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Subverting the Patriarchy: Gender, Power, and Performance in the Postmodern Plays of Churchill and Kane

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Wasit University

College of Education for Human Sciences

Department of English Language and Literature



**Subverting the Patriarchy: Gender, Power, and Performance in the Postmodern Plays of
Churchill and Kane**

A Thesis

Submitted to the Council of the College of Education for Human Sciences/ Wasit University in Partial
Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master of Education in English Literature

By

Murtadha Abood Jawad

Supervised by

Prof. Dr. Ikhlas Mohammed Nati Al-Abedi (PhD)

Quranic Verse

(سورة النساء - الآية ٣٢)

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

{وَلَا تَتَمَنَّوْا مَا فَضَّلَ اللَّهُ بِهِ بَعْضَكُمْ عَلَى بَعْضٍ لِّلرِّجَالِ نَصِيبٌ مِّمَّا اكْتَسَبُوا وَلِلنِّسَاءِ نَصِيبٌ مِّمَّا
اَكْتَسَبْنَ وَسَأَلُوا اللَّهَ مِن فَضْلِهِ إِنَّ اللَّهَ كَانَ بِكُلِّ شَيْءٍ عَلِيمًا}

صدق الله العلي العظيم

(Surah An-Nisa – Verse 32)

In the Name of Allah—the Most Compassionate, Most Merciful

{And do not crave what Allah has given some of you over others. Men will be rewarded according to their deeds and women 'equally' according to theirs. Rather, ask Allah for His bounties. Surely Allah has 'perfect' knowledge of all things.}

God Almighty has spoken the truth

Supervisor's Certificate

I hereby certify that the thesis entitled : (**Subverting the Patriarchy: Gender, Power, and Performance in the Postmodern Plays of Churchill and Kane**),by **Murtadha Abood Jawad**, has been prepared and written under my supervision at the College of Education for Human Sciences / Wasit University, as a partial fulfillment of the requirements for degree of Master of Education in English literature.

Signature:



Prof. Dr. Ikhlas Mohammed Nati Al-Abedi (PhD)

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Date: 7 / 9 / 2026

In view of the available recommendation, I forward this thesis for debate by the Examination Committee.

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Head of the Department of English Language

Date: 7 / 9 / 2026

الأستاذ الدكتور
هاشم عليوي محمد الحسيني
(رئيس قسم اللغة الانكليزية)

Examining Committee Certification

We hereby certify that we have read the thesis entitled "Subverting the Patriarchy: Gender, Power, and Performance in the Postmodern Plays of Churchill and Kane" and, as Examining Committee, examined the student (Murtadha Abood Jawad) in its contents and that in our opinion it is adequate as a thesis for the degree of Master of Education in English language and literature.

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Dedication

To the soul that left too soon, my beloved father, Professor. Dr. Abood Jawad Radhi Al-Atabi (1964-2023), and to the pure, innocent soul of my beloved niece, Rain Mustafa Abood Jawad (2024-2026). Writing these pages without you here to read them is a sorrow I carry with every word. No academic achievement can heal the pain of your absence, nor replace the great legacy you left behind at the University of Wasit. My heart aches for your presence. I miss you more than language can express. May you both find in Paradise the comfort that we have lost without you. Rest in peace, until we meet again.

&

To the women who remain silent and refuse to speak,

Whose voices are lost in a world that is bleak.

For the stories hidden and the tear on your cheek,

I dedicate this to the peace and justice that you seek.

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Abstract

The thesis explores the phenomenon of "Subversion Theatre" by investigating the mechanics of resistance within postmodern British drama, focusing on the thematic deconstruction of patriarchal power in the works of Caryl Churchill and Sarah Kane. It examines the way these playwrights systematically reject the traditional theatre and the conventions of realism, illustrating the persistence of patriarchal power dynamics alongside the emergence of theatrical resistance. Through a contrasting feminist analysis of the seminal plays—ranging from Churchill's *Cloud 9*, *Top Girls*, *A Mouthful of Birds*, *The Skriker*, and *Far Away* to Kane's *Blasted*, *Phaedra's Love*, *Cleansed*, *Crave*, and *4.48 Psychosis*—the study reveals how subversion is integrated into the dramatic architecture itself. Structurally, the thesis details this subversion across consecutive chapters. Chapter Two explores the concept of theatrical form as subversion in details, with reference to the use of postmodern techniques like non-linear time, fragmented structures, and meta-theatricality. Chapter Three employs a thematic analysis to contrast the way the characters perform and resist gendered identities, examining Kane's depiction of physical violence against Churchill's focus on structural violence. Chapter Four provides a close comparison of the way in which both playwrights deconstructed patriarchal discourse through language and silence. Finally, the Conclusion draws on these findings to conclude that both Churchill and Kane created a feminist subversive theatre that remains relevant to the audience today, as a testament to the power of theatrical performance as a critical tool of subversion. Ultimately, the thesis identifies three core subverting strategies: the fragmentation of theatrical form as a rejection of monolithic patriarchal narratives; the destabilization of identity through gender performativity and the "unmaking" of the subject; and the subversion of language, evolving from Churchill's polyphonic interruptions to Kane's radical collapse into silence. In doing so, the study proves that both playwrights created a feminist subversive theatre where the abandon of formal conventions remains essential to the disarmament of patriarchal power.

Keywords: Subversion theatre, dramatic form, patriarchal authority, silence, identity, symbolic power, fragmentation, gender performativity, intertextuality, linguistic disruption.

Chapter One: Introduction

1.1. The Playwrights' Theatrical Interventions: Two Generations of Subversive Drama

Few playwrights have had as much of an impact on British theatre from the late 20th century to the present as Sarah Kane and Caryl Churchill. Separated by a generation, yet united by a searing interrogation of power, both are part of two major waves of the theatrical revolution that helped tear apart the formal and ideological conventions of theatre. These playwrights embark on a sustained, rigorous critique of patriarchal power structures through the use of the destabilizing mechanisms of postmodern theatre.

Caryl Churchill (1938-Present) remains one of the prominent British's avant-garde dramatists, contributing significantly to postmodernism and feminist theatre. She has always had a very radical approach to dramaturgic language and form. She has a "radical struggle over gender identification" in her work, with performative methods such as 'cross-casting' and 'doubling' to unsettle the audience. Churchill is one of a few playwrights who have dealt so extensively with the issues of feminism and social power structures. Churchill's work is frequently described as the "feminist appropriation of Brechtian technique" and highlights her deep engagement with sexual power dynamics. For instance, her plays, especially *Cloud 9*, are often categorised as "feminist theatre" to demonstrate a theatre that tries to challenge the "dominant presumptions of patriarchal culture" (Harding, 1998, pp. 264, 260). Her postmodern plays, such as *Cloud 9*, *Top Girls* and *A Mouthful of Birds* explore the personal and ideological aspects of gender and systemic power in all its complexity.

As a postmodern playwright, Churchill is still recognised as a controversial figure in contemporary drama due to the intersection of her political activism and formal experimentation. Since the 1960s, her output has grown in tandem with the fringe theatre scene of the ideological shifts and second-wave feminism in Britain. Her engagement with the Royal Court Theatre and cooperative theatre companies such as Monstrous Regiment and Joint Stock influenced her. She

achieved this by engaging in "dramaturgy" that functions as both social criticism and a collective pursuit. The strategy of dramaturgy adopted by Churchill is essentially socio-political.

Although Churchill's work is marked by a wide range of styles and themes, it always addresses the same set of issues, namely, the interpenetration of capital and gender, class and power. She developed a feminist critique in her early plays, such as *Owners* (1972) and *Vinegar Tom* (1976) and related historical oppression to current social institutions. The style of the postmodern theatre that she pioneered reached its zenith with such plays as *Top Girls* and *Cloud 9*. To disrupt traditional categories of gender and history that seemed to be naturalised, she employed overlapping dialogue, cross-gender, anachronistic casting, and disrupted linear narratives. Later works that dealt with the language of finance, of ownership and apocalyptic paranoia would encompass *A Mouthful of Birds*, and *Far Away*. Driven by the need to find an ideal dramatic structure to reveal the obscure mechanisms of power, Churchill's works constantly dismantle and recreate theatrical form.

On the other hand, Sarah Kane (1971-1999) is a physically transformative and divisively extreme presence on the late-1990s British theatre scene, most closely linked with the 'in-yer-face' movement. Kane's plays always seek to reveal extreme power dynamics, systemic violence and human despair through a complex, demanding and fractured postmodern language. Her first play, *Blasted* (1995) radically challenges the conventions of realist theatre. Instead of following conventional ways of representation, Kane employs startling images of savagery and structural violence that called into questioning the larger socio-structural power structures, compelling the audience to consider the extreme forms of domination and vulnerability. Tragically, Kane's career as a playwright was cut short by her suicide by hanging herself at King's College Hospital in 1999. Nevertheless, her works left a distinct mark on contemporary drama.

Kane's dramaturgy remains distinctively British in its rejection of authorial possibilities and its commitment to experiential presentation, where the depiction of raw emotional truth is vivid and visceral, resonating deeply with the audience. Aleks Sierz (2001) supports the description of Kane's

work as a devotion to this specific form of theatre. Kane decides to pursue this form of theatre after witnessing Jeremy Weller's *Mad*, stating that she wants to take the audience to a "place of extreme mental discomfort and distress and then popped to the other end," rather than allowing them to view mental illness as an "intellectual conceit" (p. 92). Her later plays, especially *Crave* and *4.48 Psychosis*, are marked by a fragmented language, where conventional punctuation is absent and the text functions a montage of voices. Therefore, Kane took her own life is an event that had a significant impact on the posthumous reception of her final work, *4.48 Psychosis*. The thesis shows how both playwrights shared focus on subversive drama utilises and transcends traditional feminist theatrical conventions, representing a unique and revolutionary shift in feminist drama, challenging established norms and creating a new innovative language for the postmodern era.

Three decades after Churchill's debut, Kane transforms the British theatrical landscape by introducing a dramatic voice that is raw, abrasive, and uncompromising. Her career is remarkably brief; she authored only five full-length plays which include *Blasted*, *Phaedra's Love*, *Cleansed*, *Crave*, and *4.48 Psychosis* that profoundly changed the face of contemporary theatre in both major and nuanced aspects. She becomes one of the defining faces of 'in-yer-face' theatre, a term popularised by Aleks Sierz. Sierz (2001) notes that critics frequently used adjectives like "‘disgusting,’ ‘disturbing,’ ‘degrading’ and ‘depressing’ to describe Kane's ‘atrocity play.’" Kane's tracted labels such as "‘prurient psycho-fantasies,’ ‘unadulterated brutalism,’ and ‘degradation in the raw’" (p. 95). Kane established her position as a theatrical provocateur in 1995 with her debut play, *Blasted*, which contrasted domestic sexual violence with the atrocities of the Bosnian War.

Consequently, Kane's poetic lyricism lies in her depiction of extremes; love, pain, violence, and mental suffering are all elevated into grand and dreadful actions. Kane condemns patriarchy ferociously and viscerally by comparison with the more systemic and satirical perspective of Churchill. Kane's plays function as raw and visceral experiences of reality. She strips away all

dramatic artifice to reveal the suffering of her characters. It transforms the body into a material space where power exerts its most inhumane logic. Her final plays, *Crave* and *4.48 Psychosis*, abandon conventional dramatic forms to generate a vocal, fractured lyricism which expresses no less than the dissolution of mind experienced by their protagonist. Regarding Kane's writings, Graham Saunders (2002) notes, "Finding a theatrical language for her own writing that may elicit powerful emotional and intellectual reaction is essential, even if those reactions are uncomfortable or painful" (p. 14).

Although both playwrights employ distinct styles, as Churchill focuses on systemic and intellectual irony through the use of dramaturgical parody, and Kane emphasises the visceral and affective aspects of trauma, they are connected by a shared subversive purpose of exposing the structures of gendered power and developing a new kind of counter-performative language to convey trauma to those who are being dominated by patriarchal power. The thesis traces the contours of each playwright's individual theatrical stage to upend and disturb patriarchy by taking into account how they deconstruct language, manipulate dramatic form, represent violence, and conceptualise identity.

1.2. Literature Review: Divergent Critical Paths

The critical reception of late twentieth-century British drama has been demonstrated by the intersecting discourses of postmodernism, materialist feminism and 'In-Yer-Face' sensibility of the 1990s. Caryl Churchill and Sarah Kane are generally accepted as playwrights of the post-war period, scholarship on them has historically diverged into parallel but distinct fields. Churchill, for her part, is largely studied against the background of socialist feminism and Brechtian structuralism; Kane, conversely, is often put against the background of experiential violence, Artaudian cruelty and the "New Brutalism." This section surveys the major critical interventions in these fields in an attempt to point out the gap in comparative scholarship in terms of the common strategies of subverting patriarchal narratives.

An extensive studies have also examined the relationship between the postmodern form and feminist ideologies. As Linda Hutcheon (1988), who argues that postmodernism is characterised by

'historiographic metafiction'—a strategy involving a "critical revisiting, an ironic dialogue with the past of both art and society" (p. 4). This is an important concept to analyse the way that feminist playwrights deconstruct historical narratives.

Within the feminist performance studies, Elin Diamond (1997) provides a basis of work in her text *Unmaking Mimesis*. Diamond argues that realism is often a trap for the feminist artist as it reinforces the status quo. Instead, Diamond calls for a "Brechtian" feminist theatre which uses alienation effects (making the familiar strange) in order to expose the social constructs of gender. This conceptual context provides the necessary basis for understanding both Churchill's and Kane's rejection of naturalism and their adoption of fragmented and surreal forms.

However, critical scholarship on Caryl Churchill is quite extensive, with critics always stressing her capacity to combine ideological commitment and avant-garde experimentation. A preeminent scholar of Churchill's works, Elaine Aston (1997) has labelled her work as a "socialist-feminist" project which is constantly reinventing itself to address changing ideological landscapes (p. 26). Aston also highlights Churchill's use of techniques such as "cross-casting and cross gender in *Cloud 9*," and "non-linear time, fragmentation and the possibility of 'unfixing' in *Top Girls*," are not merely stylistic flourishes but are essential to her critique of the "male gaze" (pp. 32, 40-41).

In addition, critics like Alicia Tycer (2008), analyse the way in which Churchill employed strategies in an effort to challenge patriarchal capitalism. Tycer notes the way Churchill "borrowed" or "recuperated" characters from art and literature, employing intertextual references, such as Dull Gret from Brueghel's painting and Griselda from Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales* in order to fight against patriarchal capitalism (p. 39). Tycer also writes that Churchill's plays are often "historicisation" that refuse to give one cohesive version of history, allows for a multiplicity of female voices to emerge (p. 42). This is in line with the view of Janelle Reinelt (1994), who discusses that one of the innovations brought about by Churchill is her refusal to separate the domestic sphere from the public sphere and how global power structures affect private lives.

Conversely, the scholarship about Sarah Kane has changed dramatically since her death. The initial responses were dominated by the "In-Yer-Face" label popularised by Aleks Sierz (2001) who locates Kane amongst a generation of writers who wanted to shock audiences out of complacency. Sierz is concerned with the "visceral" nature of her work which he argues caused audiences to be confronted with the physical reality of violence.

Recent scholarships have moved beyond an emphasis on the 'shock' value of Kane's works to examine its ethical and formal complexity; for instance, Saunders (2002), in the first major monograph on Kane, argued that her work should be seen as a "theatre of extremes" which uses violence in order to test the limits of representation. Also, Urban (2001) contributed significantly to this discussion; Urban suggests that Kane's work is ethically dense and surmising that her portrayal of cruelty is an attempt to elicit a response of compassion from a desensitised world. The "musicality" and "fragmentation" of her later writings including *4.48 Psychosis*, have attracted more interest by scholars, both for their linguistic indications of a cry of pain and as a poetic experiment in which she questioned the authority of the psychiatric establishment.

Although, the scholarships on Churchill and Kane is justifiable but a sustained contrasting study remains conspicuously limited. Critics too frequently have approached them as examples of the opposing generations by framing Churchill as the intellectual, structuralist feminist of the 1970s and Kane as the raw, experiential nihilist of the 1990s.

Despite the breadth of scholarship on Churchill and Kane, relatively few researches have examined the way their formal strategies converge in challenging patriarchal power, by namely how their concomitant usage of fragmentation and deconstruction of the body works towards the same end which is the disarmament of patriarchal power. The thesis attempts to address this gap. By reading Kane's visceral aesthetics in conjunction with Churchill's intellectual techniques, the study suggests that the two dramatists are not opposed to each, but rather complementary practitioners of a postmodern feminist poetics that seeks to unmake the master narratives of gender and history.

1.3. The Context of Postmodern Theatre: Subversive Strategies

The term "postmodern theatre" refers to a distinct theatrical movement that emerged in the 1960s as a radical departure from both modernist aesthetics and the realist traditions that had previously dominated the drama field. Realists assume, without explicitly stating it, that psychological depth, verisimilitude, and linear causation are more crucial than stability, and representability of reality. Postmodernism, on the other hand, is grounded in its very lack of certainty. As Jean-Francois Lyotard (1984), posits postmodernism is fundamentally defined as an "incredulity to metanarratives, to simplify to the extreme." He claims that this disbelief is a direct consequence of scientific progress, which in turn necessitates it. He further argues that the demise of the metanarrative machinery of legitimation is primarily accomplished by a profound deterioration of metaphysical philosophical thoughts and the institutions that historically relied upon it. This phenomenon drastically impacts conventional knowledge structures, causing the core foundations of traditional narratives to crumble. Consequently, the narrative task is stripped of "its functors, its great hero, its great dangers, its great voyages, its great goal" (p. xxiv). In a word, Lyotard defines the 'postmodern' through a pervasive feature of skepticism, which is expressed in postmodern theatre through the disavowal of realist formal conventions. This subversion of traditional storytelling ultimately aims to confront the 'master narratives' of advancement, truth, and patriarchy that have long governed Western consciousness.

Consequently, the feminist projects examined in the thesis are entirely compatible with this philosophical shift. Kane and Churchill consider the emerging form of postmodern theatre as a potent tool to undermine patriarchal systems. These playwrights challenge prevailing notions of gender and power in both the form and substance of their plays. Thus, the following is not just a sequence of stylistic triumphs, but a set of methods utilised by these writers to deconstruct and reject grand narratives which leads to the fragmentation of social bonds. As Jean Baudrillard (1983), suggests the masses resist the imperative of rational communication and instead reject the 'dialectic' of meaning"

(p. 10). These playwrights' thematic aims are always intimately connected with their postmodernist innovations in form, whereby time travel is the upheaval of patriarchal history and the disintegration of the stage is the disintegration of the individual.

The thesis draws on a coherent set of theoretical perspectives to examine how power, patriarchy, violence, theatrical form, gender, performance, language, and the body operate in the selected plays. Rather than treating these concepts as separate topics, the framework connects them to the central argument of the study: Churchill and Kane challenge patriarchal structures through different postmodern theatrical strategies. The theories are therefore used as analytical tools and are applied selectively in Chapters Two, Three, and Four.

1.3.1. Dismantling the Patriarchal Narrative: Fragmentation, Time, and Intertextuality

In order to actively challenge the patriarchal system, postmodern playwrights often reject the Aristotelian unity of action, place, and time. Less important in these plays is the typical linear, cause-and-effect plot, which is instead broken up, cyclical or collaged. Formally, the rupture is a deliberate structural intervention, while the intervention of Churchill in the continuous flow of historical time is disruptive to the unity of the concept of official history. The postmodernists view the past as always contestable, as it is viewed through the lens of the contemporary. As Mehmet Salih Çoban (2026), states that postmodern history is a school of thought which claims that history is not an objective and fixed reality but history is an expression of language, discourse, power structure and the historian's interpretation of the past. The postmodern view is that the concepts of 'Liberation' and 'Progress' are constructs that deceive individuals into thinking that there is order and cause in the very complex and unpredictable world in which people live.

Churchill and Kane utilise montage and collage to bring together diverse media and languages, creating unified texts that transcend time and genre to illustrate internal violence and systemic conflict. For instance, Aneta Mancewicz (2022), describes Heiner Müller's *Hamletmachine* as a postmodern collage work, which is "a collage of scenes and citations from Shakespeare and

others, with intertextual images and ideas complementing and contrasting each other with an explosive energy of *différance*" (p. 125), that avoids a chronological narrative in favor of a "verbal explosion" of structural and violent images to create the chaotic and shattered image in the 20th century Europe. Likewise, Churchill employs 'the historical collage' in *Top Girls* to unite women from various eras, while Kane creates a startling collage in *Blasted* to merge a realistic hotel room with the nightmare of a war zone, demonstrating that underlying tensions in patriarchal relationships are the source of all major discord.

The cyclical narratives are also used to depict traumas and stunted histories of entrapment, challenging the notion of progress and linear feminist development. Postmodern dramas portray a sense of history that is more like a circle than a line, more like a closed than an open loop. This concept of narrative circularity is exemplified by the work of Samuel Beckett. Beckett achieved a 'theoretical impossibility' in *Waiting for Godot* by writing a play in which 'nothing happens, twice' (Mercier, as cited in Andonian, 1998, p. 95). *Cloud 9* is a critique of the Churchillian techniques, which is a static cycle of history, with oppressive patriarchal models demonstrated in the first act being turned upside down and used as a critique of such models. In *4.48 Psychosis* Kane shows radical repetition as a mental web of entrapment in despair, as trauma is caught in a cycle of despair that will never end. Time itself becomes a battleground; and, both by deconstructing traditional form and by introducing previously unheard narratives to the stage, playwrights challenge the history as a triumphant story, while making space for other stories. The nonlinearity in *Top Girls* is also indicative of the fact that feminist "progress" is not to be found in the past but is present, with women from different eras sharing their experience of oppression. As Suzan-Lori Parks (1993) employs a similar 'Rep & Rev' (repetition and revision) in *The America Play*—a technique that departs from linear storytelling to stage the re-imagining of historical events, viewing history as a never-ending process of re-inscribing, rather than a finished and unalterable object.

Pastiche, intertextuality, and parody are other textual strategies through which postmodern theatre questions established narratives and inherited cultural forms. Classical mythology and canonical plays may be presented, altered, and placed in dialogue with the present, allowing older narratives to acquire new meanings. Churchill and Kane employ intertextuality to reinterpret myths and construct alternative experiences of history and identity. Postmodern parody similarly provides a critical distance from canonical traditions, as illustrated by Tom Stoppard's *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* and Charles Ludlam's *The Mystery of Irma Vep: A Penny Dreadful*, both of which expose the constructed nature of established theatrical conventions.

1.3.2. Deconstructing the Subject: The Unstable Self, Performed Body, and Meta-theatricality

Postmodern theatre puts audiences under the pressure of participating in "meaning-making" in a "gaps and fissures" environment. In using the so-called "Alienation Effect" of Bertolt Brecht (1964) to make the familiar seem strange, and then to make the audience into a "spect-actor" with keen critical awareness, postmodern theatre is successful in bringing about this transformation (p. 125). The cohesive and psychologically stable self-promoted by theatrical realism, therefore, is totally replaced by the dynamic, inconsistent, de-centered subjectivities. The characters in these plays may serve as archetypes who utter several voices, and thus embody the postmodern conception of identity as a series of socially negotiated roles, rather than truths. If the self is understood only as a persona created in the context of the performance, then the audience's impression of seeing a unified, coherent self on stage is called into question and undermined by Philip Auslander (1997), who states that the performer explores "his own relationship to the task he is carrying out... catharsis, too, must be defined in textual terms" (p. 44).

To further deconstruct gender identity, the casting process itself, is utilised as a powerful tool on stage, as a physical instrument. The actor's physical body—specifically the person they represent—is a contested site of representation when cast with actors of the opposite gender or when

cast as a “nontraditional” type of character. The knowing performance of a white actor as a black slave, and a man as the stereotypical mother of the family, is a visual and graphic expression of colonial and patriarchal assumptions in Churchill's *Cloud 9*. The approach is clearly to make the audience aware of the fact that gender and race are performative and social in nature rather than fixed and natural. Similarly, in Tony Kushner's (2013) ‘*Angels in America*,’ the fact that the same actor portrays multiple, often contrasting characters leads the audience to view identity as something inherently fluid, interconnected, and shifting, rather than rigid or static.

This subversion of the self is further amplified by the growth of “meta-theatricality.” This is a concept popularised by Lionel Abel (1963), to describe plays that intentionally probe the theatre's very essence and mechanics (p. 59). Characters in these postmodern plays “are aware of their own theatricality” and frequently break the fourth wall, directly engaging the audience and further supporting the idea that one's identity is, at its core, a performance. Postmodern meta-theatre, as Waugh (1984) suggests regarding the similar concept of metafiction, consistently “poses questions about the relationship between fiction and reality” (p. 2). By deliberately making the audience doubt the grand narratives and absolute truths governing their lives outside the performance space, playwrights deconstruct traditional elements like chronology, character and plot. By performing so, they establish an extremely emotionally charged theatrical environment where identity is indisputably fragile, history is shown to be inaccurate, and audience participation as spectators are given the deep power to collaborate with meaning.

1.4. Conceptual and Theoretical Frameworks

Postmodern theatre provides the broad conceptual context of the thesis. It emerged as an ultimate departure from realist assumptions about stable reality, linear causation, coherent characterisation, and closed dramatic structure, placing profound emphasis on fragmentation, discontinuity, unstable identity, intertextuality, performance, and the active participation of the spectator. These features are particularly relevant to Churchill and Kane because both playwrights

challenge conventional dramatic representation while connecting formal experimentation to questions of gender, power, violence, identity, and the body. The framework therefore does not treat postmodern theatrical concepts and feminist concerns as separate fields; instead, it uses them as interconnected analytical tools for examining how theatrical form, performance, language, and embodied experience can question established relations of authority.

The first conceptual dimension concerns power, patriarchy, and violence. The study approaches patriarchy as a systemic structure rather than simply as individual male domination. Walby (1990) defines patriarchy as a system of social structures and practices through which men dominate, oppress, and exploit women. This perspective is particularly useful for reading Churchill, whose plays connect gender oppression with institutions, class relations, economic structures, and social practices, while also providing a basis for understanding the more immediate forms of domination represented in Kane. Bourdieu's (1991) concept of symbolic power explains how domination can operate through language, recognition, and socially accepted categories without appearing openly coercive. Foucault's (1977) account of productive and disciplinary power complements this perspective by showing that power does not merely repress but also produces forms of behaviour, knowledge, and disciplined subjects. Žižek's (2008) distinction between subjective and objective violence provides a further analytical distinction between visible acts of direct harm and less visible violence embedded in social and institutional structures. Together, these concepts establish the framework for tracing the relations among patriarchal structures, symbolic authority, discipline, and violence in the selected plays.

The second dimension concerns performativity, identity, discipline, and the body in pain. The analysis of gender and performance begins with Austin's (1962) speech-act theory, which provides a basis for understanding language and action as performative practices. Butler's (1990) theory of gender performativity develops this insight by treating gender not as a fixed essence but as constituted through repeated acts and social norms. In the thesis, Butler's concept is used to examine

how gendered identities are produced, repeated, disrupted, and renegotiated on the stage. Foucault's theory of discipline is applied specifically to the body, allowing the study to examine how bodies are regulated, exposed, controlled, and subjected to violence. Phelan's (1993) account of performance and the 'unmarked' contributes to the discussion of presence, visibility, disappearance, and the limits of representation, while Scarry's (1985) phenomenology of pain provides a basis for interpreting the material and expressive significance of bodily suffering, particularly in Kane's theatre. These perspectives connect the performed body with gender, discipline, violence, theatrical presence, and the instability of identity.

The third dimension concerns postdramatic form, performance, language, and silence. Lehmann's (2006) concept of postdramatic theatre provides the principal formal context for the thesis, particularly his emphasis on fragmentation, montage, discontinuity, interruption, and the displacement of tightly organised dramatic action. This perspective explains why fragmented structures and non-linear time are central to the analysis of theatrical form. Fischer-Lichte's (2008) aesthetics of the performative strengthens this account by treating performance as an event in which meaning emerges through the interaction of performers, spectators, bodies, and space. Roach's (1996) concept of surrogation is relevant to substitution, doubling, and the circulation of identities in performance. Bourdieu's symbolic power is also important for analysing language, especially the social conditions that determine whose speech is recognised as legitimate and whose voice is marginalised. Kristeva's concept of the semiotic chora and Diamond's (1997) feminist critique of mimesis help explain how fractured speech, repetition, intertextuality, non-naturalistic theatrical signs, and disruptions of representational conventions can interrupt familiar patterns of meaning. Silence is considered within the same framework as a communicative condition that may signify fear, concealment, exclusion, refusal, or resistance according to dramatic context. Harold Pinter's

(1999) discussion of silence and the unsaid further supports the treatment of pauses, withheld speech, and silence as meaningful dramatic actions rather than as empty spaces.

Taken together, these perspectives form one coherent framework rather than a collection of unrelated theories. Walby, Bourdieu, Foucault, and Žižek establish the study's account of patriarchal power, symbolic authority, discipline, and violence; Lehmann, Fischer-Lichte, Roach, Kristeva, and Diamond explain the formal, performative, and linguistic operations of postmodern theatre; and Austin, Butler, Phelan, and Scarry provide the concepts required to analyse performativity, identity, the body, and pain. The framework is applied selectively across the analytical chapters: its formal dimension informs Chapter Two, its performance, identity, violence, and body-related concepts inform Chapter Three, and its linguistic, symbolic, and silence-related dimensions inform Chapter Four. In this way, the conceptual framework establishes a direct connection between the theories introduced in Chapter One and the analytical procedures used in the subsequent chapters.

In Chapter Two, the formal dimension of the framework is applied to the dramaturgical methods of Churchill and Kane. Lehmann (2006) is used to interpret the movement away from coherent dramatic action toward fragmentation, discontinuity, montage, and performance-centred meaning. Churchill applies these strategies through the non-linear and historical montage of *Top Girls*, the cross-casting and role-doubling of *Cloud 9*, the ritualised and fragmented structure of *A Mouthful of Birds*, and the abrupt spatial and temporal shifts of *Far Away*. These techniques interrupt linear narrative and redistribute the audience's attention across competing histories, bodies, and voices. Kane develops a more radical form of postdramatic disruption: *Blasted* collapses the boundary between the domestic hotel room and the war zone; *Cleansed* replaces coherent progression with ritualised sequences of bodily violence; *Crave* uses disembodied voices, repetition, and fragmented exchanges; and *4.48 Psychosis* employs gaps, blank space, numerical sequences, pauses, and the absence of fixed character identities. Fischer-Lichte (2008) therefore helps explain the active relation between performers, bodies, space, and spectators, while Roach (1996) clarifies

Churchill's doubling and role substitution, and Diamond (1997) supports the feminist challenge to realistic representation. In this way, Chapter Two shows how form itself becomes a means through which both playwrights reorganise theatrical meaning and challenge established structures of authority.

In Chapter Three, Austin (1962), Butler (1990), Goffman (1959), Foucault (1977), Phelan (1993), and Scarry (1985) are applied to performance, identity, discipline, visibility, and the body. Churchill presents gender as something enacted and socially regulated through cross-gender casting, role transformation, costume, speech, and repeated social behaviour. In *Cloud 9*, Betty's performance by a male actor exposes gender as a theatrical construction; in *Top Girls*, the historical women's stories and Marlene's career identity reveal competing performances of femininity, success, and agency; and in *A Mouthful of Birds*, possession and bodily transformation make identity visibly relational, unstable, and performative. Goffman (1959) helps to explain the presentation of self through socially organised roles, while Butler (1990) provides the central concept of gender performativity. Foucault (1977) is applied to the regulation of bodies and conduct, especially where institutional power disciplines the subject. Kane intensifies these concerns through the body itself: *Blasted* presents sexual violence as a direct inscription of power on Ian's body; *Cleansed* stages mutilation, bodily transformation, and endurance as struggles over identity and agency; *Phaedra's Love* undermines idealised masculine authority through the abject body of Hippolytus; and *4.48* *Psychosis* presents a fragmented subject whose body and identity are shaped by medical and social systems. Phelan (1993) supports the analysis of presence, visibility, and the limits of representation, while Scarry (1985) helps to interpret pain as an embodied experience that becomes theatrically visible. Thus, Chapter Three demonstrates how performance is simultaneously a site of regulation and a possible site of resistance.

In Chapter Four, Austin (1962), Bourdieu (1991), Kristeva (1980), Diamond (1997), Lehmann (2006), and Pinter (1999) guide the analysis of language, authority, fragmentation, and

silence. Churchill treats speech as a social action and a struggle over who is allowed to speak, be heard, and control meaning. In *Top Girls*, overlapping dialogue, interruptions, repetition, and competing voices prevent one authoritative voice from controlling the scene; in *Cloud 9*, dialogue and silence expose the social scripts through which gender is regulated; in *Far Away*, restricted speech turns secrecy and silence into mechanisms of social control; and in *A Mouthful of Birds* and *The Skriker*, fractured, repetitive, and non-naturalistic language challenges stable systems of meaning. Bourdieu (1991) explains the unequal authority attached to different speakers, Austin (1962) clarifies the performative force of utterances, while Kristeva (1980) and Diamond (1997) support the analysis of fractured and non-realistic language. Kane pushes linguistic disruption further: in *Blasted*, language deteriorates under the pressure of trauma; in *Crave*, fragmented voices, repetition, and citation turn speech into a struggle against isolation; and in *4.48 Psychosis*, syntax, dialogue, punctuation, lists, and finally silence progressively collapse. Lehmann (2006) explains this movement from coherent dramatic communication toward fragmented states, while Pinter (1999) provides a useful precedent for understanding silence, pauses, and the unsaid as active dramatic forces that may conceal fear, expose shifts in power, or register the limits of communication. Chapter Four therefore establishes linguistic disruption and silence as further dimensions of the framework through which patriarchal authority can be exposed and challenged.

Within this coherent framework, the term Subversion Theatre is proposed as an original critical and analytical concept developed by the thesis to describe the focused combination of postmodern theatrical strategies and feminist resistance. It does not replace Postmodern Theatre but functions within it as a specific analytical lens through which theatrical form and performance are treated as sites of resistance to patriarchal power. The concept brings together interconnected characteristics: the organisation of perception through visibility, attention, perspective, and interpretation; formal disruption through fragmentation, non-linear time, montage, episodic structure, spatial instability, and discontinuity; the transformation of the spectator into an active meaning-

maker; the treatment of identity as unstable and performative; the body as a site of vulnerability, representation, suffering, and resistance; and the disruption of language through interruption, repetition, overlapping dialogue, polyphony, fragmentation, and silence. These characteristics are not separate techniques but interconnected operations through which the selected plays expose, question, and challenge entrenched relations of gender and power in patriarchal system. Thus, Subversion Theatre provides the thesis with its original conceptual link between postmodern theatrical form, performance, language, identity, the body, spectatorship, and feminist resistance.

1.5. Thesis Problem, Questions, and Statement of Intent

The main study problem addresses the critical limited of sustained contrasting analysis connecting the formal innovations of Churchill and Kane to their shared goal of overturning patriarchy through performance and gender. The study directly addresses this gap. To investigate this gap, **the primary study question** is:

- To examine how Churchill and Kane challenge and subvert the patriarchy through the use of postmodern performance strategies in their selected plays.

The Secondary study questions are:

- To investigate how both playwrights, create their images of gender and power, while identifying the main dramaturgical similarities and differences between them.
- To analyse the ways in which their works challenge the traditional notion of narrative, character, and theatrical form to question patriarchal power structures.
- To explore the role of the active spectator plays in shaping the thematic meaning within these fragmented postmodern performances.

Furthermore, the study answers these questions by arguing that both Churchill and Kane try to challenge patriarchy, but that the ways they subvert patriarchy are similar yet different within the application of postmodern performance's subverting strategies. In revealing general ideological

systems of patriarchal power through historical irony and dramatic fragmentation, Churchill's dramatic practice acts out a systemic and Brechtian critique. Staged transgression and disruption of form in contrast, are used by Kane to investigate the affective and traumatic impact of that power on the individual body and psyche by means of a visceral, and Artaudian aesthetics. The study explores the way both playwrights' dual legacy have reshaped feminist theatre within a postmodern, post-realistic context. Through a contrasting analysis, it examines four key areas: their respective approaches to theatrical form, their representation of violence as a representable phenomenon, their use of performance to enact identity, and their utilization of language.

1.6. Thesis Aims and Delimitations

The study aims to contrast two ways in which the politics of patriarchy are subverted through postmodern performance in works of Churchill and Kane. The study focuses on literature in depth, examining selected plays, with particular emphasis on language, structure and characterization. Further, it discusses these plays in terms of central postmodern themes such as identity, gender, power and performance and contrasts the distinct manner in which they challenge the patriarchy, e.g. the disintegration of the subject in Kane, and the cross-gender casting in Churchill. Finally, the study examines the role of the audience in the theatrical significance and effect of these kinds of performances.

Therefore, in order to maintain an acute focus, the following primary texts are examined in the thesis: Caryl Churchill's *Cloud 9* (1978), *Top Girls* (1982), *A Mouthful of Birds* (1986), *The Skriker* (1994), and *Far Away* (2000); and Sarah Kane's *Blasted* (1995), *Phaedra's Love* (1996), *Cleansed* (1998), *Crave* (1998), and *4.48 Psychosis* (2000). These plays are selected to explore the themes of gender, power and violence, reflecting formal experimentation. The primary sources for the study are the texts of the plays, while critical reception and production history are analysed in order to facilitate a performance-oriented approach to the texts.

Chapter Two: Theatrical Form as Subversion

2.1. Introduction

Postmodern feminist drama critiques not only patriarchy thematically, but also actively changes the way theatrical meaning is produced. Patriarchy reinforces hierarchy through familiar narratives, prescribed roles, and 'common sense' logic. Feminist drama counters this by purposefully disrupting those conventions. Both Churchill and Kane do not uphold the realist belief that the world is inherently stable or fully comprehensible within a coherent plot. Rather, their plays demand that the audience construct their own notions of time, agency, and responsibility.

The chapter interprets theatrical form as a manifestation of critical pedagogy. Indeed, the primary aim of Susan Bennett's *Theatre Audiences* (1997), is to bring "spectators to the foreground, emphasizing their creative involvement and showing how they contribute to theatrical productions." Accordingly, she asserts that her work "constantly assures us of the productive role of any theatre audience" (p. 1). In her preface, she further believes "the act of theatre-going can be a significant measure of what culture affords to its participants and what theatre itself contributes to cultural experience and expression. It is at the nexus of production and reception that the spectator exists" (p. vii). According to Bernard Dort (1982), the director's ascent to prominence is a historical phenomenon that subordinated all other theatre professionals while simultaneously causing a shift in focus from text to production plan. Dort implies that the acceptance of the performance and the rise of the director reflect the progressive liberation of the elements of the theatrical performance because this transition represents a change in the performance's composition—namely, the rejection of an organic unity predetermined and the selection of a meaningful polyphony accessible to the audience rather than the translation or decoration of a text (pp. 63-64). By disrupting the narrative, postmodern form calls into question and challenges the passive reader or audience accepting patriarchy as an ideological system.

Postmodern feminist drama does not merely oppose patriarchy; it rewires the stage that patriarchy presents as common sense. The playwrights shock and defy prevailing theatrical conventions that naturalise male hegemony, and they take over the representational space that female emancipation demands. This reinforces the principle that whether feminist or human "rights are not granted but seized through ongoing struggle, passed down until the goal is achieved" (Asaad, 2025, p. 1175). Both playwrights use and challenge the structure of realism, which is characterised by linear plots, coherent characters, causality, and closure. These features organise theatrical time and make the world seem orderly and governable. When dramaturgical order appears 'neutral', it unconsciously sustains hierarchy. The chapter argues that Churchill and Kane resist patriarchal authority by breaking time, destabilizing identity, refusing resolution.

Both playwrights write in the long shadow of the dramatic tradition of realism, a tradition that often has professed a social conscience—holding up a mirror to the world and staging its conflicts. As Stephen Lacey (1995) in *British Realist Theatre*, points out that "realism usually becomes an issue in a culture when the representation, exploration and analysis of a society is on the agenda" (p. 63). Lacey notes that this theatrical movement is a "mirror in which the nation could observe, stark and naked, its own image," putting the new drama at the heart of a "wider realignment in British society" in which post-war certainties were "challenged and redefined" (p. 4). This involved an effort to "extend the range of British social experience—particularly class experience" and to investigate how characters' dilemmas were also related to gender (p. 70). Churchill and Kane had inherited the legacy of dramatic realism – the dominant theatrical form for most of the 20th century. That tradition, in particular what came to be called British "kitchen-sink realism" of the 1950s and '60s, is characterised by an idea as bluntly sociological as it is today largely passé: holding up a mirror to society with a willingness openly to address social issues. For Churchill and Kane, both works define by its relation to and breakdown of this tradition. They have inherited realism only to break it, contending, through their work, that its formalist conventions were no longer up to the task of representing the fragmentation,

trauma, and complexities of the late 20th century. The well-made play, by its clear chain of cause-and-effect and neatly wrapped-up resolution, tacitly acknowledges that there is such a thing as an ordered external world. As David Lane (2010), describes the shift of contemporary drama moving away from the "closed model of social-realist drama" that typically "requires reasons, solutions and answers" (p. 46). Instead, writers such as Churchill and Kane use "fractured time frames, non-linear narratives, [and] open performance text" rather than "the security of dramatic constants," and create "dizzying multiplicity of perspectives" (pp. 51, 44). This departure is an "oppositional response" intended to "problematise story" and to question the narrative authenticity during the act of telling (p. 28). From ancient Greek tragedies that dealt with moral and systemic issues to modern immersive and digital performances and plays, the theatre has evolved, while still retaining its ability to serve as a powerful medium of social commentary. By the late twentieth century, Churchill and Kane have become convinced that the logic of realism is an ideology with no coherence, not robust enough to contain the unfixed subjects, histories of trauma, and the messy asymmetries of gendered power.

To see the way theatrical form can destroy gendered hierarchy, it is imperative to consider the feminist attack on representational realism. As Sue-Ellen Case (1988), criticises the realist stage as a "'prisonhouse of art' for women" because its focus on the domestic sphere and the family unit reifies the male as the sexual subject and the woman as the "sexual 'Other'" (p. 124). Rather than accepting character as an essence, Case argues that feminist theatre should employ deconstructive methods to reveal the live woman on stage as "a fictional construct" rather than a natural reality (p. 118). This "new poetics" explicitly abandons "traditional patriarchal values embedded in prior notions of form" to construct new models that accommodate the presence of women as subjects (p. 114). Through formal experiments such as Caryl Churchill's *Cloud 9*, the use of "cross-gender, cross-racial and cross-generational casting" is employed to foreground "fabricated roles" and effectively "distancing identity from biology." This cross-gender casting "dramatises this patriarchal colonisation of female experience by allowing the audience to see the man behind the image" (p. 85). These techniques

make gender legible as a set of “cultural encodings”— ideological imprints upon theatrical signs like “gesture, costume and make-up” (p. 117).

2.2. Churchill’s Feminist Stage-Time: Non-Linearity and Montage

Caryl Churchill's stylistic experimentation appears perhaps most dramatically in her play *Top Girls* (1982). The play is out of chronological order; it interrogates the notion of female progress in a capitalist, patriarchal society. The nonlinear timeline is not a gimmick, but an argument whose thought is put in extensively so that the audience is, in turn, compelled to rethink historical narratives and their impact on present-day reality for women.

However, *Top Girls* opens with one of a pivotal scene in modern drama, a dinner party held by Marlene, the recently appointed managing director of a female-only temping agency's 'top girls'. In this painting, her guests are a collection of historical and mythical figures who are women from different centuries; Isabella Bird (a Victorian explorer), Lady Nijo (13th century Japanese courtesan turned Buddhist nun), Dull Gret (larger-than-life figure from a Brueghel painting leading an army of women in Hell), Pope Joan (alleged woman pope during the Middle Ages disguised as a man) and Patient Griselda (submissive wife from Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales*). Lady Nijo and Isabella Bird arrive first and discuss their lives, including their families. Pope Joan, who is elected in the ninth century, and a Dull Gret make an appearance. The topics of discussion range from religion to Nijo and Isabella's amorous relationships. Isabella goes on about her experiences. Joan tells a startling story of how she became pregnant as a result of an affair travelling with a chamberlain. She is stoned to death after giving birth to her child in a papal procession while being in denial of her condition. Nijo tells about the birth of her four children and how she is only able to see one of her children after she gave birth to them. Joan tells her story. Isabella talks about being childless. When the last visitor, Patient Griselda, who is asked to marry a local prince - but only if she obeyed him without question- arrives, Marlene is just wondering why everyone is so unhappy. As Campion Decent (2016), identifies an explicit parallel between Churchill’s *Top Girls* and Judy Chicago’s *The*

Dinner Party, observing how both works depict "a dinner table with places set for notable women from history" (p. 1), which suggests that Chicago's 1979 artwork employs a similar conceptual approach to analyze the lives and sacrifices of successful women as an allusion to the fantasy dinner party in *Top Girls*'s first scene, discussing their experiences in a patriarchal society. Act One presents a sequence of overlapping conversations rather than a single continuous dialogue between Isabella Bird and Marlene. Isabella reflects on her life of duty, travel, and self-sacrifice, while Marlene's frustrated question, "Oh God, why are we all so miserable?" (Churchill, 1982, p. 125), emerges from the wider collective conversation among the dinner guests rather than as a direct response within one uninterrupted exchange. This fragmented structure reinforces Churchill's rejection of linear dialogue and emphasises the shared historical experience of female oppression.

Marlene listens to Isabella and to the other historical women who tell their stories of suffering and sacrifice. She begins to realise that individual success cannot decouple a woman from shared historical weight of female oppression. Thus, this conversation is not only about individual failures in life, but, as it is, about a collective female experience, limited by the necessity of adaptation and often punished in a patriarchal world, no matter the century. Marlene's flawed and capitalist brand of feminism is still focused by many contemporary feminist literary critics who believe the issues posed by Mary Wollstonecraft (1792/1985) in her book *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*.

Wollstonecraft's main point is that if women are not "be prepared by education to become the companion of man, she will stop the progress of knowledge and virtue; for truth must be common to all." (pp. 85-86). The Enlightenment values of duty, freedom, reason, self-determination, and patriotism are the values she fundamentally appeals to, unlike later feminists, who do not reduce these values to the products of a patriarchal history. The misery resulted from the effort to be "exceptional" within a system in which, in reality, there is no room for female power without it extracting a heavy emotional price. The exchange gets to the heart of a central theme in the play; The

price women pay for ambition, and the unhappiness that can be a part of a life of accomplishment in a patriarchal society.

In addition, the dinner party in *Top Girls* is a deliberate collision of times and biographies, bringing women from different centuries into one theatrical now. The scene rejects any singular account of the origination of women's oppression or of women's "success"; rather, it sets up history as uneven and contested, with each guest bringing her own economy of survival. The commentary on the play states, "the stories of Act One, drawn from different times and different social backgrounds, point to a universal female experience of oppression" (Churchill, 1982, p. 48). In bringing together these figures into a single image, Churchill reveals patriarchy as a structure that changes its form from one context to the next, and does not vanish.

In Act One dinner party, costume is used as something of a (historical) shorthand; Commitments are built into each guest's appearance ("framed" by some recognizable iconography, e.g. warrior, courtesan, saint, traveller), so the history of the given scene is carried within the stage image, before anything can actually be said about it as well. Churchill allows for fabric and poses that are ritualised decorum. The audience power reads by means of surfaces, which can be seen as who is covered, who is encumbered, and who is made for spectacle. Patriarchy is seen as a material system as well as at work in institutions written on women bodies. As Ruby Cohn (1991), observes this "inventive theatricality" of costuming functions as a visual lesson; by presenting "resplendent costumes" alongside stories of sacrifice, the scene forces the spectator to "absorb the forms of gender oppression in the several cultural contexts" rather than viewing the women as a unified community (p. 132). This structural collision also prepares for the later non-linear temporalities of the play, in which private life and economic life are held in opposition rather than reconciled. Churchill's broken chronology does not mean the triumphant history of emancipation, with advances of some sort in one frame co-existing with the loss of another and the pace of play not resolving those contradictions but

leaving them hanging in the air. This way, the drama does not remain content with a neat time arc, crisis, correction, closure, which are often the stuffs of Patriarchal narratives.

Furthermore, this temporal disjunction is paralleled by the strategic use of multi-role casting in Churchill's work, in which actors are compelled to take on more than one role across the play's various settings. In *Top Girls*, Churchill suggests that the parts of Dull Gret and Angie must be played by the same actress, Carole Hayman. This doubling makes for a powerful, subliminal identification between the mythic icon who rampages through Hell and the troubled, "slow" teenager with violent thoughts. It implies a common primal rage and capacity for rebellion, but it is also a historical link to the immediate, in an instant and imagery way. Churchill's use of role-doubling and cross-casting is not a decorative quirk but a dramaturgical method that turns gender into something the audience can see being made. Because a single performer may have traces of one role to another, identity ceased to look like a private truth and began to look like a public technique. As Lesley Ferris (1993), suggests that cross-casting in performance is a "volatile symbol of liminality" that defies the social rules of gender. By separating the physical body of the performer and the social role of the character, this theatrical device produces a "writerly text" which forces the audience to become active "producers" of meaning, rather than passive consumers of a fixed, naturalised reality. This practice denies the audience the comfort of having fixed definitions and instead creates a "double consciousness" – a doubling of vision that undermines the concept of a singular, stable self and creates a challenge to the perceived "naturalness" of dominant social roles (pp. 8, 12, 39). For example, in *Top Girls*, Pope Joan's disguising herself as a man in order to enter male-dominated ecclesiastical and educational institutions.

Accordingly, Churchill's use of bodies that look nothing like those they are supposed to be gendering ensures a certain critical distance between the actor and what she represents in performance. The audience is prevented from a simple, naturalistic identification, leading them to analyse the ideological construction of identity itself. It is an alienating, Brechtian strategy and is absolutely central to Churchill's intention to defamiliarise the familiar and reveal the contingent,

oppressive sections of patriarchal gender. In so doing, by disrupting the smooth functioning of gender, she opens a space for envisioning identities beyond the binary. A particular quote which demonstrates the limitations and performance of gender, for analysis, comes from Isabella Bird. Churchill also employs overlapping dialogue to subvert patriarchal structures in *Top Girls*. During the dinner scene, Marlene welcomes her guests while Nijo proudly reflects on her aristocratic heritage, noting that she comes from eight generations of poets and that her father is published in a prestigious anthology. Concurrently, Isabella explains that her father taught her Latin despite her gender, a privilege Marlene contrasts by mentioning that Latin is not even offered at her own school.

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urthermore, Isabella confesses that she is genuinely more drawn to physical labor—such as "cooking, washing, mending, and riding horses—than to reading books". This dialogue highlights Isabella openly addressing her socially constructed role, which forced her into traditionally feminine activities, like needlework and music. This imposed role stands in stark contrast to her genuine inclinations toward physical exertion, specifically being "more adept at manual labor" and embracing "a hard life" (Churchill, 1982, p. 101). By emphasizing this disparity between societal performance and lived reality, Churchill successfully creates a critical distance for the audience. Contrasted with Nijo's life at court and the assumed peasanthood of Gret, the audience is also reminded that "femininity," like all gender stereotypes (or racial or otherwise) does not appear monolithic, but wildly different depending on its construction of theatrical conventions—evident in rapid role, i.e. quick changes of roles, shifting social statuses, and the sudden reframing of the performer's body; Churchill prompts the audience to scrutinise the socio-cultural construction of identity rather than succumbing to the illusion of a fixed persona. An account of performance as a field of cultural scripts might help explain the ghosting of familiar social roles, followed by their destabilization when bodies and signs refuse to remain where they are supposed to. As Joseph Roach (1996), examines the way that culture reproduces and re-creates itself through a process known as "surrogation," which

occurs when actual or perceived vacancies arise in the network of relations constituting the social fabric. Into these cavities created by the loss through death or by other forms of departure, survivors attempt to squeeze satisfactory alternatives, but, since collective memory works selectively and often perversely, the fit cannot be exact. This results in a doomed search for originals by continuously auditioning stand-ins, in which performance stands in for an elusive entity that it is not, but that it must vainly aspire both to embody and to replace (pp. 2-3). The result is not confusion for its own sake, but critical distance—the audience is trained not to take authority for granted, as the genre is always performed, repeated, and thereby changeable.

Although, Churchill's doubling serves two purposes; first to keep the audience from becoming "completely swallowed up by" the characters while also allowing them to interact with all the roles each actor plays, and also to illuminate the play's actual development. Churchill discusses the advantages of doubling in a private interview with Fitzsimmons (1988). As Churchill notes, "you can have very good actors in even the smallest parts. And other effect of it is that the audience can enjoy the medium and appreciate the theatricality rather than over-identifying with the characters" (p. 61). Therefore, doubling also functions as an alienation effect that makes her socialist feminist purposes and goals advance. Multiple-role casting also puts labor into the forefront. The same performer, playing the role of a historical individual in one scene, may appear moments later as an ordinary worker, blurring the distance between "great" and ordinary lives. This casting economy is intolerant of the patriarchal structures of value that rest on the hierarchy of history being owned by exceptional men, and insists instead that it is produced not in mental numbers, but through bodies of repeated work.

Because the body of the actor continues through from role to role, identity is displayed as a practice of adjustment: posture is changed, costumes are swapped, and rules of the scene recalibrate what the body is permitted to do. Churchill thus exposes social construction in theatre-making. Gender and class seem not to be about inner truth but rather a series of pressures distributed across

costume, space, and choreography. This approach also alters the nature of spectatorship. As Worthen (1992), notes that while traditional realistic acting attempts to "erase itself from view" to sustain the illusion of a "fully coherent 'character,'" modern gestic theatre disrupts this "rhetoric of realism" by foregrounding the actor's labor (p. 19). Instead of seeing a seamless "fusion between demonstrator and subject," the audience is shown a performance in which the body is "visibly and palpably separate" from the role (p. 151). He also argues in *Cloud 9*, "both the actor's self-presentation and the representation of a fictive character are suspended as points of self-present identity" (p. 184). Instead of inviting the audience to consume a seamless fictional world, Churchill invites them to notice transitions - the seams of one role transitioning into another, and where a new rule is noticing replacing the old in a silent transition. Those seams are exactly where patriarchal "naturalness" may be questioned, since the stage shows how swiftly what seems inevitable is set up.

Thus, Caryl Churchill aggressively dismantles traditional theatre by fragmenting time, and disrupting the rigid, cohesive identity of characters as a strategy of feminist subversion. Her subverted timelines, character doubling and cross-gender casting illustrate that gender is an unstable, performed construct disrupting the patriarchal narrative of progress. These formal tactics do not merely embellish her art; rather they serve as essential vehicles for her critique, positioning the audience as collaborators in destabilizing the patriarchal dogma that shapes our historical, ideological, and personal consciousness.

Churchill uses montage to disrupt linear narratives. By placing scenes in juxtaposition rather than linking them through a conventional causal sequence, Churchill disrupts linear dramatic progression and creates a fragmented structure that reflects the instability of identity and social relations. she also changes the relationship between them. In *Top Girls*, the dinner party rejects any single time period, forcing distant lives into a shared temporal space. Elsewhere, the text continuously leaps from moment to moment and place to place, deliberately denying the audience the comfort of traditional cause and effect models. This strategic staging of simultaneity carries

profound conceptual implications because patriarchy thrives on neat narratives that are built upon specific origins, linear progress, and seemingly natural outcomes. Montage interrupts that smoothness. Instead of asking that audience follow one exemplary heroine, Churchill has spread the attention across a group: power seems to be a system with many points of contact: workplace, family, history, and the body on display. Montage functions as a dramaturgy of juxtaposition; wherein scenes are placed alongside one another without being confined to a linear, casual sequence. As Patrice Pavis (2003), argues that instead of following a plotted chain, the performance should be viewed as a “butchered effect—a mise en pieces,” which shifts the focus away from a single, fixed message (p. 8). This fragmented structure requires the spectator to act as an “active producer of meanings” who “produces more and more of her own perceptions and the connections between them” across the gaps in the performance (p. 29). By avoiding the “overly coherent closure of mise-en-scène,” these forms refuse to present social constructs. As Roland Barthes (1993), in *‘A Roland Barthes Reader’* (edited by Susan Sontag), society consumes stereotypes as “innate meanings, i.e. triumphs of Nature”. Instead, the stage is where “Language worked on by power” is exposed and reveals the process by which society produces and consumes ideological stereotypes (p. 471).

Additionally, montage also alters what is considered causality. When the organization of the scenes appears as adjacent blocks, then the spectator is providing the connective tissue - that is, the linking patterns across the gaps, rather than an explicit chain. That changes for feminist criticism, because it prevents the play from placing the source of oppression upon one origin, one villain; indeed, Hellen Keyssar (1984), argues that the rejection of “traditional heroism” of the “recognition scene” allows the drama to transcend the “power of individual consciousness” and instead reveal an accumulation: small permissions, small violences that add up to a system (p. xiv). Churchill often strengthens this accumulation by the repetition with difference. Similar situations are repeated such as workplace evaluation, domestic negotiations, public ceremonies but the rules shift slightly, as if the same social script has been run under new management. The spectator is taught not to focus on

individual motives, but to look for structural constants, and this is exactly how patriarchy can be made visible as a long-lasting setup. the montage technique employs by Churchill extended beyond brief scenes; it entails rearranging entire acts, thereby redefining how "background" and "consequence" are defined. Churchill reveals through the play's notes that she had "originally wrote the play with this three-act structure," and proceeds to name the three acts as "the dinner party, Angie goes to London, and a year earlier" (Churchill, 1982, p. 91). By providing historical context, this montage aims to show how the feminist argument benefits from the sequence of events. Churchill portrays sequence as an intentional decision rather than an inherent rule.

Since patriarchal narratives depend substantially on sequencing, this is also important for the patriarchy debate. Both domestic and realist narratives lead the people to view women's lives through the lens of morality plays, in which "right" and "wrong" decisions lead to respectability or punishment. It is easy to change the inevitability of using the past to justify the present, as Churchill's structural note shows. For example, in the restaurant setting, most basic phrases might be "Restaurant. Saturday night " (Churchill, 1982, p. 91). This is a less of setting and more of a theatrical frame, enabling the brazen collision of different centuries. Because it defies categorization, montage does not smooth over.

The dinner party, as if it were an unfinished business, setting the stage for the play's later, more "realistic" scenes. The montage of historical women compels viewers to question the silenced labor and sacrifices that have been made to appear effortless in the pursuit of "success"; rather than letting the audience accept Marlene's promotion as a given, it forces them to ask. These ladies are portrayed at this gathering not as a cohesive group but as individualists engaged in their own game of egotism. A straightforward, joyful feminist lineage is also not possible with this form. As Janet Brown (1991), states that the dinner party scene serves to 'historicise' the contemporary scene that follows, making Marlene's achievement less a sign of progress. Brown further places Marlene among those exceptional women in history and she avoided the doom of invisibility but lived lives that yet never altered the common situation of women. The audience do not ascend into an ideal lineage of emancipation;

Instead, they compete for attention frequently cutting each other off to narrate stories that underscore various forms of coercion. Consequently, montage serves not to expose external oppression but also unveil that the patriarchal system unfairly controls women.

Therefore, Churchill's own preference for the "original simple structure" (Churchill, 1982, p. 91), is also important as a dramaturgical principle. The simplicity is not psychological realism, but rather a sharp juxtaposition of clear architectural lines. The juxtaposition is a dramaturgical technique that refuses the sort of solution that can bring structural injustice into private tragedy. As Baz Kershaw (1992), defines 'performance' not as a one-way communication but as an "ideological transaction" where the "spectator is engaged fundamentally in the active construction of meaning as a performance event proceeds" (p. 16). Kershaw argues that performance is a "continuous negotiation between stage and auditorium to establish the significance of the signs and conventions through which they interact". Kershaw also explicitly points out that "the extent to which it fell short of consistent didacticism, the degree to which its messages were available... to alternative readings, was the foundation for its potential actual influence" (p. 164). In *Top Girls*, montage performs this intervention by making the audience an editor of history; spectators are called upon to make choices about how the dinner party shapes the later scenes, and vice versa.

Furthermore, montage is the advocate of an ethics of plurality. By denying a single protagonist's line of development, Churchill makes the stage a collective space where attention is redistributed. The form requires the audience to hold competing experiences in mind simultaneously—success and exclusion, freedom and cost—so that the dynamics of feminism are not something that comes to a conclusion, but a way of seeing. Churchill also makes a montage as a diagnosis. The same device that creates collective energy, as in the dinner party, is used to show domination in the later scenes, for stage time is given unevenly, interruptions are measured, and authority is expressed through controlling tempo, access, and space. Form, therefore, does not so much represent power, but rather power as a choreography of who gets room to exist. A similar

strategy of stage time shapes *Cloud 9*. By keeping Victorian Africa and late-twentieth-century London in a deliberately asymmetrical relationship - here, one act of imperial "order," and in the next, a cataclysmic change of world where identities are confused and alliances redrawn - Churchill makes history seem like a mechanism rather than an underlay. The prominent ten-year jump within a hundred-year jump will make chronology a sort of critique; Liberation does not come as progress, but rather as unfinished work. The casting notes at the beginning of the play make this type of critique literal— "BETTY ... is played by a man" and "JOSHUA ... is played by a white" (Churchill, 1979, p. 2). In the first act of *Cloud 9*, American feminist theatre scholars Sue-Ellen Case and Jeanie K. Forte (1985), who helped establish the field of feminist performance criticism in the 1980s, situate Caryl Churchill's *Cloud 9* within a "new feminist theatre practice" that emerged in the 1980s, characterised by a shift from general ideological deconstruction to a specific "critique of the self" (p. 64). In this context, the "desiring subject," a woman who is active in her desire rather than passive to male desire, is breaking "the mystifications of morality" and the colonization of her body. Regarding *Cloud 9* specifically, Case and Forte explain that Churchill utilises the "colonial setting with cross-gender casting and the action of pan-sexuality" to expose the artificiality of traditional roles. By having members of the same gender perform heterosexual pairs onstage, Churchill makes the "gendered behaviour of the heterosexual couple" to appear as a visible "cultural construction" rather than a natural fact. They go on to claim that the characterization in the play about homosexual desire is, from this perspective, a "direct threat to colonial occupation", as it disrupts the family, which is typically thought to be a part of the "national unit" (p. 65).

As a result, Churchill's later plays are inherently non-linear. With very abrupt transitions and minimal exposition, *Far Away* moves its three acts from a domestic home to a workplace and, finally, to a galactic of war. The sensation of escalation functions as a formal disruption; individuals can never be certain of safety, and the concept of safety is no longer relative. By omitting any conventional connecting tissue, Churchill utilises 'paranoia' as a structural device based on

association. In *Far Away*, paranoia operates as a central structural device that drives both the thematic progression and the psychological atmosphere of the drama. Rather than being just a personal psychological trait, paranoia is structured into the very fabric of the play's three-act escalation, mirroring an external "obsession with removing all danger, which manifests as a paranoid concern about the safety of the food, drink, and air we breathe" (Hamad & Ahmed, 2023, p. 205). She consistently employs a progression of elements and recurring motifs to construct drama, even within a contemporary context. For instance *Love and Information* is not a conventional story but rather a collection of short scenes that, when rearranged within certain constraints, form meaningful patterns and repetitions. This modularity transcends patriarchal modes of storytelling and challenges traditional theatrical controlling, keeping the dramatic world open-ended.

On the other hand, Churchill employs montage by presenting a collection of modular units, rather than a continuous, linear plot. In *Love and Information*, Churchill concedes to "random scenes... can happen any time" and "the scenes can be played in any order within each section." This instruction challenges the notion that meaning must unfold in a linear, cause-and-effect way. Instead, feminist significance is found in the repetitive, varied, and layered patterns of meaning constructed across these fragments. This modular format actively disrupts traditional models of identity that are patriarchally structured and reliant on narrative continuity. When "the characters are different in every scene" (Churchill, 2012, p. 20), gender ceases to function as a fixed essence tied for specific body. Rather identity becomes situational, continuously shaped by shifting contexts, encounters, and power dynamic. The play's structure, therefore, performs a subversive role prior a single line to the delivery of any spoken lines, representing a direct refusal of a stable 'character-portrait' through which traditional theatre historically reinforces normative femininity and domestic destiny. Churchill's montage to a new level of modularity in a score that can be recomposed in performance. In 'Note on Text,' Churchill says that "the characters are different in every scene" (Churchill, 2012, p. 20). This is a flat refusal of ownership: no one character can be allowed to "possess" the meaning

of the play, and no stable identity becomes the center around which other characters' circle.

Patriarchy tends to organise social life around a central masculine subject, and women are seen as supporting roles or types. Churchill's modular dramaturgy elicits the absence of structural conditions that make such centering seem natural.

Moreover, meaning comes via repetition rather than narrative because of the ability to rearrange and recast the scenario. Even seemingly little power moves, like offering advice, correcting someone, or just not listening, take on new forms, and the observer starts to see the power dynamics at work in everyday routines. A unique temporality is also generated by the modular structure. As Christopher Innes (2002), claims that Churchill's writings "centres on psychology rather than society" (p. 512). He argues that she "presents politics from a subjective perspective" and focuses specifically on the "psychology of politics" (p. 512). Innes also argues that her structural innovations, such as the cross-casting in *Cloud 9*, are intended to "physicalize the characters' psychologically ambivalent identities" (p. 513), while her use of a "liberated style" is designed to reflect the "uncertainties and changes of society, and a more feminine and less authoritarian feeling" (p. 516). The drama depicts dominance as accumulated, minute permissions and humiliations that become "ordinary," rather than seeing social change as a single, monumental event (such as a proposal accepted or a promotion earned). That is to say, it is a diagnostic shape, not just a fragmented one. It instills the skill of pattern attention, which is something patriarchal systems actively want to hide from women since their experiences are "just personal." Vulnerability and authority are also distributed across the members of the ensemble via modularity. For the audience, an individual authority may not be so readily apparent as a socially assigned function if they see that same person again in various contexts throughout the plot. This redistribution is a strong response to patriarchy's widespread demand that women's "true self" should be on display. 'The Death of Character,' is first identified by Elinor Fuchs (1996), which is a change where the human figure no longer occupies the category of the "single, perspectival 'point' of stage performance" (p. 9). According to Fuchs, if the "burden of signification"

can be removed from the "unfolding of character" then the audience must face "ideological levels"; otherwise, they are required to face the story of a soul (p. 12, 35). Instead, Churchill's form makes multiplicity normal. It suggests that what is commonly treated as female "inconsistency" may be lived against the background of shifting expectations and changing surveillance. In this way, the modular structure is not an escape from patriarchy; it is a materialization of power as form—who gets continuity, interruption and allowed to be complex.

Hence, *Top Girls* challenges the historical narrative about women. So, the dramaturgy leads the audience to compare instead of believing, to map connections instead of focusing on the identity of a single hero. As Tracy C. Davis (2003) writes, "I am, therefore, arguing for enabling effects of active dissociation, or alienation, or self-reflexivity in standing aside from the suffering of the righteous to name and thus bring into being the self-possession of a critical stance". She further explains that in public life, the responsibility for initiating this "theatrical moment" falls on the "spectator, who by failing to sympathise and instead commencing to think, becomes the actor" (p. 153). Davis also describes this process as being "spectators to the theatrum mundi of civil society, engaged but not absorbed watchers" who bring their full experience to bear on what is seen. This stance allows for the creation of new social laws and recognition, "not by cathecting with victims but by enabling the seeing of acts (sexual harassment, stalking, driving under the influence of alcohol) where before there was either 'nothing' or sympathetic social sanction" (p. 154). Churchill's modular writing achieves that reorganization without depending on a didactic speaker. The form of this actually becomes the argument.

Rapid shifts in perspective allow *Far Away* to montage well, moving from a child's bedroom to an industrial workplace to the global battlefield almost seamlessly. Churchill constructs little montages that demonstrate how systems attract ordinary inventiveness even in a single company. While Todd insists that "Colour always wins" in the hat-making scenario, Joan describes it as "an abstract picture of the street" and confesses that "Nobody got it, but I knew what it was" (Churchill,

2000, p. 16). Color, craftsmanship, and personal delight are all delicate touches, but the formal posture of the pieces is what really gives them away; they seem like they're about to be part of a socio-political spectacle, like a military parade.

However, the scene's dramatization is in keeping with the contention put forth by Beer's (1996), who states that ideas do not stay put when they are transferred from field to field; instead "science and literature transform rather than simply transfer" concepts (p. 796). A scientific notion, such as drift, therefore has new meanings when it is staged rather than explained. Churchill does not announce this drift in advance. Instead, she allows the audience to experience the jump first and only later retrace its logic.

To conclude, patriarchal power often rests on the capacity to portray dominance as ongoing and inevitable, as if it were an inherent component of the natural order. This experienced disparity is discursively vital. Montage rips that illusion to shreds by introducing noticeable seams within the otherwise seamless film. Instead of presenting the world as a given, the text shows it as a patchwork of interconnected pieces, and those pieces could be examined. As the play builds to its planet-wide battle in the last act, the audience is already educated to understand how "normal" work is involved in violence via these little formal ruptures.

2.3. Kane's Poetics of Pain: Deconstructed Forms and Refusal of Plot

Texts built of fragmented—presences without fixed identities, scenes without anchoring contexts, typographic gaps indicating mental pressure—replace social worlds with their structuring aspects of genuine causation in Kane's late work, where formal rupture becomes an inward turn. Just as the plausibility of the story and characters crumbles in *Crave* and *4.48 Psychosis*, the 'melting' of reality that these works create offers an aesthetic counterpoint to existence in a coercive society: the subject is a self that is not continuous with itself; it is permeable, and narratively difficult to wrap up.

However, the best start to begin when talking about Sarah Kane's most recent play, *4.48 Psychosis*, is probably of the British playwright, Martin Crimp's (1997) *Attempts on Her Life*, who is

one of the figures in contemporary "postdramatic" and "In-Yer-Face" theatre. This makes decisions of pace and spacing important to performance choices in terms of meaning. Especially, the following scene, a group of art critics tries to understand and contextualise a piece of art by an unidentified woman named Anne, who is never present; rather, she is defined solely by the words said about her in the scenario that follows, in which a panel of art experts attempts to place a work of art by the artist into context. During this debate, a panelist warns that "if she really is — as it appears — trying to kill herself, then surely our presence here makes us mere voyeurs in Bedlam," while countering that "if on the other hand she's only play-acting, then the whole work becomes a mere cynical performance and is doubly disgusting." The debate rapidly shifts as other voices interject, asking, "But why not? Why shouldn't it be / 'a performance'?" and concluding that "it becomes a kind / of theatre... for a world in which theatre itself has died." Ultimately, they argue that Anne is bypassing traditional art to offer "a pure dialogue of objects" and "no less than the spectacle of her own existence, the radical pornography — if I may use that overused word — of her own broken and abused — almost Christ-like — body," a heavy theoretical discussion that suddenly drops into a stark, fragmented "Silence" filled only with disconnected words like "deportment. Narrow. Brother. to fear. stork. false. anxiety. to kiss. bride. pure. door. to choose. hay. contented. ridicule. to sleep. month. nice. woman. to abuse" (pp. 254-56). Kane expands on this idea in *4.48 Psychosis*. Character markings are completely erased by her. There are not names of characters, fixed cast members, screenplay and neither set quantity of actors. Whereas, Luckhurst and Moody (2005) argue that Kane acknowledges that the relationships are "never explained psychologically" and that the play "scarcely has a conventional plot" in her earlier works (p. 107). Her later writings show a clear departure from character-based psychology such as *4.48 Psychosis* in which it "dispenses with characterisation altogether." Luckhurst and Moody describe Kane's latter works as "Extraordinarily penetrating series of fragments". Notable features of the writing include "bursts of hallucinogenic writing" and "moments of solid rationality," which together create an unstable perceptual condition for the listener

(p. 118). Thus, instead of giving a narrative that accounts for pain, Kane often builds an architecture of tension, brief units, abrupt interruptions, and shifts in register that keep the audience in an unstable perceptual environment.

Moreover, Kane's later drama is a feat of "unparalleled distilled intensity" through the rejection of conventional narrative in favour of extreme compression. She used a severe process of "cut, cut, cut!" to eliminate anything "extraneous or explanatory," instead focusing on minimalist formal units and "moments of extremely high drama". Resonance is created not with a logical plotted chain or explanatory development, but with rhythm, musicality, and recurrence (like the "yes, no, yes, no" sections). Her last scripts use "fragments," "disembodied text," and "numbers" to produce a "spectacle of existence" that breaks down the boundaries of traditional theatre (Saunders, 2002, pp. 15, 87, 112).

Crave indicates a major shift in the implied violence of the preceding Kane, an act of physical aggression translated seen in Kane's earlier works, redirecting the dramatic focus toward a poetic, stylised psychological exploration of inner conflict. The play has four disembodied speaker-positions, namely C, M, B, and A, whose identities, relations, and genders are ambiguous. No specific location or setting is mentioned; no plot. The play is a collage of confessions, accusations, memories, and desperate pleas. The shape is the direct expression of a broken mind, where thoughts and speaker positions bleed, and there is no logical development.

Formally, the fragmented structure of the scenes in *Crave* asks the audience to negotiate relations that are never finally fixed— at times the speakers seem to be separate, sometimes they seem to be the aspects of one distressed consciousness; thereby suggesting that identity operates as a fluid, fragmented construct that is continuously enacted in the immediate present, rather than representing a fixed psychological state. to be a construction performed in real time. This indeterminacy is in itself a radical feminist. Patriarchal realism usually transforms the experience of women into legible roles - victim, lover, patient, mother - attached to a stable biography. *Crave* rejects that kind of stabilising

frame by making the theatrical situation porous. Based on Marissia Fragkou's (2019) argument about the reconfiguration of identity through vulnerability and relationality which is in accordance with the thematic lens. Fragkou views precarity as a "'sticky' trope in contemporary British theatre and as source for politics... precarity also allows for a focus on vulnerability, risk, interdependency, responsibility and care as enabling tools which may reshape understandings of identity" (p. 183). Fragkou also notes that "Refraining from speaking about identity as a shorthand for 'the human', the book explored "precarious identities as materially situated and relational" (p. 185). Fragkou ultimately argues "in this sense, precarity carries the promise to reinvent social relationships through the perception of human life as relational rather than autonomous and sovereign" (p. 7). The audience is unable to categorise the speakers because meaning is constructed via proximity, repetition, and rhythm rather than through a consistent narrative. Instead of deploying conventional dialogue to sustain normative social interactions, *Crave* implements cinematic montage and repetitive refrains. Through this formal fragmentation, meaning is dynamically constructed by proximity, rhythm, and structural variation, enabling scenes to cycle through trauma and desire while continuously subverting the illusion of an autonomous patriarchal identity.

On the other hand, the stage setting of *Phaedra's Love*, Kane undermines royal masculinity by demeaning, mundane behavior instead of heroic discourse. When "The film becomes particularly violent," Hippolytus "examines the sock carefully then blows his nose on it" (Kane, 2001e, p. 84). Thus, patriarchal control is not presented as grandeur, but as fatigue, as performance. The anti-hero Hippolytus is characterised by theatricality that encompasses physical immobility, repetition, apathy and psychological abjection, serving as both a formal and thematic device. This approach demonstrates how Kane's stage directions function as a critical semiotic tools, conveying complex physical and psychological meanings through minimalist props and non-verbal gestures, rather than relying on explicit textual background. Even as early as the first act, it is clear that Kane's theatre is not an impartial platform. Directors have a lot of leeway in how they employ bodies and movement

onstage, so they can use them alone or in groups. Although this adaptability is not the result of patriarchy's intention to stifle individuality, it is a structural limitation of that goal. The resistance is so forceful because of the authority of the incapacity to undertake moral accounting. To alert the audience to the richness and complexity of experience and liberate them from these limits it is vital to confront the systems (which are sexual, domestic and institutional) that render coherence a luxury instead of a given.

Additionally, Kane deliberately dismantles even the transient dramaturgical anchors previously maintained in *Crave* when constructing *4.48 Psychosis*. By completely eliminating a traditional theatrical foundations— such as designated character lists, explicit dialogue exchanges, and a stable spatiotemporal settings— the text transitions abruptly from lengthly, labyrinthine passages to sparse shorter fragments, ultimately culminating in numerical groupings that evoke medical case records. This radical destabilisation of subjectivity presents directors with the unique challenge of distributing theatrical presence—whether through a singular performer, a traditional ensemble, or fluidity shifting constellations. Concurrently, the play adopts a structural rhythm defined by cyclical returns rather than conventional linear narrative, effectively conveying the passage of time. As Aleks Sierz (2012) notes, *4.48 Psychosis* offers a "completely subjective route" into the mind, where the formal fragmentation directly mirrors its core themes of "psychotic breakdown" and "suicidal despair." Sierz further argues that by abandoning realistic dramaturgy, Kane embraces a "freer style" akin to a "modernist poem," thereby traversing the tenuous "boundaries between realism, fantasy and different mental states" (p. 196).

This formal departure is particularly significant because the fragmented structure of the play does not merely represent psychological suffering; it allows the audience to experience the instability, discontinuity, and disorientation associated with the speaker's mental state. Pauses are not breaks in action but observable lengths that the audience must endure; repetition and empty space undergo structural processes. This style compels the audience to fill the character-free space, as

David Greig (2001) states "It is as though by excavating herself rather than attempting to capture an invented character's consciousness, Kane has opened her writing out to the audience, leaving a space in which they can place themselves and their own experience" (p. xiv). Greig further argues that "the struggle of the self to remain intact has moved from civil war, into the family, into the couple, into the individual and finally into the theatre of psychosis: the mind itself" (p. xvi). That insistence on duration is opposed to patriarchal habits of mastery, which like experience to be summarised, explained and closed.

Similar to a clinical interview, *4.48 Psychosis* features rapid questions, brief answers, and prolonged pauses. In a live performance context, this structure establishes a distinct power imbalance, wherein one character drives the action while the other is forced to react. Through this imbalance, Kane's dramaturgy leverages pacing and silence to perform the heavy lifting of interpretation. As Carolina Sanchez-Palencia Carazo (2006), posits the compromise of a stable identity leads to the dissipation of the subject. In *4.48 Psychosis*, this anonymous psychotic identity i

s seriously compromised to the point where "the boundaries between the 'me' and the 'not-me' get blurred." Ultimately creating "the dissipation of a definable subject, an evocative metaphor for the postmodern self" (p. 1). The very nature of this dynamic power prevents medicine from presenting itself as an impartial source of care; instead, it appears as a system of categorization and administration. The spectators experience the strain of this construct, questioning its demands, the appropriateness of responses, and how quickly lived experience is reduced to mere procedure. This constitutes a structural critique focused on speed and repetition rather than exposition. The graphic design of the text renders this critique explicit in which pages consist of fragmented text chunks punctuated by gaps, list formats where one anticipates narrative scenarios, and numbers replacing description. Consequently, these elements represent profound structural choices rather than mere cosmetic alterations. These elements enact the inherent conflict between lived experience and

institutional administration. Specifically, the tension between what is subjectively felt and what is formally documented and registered.

Similarly, within a theatrical context, 'quantification' can be reduced to a mere measuring stick, be boiled down to a measuring stick of scores, tallies, and sequences. This metric-driven approach illustrates the illusion that relieving pain is simply a matter of tallying it up. As Mariia Haatanen (2015), notes "The patient in answering the BDI(-II) questionnaire, is that intertwined with the answers to the actual questionnaire are some of the patient's own assessments of her state." Haatanen further explains that the patient's own additional remark transforms the anonymous questionnaire from something 'faceless to the particular', emphasizing the patient's individual experience and the narrative of her psychological distress and sadness (p. 58). Such clinical dynamics are effectively reproduced on stage.

The construction of duration within the piece is equally crucial. Extended stillness and sudden accelerations cause time to be felt physically within the body of the spectator. Instead of providing catharsis through narrative resolution and completion of the action, the play insists on the endurance of discomfort, leaving the intrigue unresolved while refusing a climactic close. This temporal endurance is ideologically subversive. Patriarchal systems tend to survive by turning human pain into 'cases' that can be processed and forgotten. By making this processing visible—and by denying the audience a neatly packaged resolution—Kane deprives the spectator of the satisfaction typically derived from managerial narratives. *4.48 Psychosis*'s utilises a postdramatic structure, as David Barnett (2008), argues that this lack of dramatic resolution fundamentally alters the theatrical event, he argues that because the text is a "landscape" of material rather than a linear story, it refuses to do the work of synthesis for the audience, and forces the spectator to become a "co-author" of the performance who is forced to actively negotiate the contradictions and gaps rather than consuming a packaged message. Barnett distinguishes this from earlier forms of political theatre, noting that while Brecht made spectators "co-producers of meaning" within a clear

dialectical structure, postdramatic theatre "does not articulate the contradiction but rather leaves lines to jar, in conversation with themselves and the contexts of their spectators," resulting in an engagement that "will tap into the individual memories of each spectator and contrast them with a corpus of material on stage that may be accepted, rejected, challenged, or met with indifference" (p. 22). Placed side by side, Kane's work is found to share a similar formal intuition with Churchill's: Subversion begins with the spectator's metamorphosis into an active organiser of meaning. Churchill does this by using montage and chronological disruptions; Kane does so by using discontinuity, blank space, and exposure of procedure. In both of these, the audience cannot simply consume; it must negotiate.

Thus, the concept of Subversion theatre is redefined primarily the reorganisation of scenic perception—effectively destabilising the traditional binary between the foreground and the marginalised. Within this reshaped theatrical framework, performance ceases to be a mere vehicle for explicit hegemonic messaging; instead, it functions as an active mechanism for confronting institutional power. By challenging patriarchy's propagation of rigid attention hierarchies, the stage invites a critical reassessment of authority. This subversive engagement aligns with Erika Fischer-Lichte's (2008) concept of the "transformative event" in which the central issue is not the passive reception of a fixed work of art, but the metamorphosis of the participants. This event is created by an "autopoietic feedback loop"—a self-organizing system composed of the "bodily co-presence of actors and spectators" interacting in a shared time and space (p. 86). When in scenes to be built around by Churchill and Kane—processions, repeated tasks, bodily metamorphosis—she detaches doctrinal frameworks from the message of the play and aims at experience: the audience experiences the instability that patriarchal order tends to banish.

However, the time '4.48' in the title functions less as an autobiographical reference than a structural medium. It constitutes the very fabric of *4.48 Psychosis*. Through the repetitive disruption of dramaturgical standards, the text transforms objective time into stage-time within the act of

returning to a particular moment of the day. This mechanism does not measure progression but repetition. Thus, the subject is trapped in a cycle that endlessly repeats itself. Marvin Carlson (1996), defines performance as "restored behavior," which is the "process of repetition." In existential philosophy, repetition is not copying way of the past, but a courageous movement forward to achieve true self-renewal and authentic meaning. This process involves the "continued awareness" of an original model, ensuring that the performance is a "continually recycled material" that creates a "reality that exists on a different plane from 'everyday' existence" (pp. 51-52). Carlson also describes time as a composing material and notes that in contemporary "Theatre of Images," the artist engages in the deliberate "His manipulation of space and time, his fusion of visual, aural, and performing arts, his utilization of chance and collage techniques in construction". Rather than following a narrative, the performance creates "architectural arrangements in time and space" in which the audience is invited to "listen to the pictures" and the feelings they evoke, rather than a chronological story (p. 110). As Michael Fried (1968), suggests that the literalist (Minimalist) preoccupation with time—specifically the "duration of the experience"—is "paradigmatically theatrical". Fried also argues that this focus on time and duration marks a point where theatre and art are at war (p. 145). Although, Herbert Blau (1982), describes performance as an act, essentially based on repetition and rehearsal, which represents an "unconscious testament to an Eternal Recurrence" (p. 28). Because the theatrical act is always a reproduction, it implies there is "no first time", and it is a rehearsal of "not only the disappearance of origin but what never disappeared because it was never constituted" that remains perpetually unfinished (p. 84). This lack of a unique beginning leads to a process of "ghosting," defined as the "nonpresence of the other inscribed within the sense of the present" (p. 82).

4.48 *Psychosis* eschews traditional stable characters, it employs recurring formal elements—such as lists, typographic spacing, and numerical sequences—to depict a mind oscillating between disintegration and clarity. The "Serial Sevens Test" is one major element of clarity. It is first visualised as a breakdown and then starkly visualised as clarity in writing. As Graham Saunders

(2002), reinforces the idea that critical attempts to read Kane diagnostically are a mistake. Saunders rejects biographical or diagnostic readings of *4.48 Psychosis*: “*4.48 Psychosis* was reviewed... as little more than a dramatic suicide note... Those looking for such methodology in this book will be sadly disappointed”. This is consistent with the argument that the play's text should not be read as a symptom report or case history. Saunders cites David Greig’s comments about warning against diagnosis-by-mythology— “It would be a pity if, in attending to the mythology of the author, we were to miss the explosive theatricality, the lyricism, the emotional power... contained within the plays themselves” (p. x). This comes very close to the phrasing of the play regarding experience over diagnosis.

Hence, Manning (1982) identifies the Serial Sevens Test as a cognitive task in which an individual is asked to subtract seven successively from one hundred. In *4.48 Psychosis*, Kane incorporates a numerical sequence that recalls this clinical procedure. However, the sequence should not be treated as evidence for diagnosing the speaker. Rather, its dramatic significance lies in the way it transforms a familiar clinical exercise into a visual representation of disrupted thought and unstable cognition. The first sequence begins with an attempt to follow the expected pattern but gradually breaks down into irregular and disordered numerical relations:

100									
								91	
		84						81	
	72								
			69						
				58					
	44								
				37			38		
42									
		21						28	
			12						
7									

(Kane, 2001a, p. 208)

The sequence initially appears to follow the logic of successive subtraction, but its numerical order soon becomes unstable. The interruptions, deviations, and spatial dislocations on the page disrupt the expectation of logical progression. Rather than presenting a coherent account of a

character's mental condition, the passage uses visual form to dramatise the difficulty of sustaining order and continuity. The fragmented arrangement of the numbers therefore becomes part of the play's postdramatic language: meaning is produced not only through verbal expression but also through typography, spacing, and the breakdown of sequential structure.

Beyond its representation of cognitive instability, the Serial Sevens Test in *4.48 Psychosis* directly intersects with historical and philosophical constructs of gendered authority. Rather than serving as a neutral clinical metric, the deployment of numbers invokes a long-standing symbolic association between numerical structures and masculine domination. Historically, dating back to Pythagorean traditions and foundational Eastern philosophies like the Yin and Yang, mathematical concepts have been strictly binarised; within these framework, odd numbers—defined mathematically as integers that leave a remainder of one when divided by two, such as 1, 3, 5, 7, and 9—are culturally and psychologically aligned with masculinity, rationality, and order. By disrupting this numerical sequence onstage, Kane does not merely depict a mind resisting a clinical procedure; she subverts the patriarchal structures of knowledge that seek to categorise, measure, and contain the female subject under a rational, masculine gaze." Kane thus subverts institutional forms of authority by exposing the limits of medical classification and by allowing fragmented experience to generate its own form of meaning. In this sense, the disruption of the numerical sequence contributes to the play's broader challenge to patriarchal systems that seek to regulate, define, and speak for vulnerable subjects.

Later in the play, a second numerical sequence follows the pattern consistently:

100
93
86
79
72
65
58
51
44
37

30
 23
 16
 9
 2 (Kane, 2001a, p. 232)

In contrast to the earlier sequence, this passage proceeds through a clear and uninterrupted pattern of subtraction. The shift from numerical disorder to formal regularity may be read as a moment of temporary lucidity or cognitive coherence. Yet this apparent order does not resolve the instability represented throughout the play. Instead, the juxtaposition of the two sequences highlights the fluctuating movement between fragmentation and clarity that characterises *4.48 Psychosis*. Through this contrast, Kane turns a clinical procedure into a theatrical device that makes the instability of consciousness visible on the page.

Rather than offering a continuous psychological progression for the audience to follow, Kane constructs *4.48 Psychosis* as a sequence of shifting formal states—clinical and devotional, confessional and starkly procedural—whose boundaries remain unstable. This fragmented composition invites the director to approach the text not merely as a score of emotional intensity and duration, but also as a performance structure shaped by variations in tempo, silence, pause, and abrupt transition. Consequently, the play cannot be reduced to conventional character motivation; its meaning also emerges through rhythm, spacing, and the temporal organisation of the performance. As Scheurer (2018) argues that the "interplay" of silence between patient and therapist shapes the "rhythm of analysis" (p. 48). She claims that this apparent non-silence constitutes an integral dimension of the "structure of the text" (p. 56) which tends to highlight the "musical quality of the language itself" (p. 51). In the context of *4.48 Psychosis*, Scheurer notes that by this reliance on silence, *4.48 Psychosis* gets a "tangible, corporeal life", which creates a "disturbing silence" that requires the audience to "turn inwards" and confront the "despair and depression" through their own frustration and not have to simply decode any narrative (pp. 56-58). Kane's late dramaturgy throws the spectator at the raw nerve end of form. In the play *4.48 Psychosis*, the page rejects the traditional

values of character lists, stable settings, or stage business; it reveals blocks and gaps, and sudden shifts that a production will have to express in terms of rhythm and duration.

Despite the time is known in this play, but the play uses the time more as a structural hinge than a story point. This limitation in the narrative flow becomes clear when the speaker states that "at 4.48, when sanity visits for one hour and twelve minutes, I am in my right mind," noting that "when it has passed I shall be gone again, a fragmented puppet." The character adds to this sense of dislocation by admitting, "Now I am here I can see myself but ... I cannot touch my essential self" (Kane, 2001a, p. 229). Thus, "clarity" is explored not as an endpoint but as the time it takes for something to arise and then vanish.

Aside from not being a story point, the time in the text, is just a repeating marker. Scenes do not progress in the typical sense; instead, lists, numerical patterns, and abrupt blankness create a sensation of repetition, as if one's thoughts keep hitting the same wall. Such a looping arrangement resembles a dance of beginnings and endings in performance. Importantly, Kane elevates the commonplace theatrical tools of space, tempo, and stop to the position of principal signifiers. A topic becomes more of a field than a person due to the absence of speaker assignments, which permits staging that divides, doubles, or distributes presence among bodies. That the pain be formalised into a "case," defined, and rendered narratable is an example of patriarchal formal demand. Kane's form makes it impossible for the audience to access the content but to sense duration, to refuse the ease of diagnosis-as-story (of not experiencing an event carry over into the following instant). Thus, composition is just as important as content in conveying the up-and-down motion between the yearning for recognition and the fear of confinement. As Evelyne Pieiller (1999), who translated *Crave* into the French language, states that Kane disrupts what is "habitual", "expected" and "acceptable", forcing audiences to confront pain without the mediating comfort of familiar theatrical conventions because she knowingly lives broken in a broken world (p. 48).

Besides, shock and minimalism are formal constraints that do not provide a soothing closure to the audience and instead keep them involved; critics perceive this stripped-down structure as connected to Kane's ethical demand on intimacy. According to Wixson (2005) states that Kane's dramatic approach involves "demolishing... "the safety of familiar form" to disrupt the "naturalistic security" often offered by traditional theatre. "Severe indictment of ethical apathy" is her way of putting "materiality in the form of bodies in pain" into her talk. These are not just "mere shock tactics"; they're strategic moves meant to "disorient conventional interpretive cognition" and make the audience feel uncomfortable. By purposefully "unmooring psychological underpinnings" and "disturbing smooth causal narrative," the literature dismantles the "stable container" that is a conventional housing or neighborhood. The result is a structure that is "fragmentary, evasive, and vigorously abstract," making the audience feel like a "alienated exile" within it. Seated in this state of "exposure," audiences are forced to confront their "own fragility" and the "nightmarish experience of spatial abstraction." They are forced to create a feeling of unity out of a "snapshot series" of reality that will not cohere into a "coherent sequence" (pp. 75-93).

Ultimately, Kane's formal experiments move representational emphasis from explanation to arrangement. When a script is incomplete, the director's choices about bodies, space, and time become the primary interpretive layer. Instead of a window onto a finished world, theatre becomes an event where meaning is assembled and then disassembled for the audience. Because patriarchal power relies on fixed frames—narratives, institutions, and categories—that claim to justify everything, this event-centered apparatus is essential to subversion. Dramaturgically, Kane breaks those frames so that the audience can relax in familiarity. The one and only encounter with a structure is all that's left.

On the other hand, the rejection of the "proper place" that patriarchal narratives assign to women is sometimes accompanied with a rejection of plot. As Gay McAuley (1999), states that theatre is basically a relationship between the performer, the spectator, and the "space in which both

come together". She stresses that this theatrical space is an "active agent" rather than a neutral container, in that it "shapes what goes on within it" and serves as a "context of interpretation" for both practitioners and spectators (p. 41). This space serves to anchor "theatrical semiosis in relation to a given sociopolitical reality," meaning that the "spatial organization of the fictional world is always to be perceived in terms of ideology" (p. 18). When connected to patriarchy, this spatialised ideology functioned as a means of control and hence of domination, of power, as Henri Lefebvre (1991), argues that space means "control and hence of domination, of power" (p. 26). Churchill and Kane use this to their advantage by creating spaces in which the spaces will not stabilise into one 'home' or 'private interior' where patriarchal control is naturalised.

Furthermore, storyline, location, and organised narrative are the backbone of traditional theatre, which uses them to construct a believable universe and lead the audience through its evolution. The societal need to classify, validate, and confine experiences within familiar paradigms underlies this narrative control propensity. Postmodern theatre, on the other hand, emerged as a reaction against these boundaries; it challenges ideological restriction via moving away from conventional story structures and stable locales. As Mikhail Bakhtin (1984), articulates that the disruptive and subversive nature of avant-garde and postmodern theatre are "Both the grotesque and ambivalence intrinsically display 'the potentiality of an entirely different world, of another order, another way of life'" (p. 48); and this is associated with irrationality or madness, which by definition offers an "'abnormal' viewpoint that is free from conventional ideas and official 'truths'" (p. 39). By refusing linear narrative structures and traditional stages, playwrights create audiences and theatrical spaces that welcome multiform patterns of subversion, disorientation, and sustained interrogation of dominant ideologies. This way of creating a story not only escapes the passive acceptance of narrative coherence on the part of the audience but also reconquers the stage itself as a space of questioning and action. In such work, the stage is no longer a place of representation, but is a place of psychic reality,

in which no fixed "where" and no linear "what happens next" constitute a powerful form of systemic and aesthetic resistance.

However, there is no consistent scene order, no fixed setting, and no typical climax and denouement in *4.48 Psychosis*, as a result of Kane's rejection of linear narrative form. Recurrence, sudden pauses, and vacant space constitute a dramatic architecture that allows form to endure the strain that narrative usually faces. A structure resonates with Jacques Rancière's (2009) rejection of the idea that theatre should guide spectators through a coherent narrative toward predetermined understanding, as Rancière argues: "The playwright or director would like the spectators to see this and feel that, understand some particular thing and draw some particular conclusion. This is the logic of the stultifying pedagogue, the logic of straight, uniform transmission..." (p. 13). Throughout *Crave*, Kane aims for the same rejection by limiting the stage to an intense concentration by removing the realistic elements of the scene. In place of a narrative explanation of the relationships between the speaker-positions and the environment, the piece encourages performance as a means of navigating these dynamics via rhythm, proximity, and space rather than a plot to "solve" or map.

The formal decisions become even more important when seen through the lens of patriarchal power, since plot and setting are often disciplinary devices that convey what occurs, place bodies in familiar settings, and essentially promise that conflict will be resolved. Adrienne Rich (1972), contends that a radical feminist reading should examine not just texts but also the circumstances of meaning-making. This leads the audience to the conclusions drawn from her work. Rich emphasises, in particular the need to look at "how we have been living, how we have been led to imagine ourselves, how our language has trapped as well as liberated us," while alerting the audience to "the very act of naming has been till now a male prerogative, and how we can begin to see and name--and therefore live--afresh" (p. 18). Kane challenges the audience to confront the truth that patriarchal fiction often seeks to evade: unhealed, unexplainable, and structurally-bound pain. Like this, although in a different manner, Churchill's dramaturgy gets to the same place. Her plays often start in

recognizable locations, but they break the dramatic container with each new act, rule change between acts, and the stage picture dominates the audience's interpretative basis. As a result, both authors use plot and setting deconstruction as a feminist strategy to prevent theatre from becoming a means of submitting women's identities to conformist narratives.

Conversely, Kane starts *Blasted* with a sealed realism hotel room, but she smashes the container to such an extent that the stage image becomes the debate. As Aleks Sierz (2012), sheds light on Sarah Kane's part in a "revolution" in theatre that challenged the dominant British cultural paradigm. A "fresh directness of expression" and a "bleakness of vision" were provided by the "in-yer-face theatre" that Kane's *Blasted* belonged to, which was a kind of "new sensationalism" (p. 21). The world is "plonked on the stage like a familiar old sofa" in classic English realism, according to Sierz, but Kane's art breaks this mold, making the "meaning of what you do is the aesthetic and is the form" (pp. 18, 61). According to Stephenson and Langridge (1997), Kane's view which opposes the aesthetic safety of English realism, views the finest work as "subversive in form and content." a philosophy that rejects the aesthetic safety of English realism. By reading *Blasted* as a rebellion against the reassuring dichotomy between "private" damage and public disaster, in-yer-face theatre exemplifies this kind of rupture, which is central to its techniques for removing audiences from aesthetically safe space. This explosion represents more than mere a dramatic shift in the narrative; it functions an official proclamation. Kane effectively deconstructs the realist premise that private space remains shielded from public disaster by dismantling the scenic setting. The room becomes a highly porous, serving as an architectural portal through which both the audience and domestic life are inundated with structural violence. Consequently, the audience interprets the play's explanation as a psychological explanatory logic rather than focusing solely on the plot development.

In a more formal sense, the explosion also indicates a dynamic shift in the set's behavior rendering it inherently less stable. An once sealed space becomes open and airy as the audience witnesses a tried-and-true theatrical promise that the room would retain its contents in which it

utterly collapses. As Sean McCorry (2017), argues that Sarah Kane's *Blasted* utilises an expensive hotel room setting that functions as an "atemporal non-place," deliberately refusing the stability of a specific location to suggest a site that "could be anywhere in the world" (p. 7). The sudden "blast" is a key device that helps reorient the audience's frame of apprehension, breaking "expectations of compartmentalisation" between the private domestic sphere and public tension (p. 9). By breaking this container, the play forces the spectator to identify Ian's personal acts of "sexual predation" and "racism"—which are treated as familiar within the initial realist setting—directly with the "spectacular violence" of the war that eventually consumes the stage (p. 10). Stagecraft is now highlighted as proof since the theatre is unable to hide the mechanics of destruction. Everything from dust and debris to shattered walls and exposed edges is not an afterthought; rather it is the very substance of a world restored to its former glory. Upon first glance, the audience notices the altered landscape: no longer is one to be secure, both in terms of the plot and the setting. As a feminist intervention, this is the reason *Blasted* is so powerful work. A common tactic of patriarchal violence is the idea of "separation," or the idea that domestic violence is "separate" from individual and global violence from coerced sex. The spatial collapse in Kane's drama disapproves of such divisions; It is the stage's contention that the dominance structures can be logic-transferred from one scale to another.

In contrast, the rejection of naturalism is developed further in *Cleansed*. The play sets in an institutionalised "university" space, which functions not as a place of learning, but as a punitive site of systematic torture and pursuit of love to the most extreme physical limits to enforce heteronormative authority. The story does not go in one direction towards a goal; it consists of a series of brutal, ritualistic events that the sadistic doctor Tinker, in a sort of anti-therapist or patriarchal inquisitor manner, has planned. The story circles around suffering and endurance, rather than the typical climax and resolution. Tinker is less a psychologically realistic character and more a symbol of clinical, almost divine, power that inflicts pain without emotion. He is a "dealer, not a doctor," and his actions

are based on a logic which is impossible to understand or feel sorry for (Kane, 2001c, p. 1). The purpose of this anti-narrative structure is to fight stories that make it easy to understand why people suffer so much, or learn moral lessons.

Subsequently, Kane's play *Cleansed* takes this strategy to an extreme, rejecting even the "room as container" approach. As Jolene Armstrong (2015), describes "the concentration camp atmosphere of *Cleansed*" as part of a sustained inquiry into a "society in crisis" that becomes increasingly complicated across Kane's body of work, and suggests that such works are designed to show how the "underside of culture is blood, torture, death, and terror," exposing the "subtle social mechanisms" and "current cultural and economic structures" that maintain a "cycle of violence" (p. 21). This play belongs to a category of Kane's writing that features a "cataloguing of the possible traumas that can occur, both personal and public," where the playwright grapples with how to present these events in an "effective, shocking and... traumatizing manner" (p. 26). By ensuring that "the form and content to be one – the form is the meaning," Kane seeks to "theatrically expose, deconstruct, transgress, resist and subvert oppressive societal norms" (p. 32). Ultimately, these strategies reveal a world where individuals are 'trapped' and frequently reinscribed "within the very dominant discourse from which [they] wished to dis-articulate" (p. 22). *Cleansed* stages that infrastructure through snap from tenderness to violation scene blocked without crepuscular transitional realism. The suddenness is not sensationalism, but a way to show the speed at which the normalisation of coercion can take place once an institution has taken the right to control bodies.

Some of the most visible themes of research in recent years, following this, have been around the play's visceral mechanics. In a recent analysis of *Cleansed*, Raad Kareem Abd-Aun (2025), argues that Sarah Kane's work is a "phenomenological examination of suffering, trauma, and the human capacity for cruelty" (p. 15). Rather than violence being a storytelling device or psychological classification, Abd-Aun also adds that: "In phenomenological readings, it is the mode of presentation itself, with its inherent rhythms and affective power, that classifies violence." Abd-Aun further

introduces the concept of a "violent-affective rhythm" to describe how the stage presentations affect spectators with their "very presence and presentation" and go beyond representation to elicit existential responses (p. 2). In this context, *Cleansed* does not deal with acts of brutality as driven by inner psychology; violence is performed through the repetition of institutional behaviours and stage procedures that foreground the systemic nature of cruelty. In this theatrical space, signs such as gestures and words are altered as a "lived, existential experience," in which the audience and performers engage in an exploration of the human condition together (p. 19). The result is a theatre of witness. The spectator is put into a position similar to that of an observer within the institution: present, at the events, unable to intervene, called upon to register the consequences. This enforced spectatorship has an additional critical edge: it resembles the structural dependence of patriarchal violence on audiences -- on publics trained to watch and rationalise and move on.

Furthermore, the caring moments in *Cleansed* are not meant to be salvific endings that can restore order; instead, they are brief breaks in the logic of violence's procedures and visible instances of the horizontality of institutional norms, but they do not make the cruelty go away. Formal plays of this kind are just as deserving of compassion as they are of terror, and audience begin to realise how the strength of those loving moments exposes the systematic brutality that exists to prevent yet has not yet resolved human suffering. As Lea Jasmin Gutscher (2015), argues in her analysis of Sarah Kane's theatre, that Kane's dramatic strategy in *Cleansed* intentionally avoids the audience reading the ending as a "morally redemptive", in which "Kane stops us from rationalising the play," asserting that "we cannot understand it and the play does not ask us to understand," then audience should pass judgment on them (p. 27). Because there is no "moral guidance provided by the author" or authorial closure, the spectator is forced to "cope with what we see and hear by ourselves" and "pass judgement" on the events independently (pp. 17, 22). These metamorphoses, ritualised gestures and impossible growths in the play are formal counter-orders: they are not symbolic messages delivered through exposition but facts of the stage that resist managerial or patriarchal interpretation. Kane's

dramaturgy instead refuses to domesticate the suffering, to smooth out the edges of it, to make it into a story whose narrative actions are straightforward: sufferers suffer, and they suffer just that much. Rather, it affirms the visibility of suffering to experience, it casts its vulnerable, struggling, and indeterminate light.

To conclude, much like *Blasted*, this is an ongoing procedure that starts with a prior theatrical contract and ends with its termination. Stable environments, consistent sequences, and the prospect of meaning via closure are the precise instruments of domination that the anarchists seek for in order to assert their power. Through his dissection of these components, Kane removes power as disease, setting the stage for an audience to face power as structure. Although Churchill uses a different tonal palette, her work reflects this focus on form. Dramatic form, according to both playwrights, is a tool of ideological mechanism. Their reimagining of time, place, and staging renders the patriarchal system as "common sense" onstage untouchable.

2.4. Embodied Rituals and the Power Dynamics of the Stage Image

Embodiment takes on a deeply ideological dimension when it functions as a core compositional principle rather than a mere byproduct of character development. As Alison Oddey (1994), explains that devised and movement-led theatre enable a group of performers to be "physically and practically creative" by generating an original product that emerges from the "sharing and shaping" of their own experiences (p. 1). In academic discourse surrounding contemporary British performance, this collaborative process is recognised for utilising specific physical methodologies in which a director may "set tasks" to which performers "invent presentations in response" using their "choreographic, acting or musical skills" (p. 35). By paying attention to "visual or physical language" rather than a pre-existing script, meaning is constructed through "sequences of moves" and "physical imagery" that exist as a "performance text" (pp. 19, 58). This compositional method is valuable to feminist theatre because it dismantles the authority of a single of the one authorial viewpoint and promotes collective, bodily knowledge. If patriarchal

realism is reliant on explanation—on the belief that events can be ordered into causes, motives, and lessons—then one of the sharpest formal refusals is to take the meaning out of explanation altogether. Churchill and Kane continually create scenes that have the feel of ritual or tableau: actions are repeated, bodies change shape, images on the stage are meant to be seen rather than unravelled.

Throughout Churchill's *A Mouthful of Birds*, formal patterns serve as rituals interrupt of everyday life. For example, "I can't come to tea because I cut my finger." This kind of scenario is built from a series of alibis, such as "I can't make the conference... My ankle has been strained..." The accumulation of justifications shows how people manage their bodies in social life through obligations, appointments, and "reasonable" self-management. After that, "Breakfast time on four successive days" (Churchill & Lan, 1987, p. 23) turns this script into a scoring repetition. For the patriarchal concept of routine, the play explores what it means to be constrained by time as a loop and by activity as a chore. Rather than being limited to the paranormal, this kind of possession is a theatrical device that draws attention to the social, sexual, and institutional forces already at work in the human body. At its core, Kane's *Cleansed* is a meditation on the metamorphosis and change that may take place within the human body. Using repeated actions of re-writing the body in a ritual is the only way to undergo transformation; confessing, explaining, or being at the rear of the tale will not bring about this change.

Churchill's stagecraft also turns to the grotesque and the mythical to dissociate the everyday. In *The Skriker*, the world can suddenly admit creatures that do not fit into realist logic—"JOHNNY SQUAREFOOT, a giant riding on a piglike man, throwing stones" (Churchill, 1994, p. 7). Such images push spectators out of naturalised perception: the patriarchal 'real world' is revealed as only one possible ordering, vulnerable to invasion by other temporalities, bodies, and laws.

In addition, this focus changes how we view spectatorship. Instead of seeing women as passive objects to be consumed, As Jill Dolan (1988), argues that the feminist performance aims to deconstruct

these traditional apparatuses, which proposes that the "radical deconstruction of the performance apparatus that objectifies women" (p. 2). This deconstruction is necessary because mainstream criticism historically shapes the spectator's view to reflect dominant cultural ideology which is an ideology that reinforces prescribed gender roles (p. 19). In materialist discourse, gender is not innate but dictated through enculturation, as gender divisions are placed at the service of the dominant culture's ideology" (p. 10). This shows how performance can actively challenge and redefine these prescribed gender roles.

On the other hand, in *Far Away*, a domestic workshop where hats are made is suddenly interrupted by a public spectacle: "A procession of ragged, beaten, chained prisoners" marches through, each wearing one of Joan's creations (Churchill, 2000, p. 24). The striking image establishes a profound intersection between domestic labor and state-sanctioned political violence. The hats products of everyday aesthetic creation and commodity are absurdly juxtaposed with the physical brutality of the chains. Here, Churchill utilises clothing not merely as a theatrical prop, but as a visceral site of violence where the vanity of fashion collides with the subjugation of the human body. By staging this 'theatre in chains' within a mundane workshop, the play demonstrates how patriarchal and social system commercialise human suffering, transforming institutional violence into a consumerist display. Rather than forcing a singular interpretation, this formal rupture invites the audience to actively interrogate, the hidden networks connecting artistic production, capitalistic labor and systemic oppression. Consequently, the staging encourages the audience to synthesise these fragmented elements themselves, moving them from passive spectators to active witnesses of the underlying brutality.

Far Away explores ritual and imagery to demonstrate that subversion cannot be reduced to a didactic message. The stage does not merely deliver a moral warning to the audience about the brutality of patriarchal control; rather, it structurally positions them to confront this oppression directly. This is achieved through formal rupture, repetition, and the stubborn opacity of the flesh, ensuring that the experience remains complex. Rather of employing a single protagonist, Churchill

openly opposes patriarchal domination by stating over and over again that theatre is made by a group. At the casting level, this concept is expressed in the commentary of *A Mouthful of Birds*, by stating "Other parts are played by members of the company" (Churchill & Lan, 1987, p. 5). That's not the paperwork instruction it is; that is the dramaturgical ethic instruction. This reliance on visceral, non-verbal stage imagery to disrupt patriarchal narrative expectations forms a shared aesthetic baseline with Sarah Kane's dramatic strategy. Just as Churchill links domesticity to political violence through structural shocks, Kane's stage images operate with a similar raw immediacy. Kane's work functions as an experimental lab where the body is cut, remade, and re-presented without explanation, sharing Churchill's fundamental repudiation of spectator comfort.

In *A Mouthful of Birds*, Churchill and Lan actively disrupt the realist assumption that identity is an interior, stable essence of a person, presenting it instead as something performed, fluid, and enacted through ritualised theatre. The fragmented vignettes and repetitive physical features of the play render identity as a series of enacted states rather than a psychological core; that is, they subvert traditional gender divisions and patriarchal norms of consistency and readability. As R. Darren Gobert (2014), characterises Caryl Churchill as a restlessly innovative dramatist who is "constantly reinventing her style and pioneering new forms" (p. 16). By "foregrounding the body and performance" rather than "narrative cohesion" as the traditional methods, her work makes the audience challenge its ability to rely on "straightforward identification" (p. 29). Gobert further states that an identity could be "shaped by scripts, written by genetic or ideological forces. But it is not reducible to them; just as both a play and a person constitute themselves through performance in a process that unfolds moment by moment in the present."

Through its non-linear structure and ritualised possession scenes, *A Mouthful of Birds* stages identity as relational and contingent, and stresses that characters are formed through action by others in a community and through their bodies rather than through internal psychological drives. Rather than being driven by stable, internal psyches, characters find their physical behaviors and social

scripts dictated by external forces, such as when Marcia's Trinidadian medium identity is colonised and overwritten by the white middle-class spirit Sybil, who commands: "Tap the teaspoon three times on the back of your hand before you lay it down. That's how it's done in this country" (Churchill & Lan, 1986, p. 35). This external, communal possession leaves Marcia's sense of self entirely fractured, forcing her to seek recovery in her homeland: "My doctor said I'm just not feeling right in myself. I got to go back home and find myself. I lost myself. I don't know where" (p. 36). This formal strategy means that the play will present a feminist dilemma in theatrical terms: it will question patriarchal systems that lay claim over bodies and identities. The audience see this patriarchal claim in the medical and state systems that attempt to rigidly categorise and control Herculine Barbin's intersex body: "Hermaphrodite, the doctors were fascinated, how to define this body, does it fascinate you, it doesn't fascinate me, let it die" (p. 52). It is similarly highlighted by King Pentheus's violent, authoritative desire to dominate the escaping, ecstatic women of his city: "Send the soldiers to fetch the women. I want to kill them" (p. 54). While at the same time providing space for imagining transformation precisely because identity is presented as being performed, shared and repeated onstage rather than being possessed once and for all. This fluidity of identity is physicalised in the "Dressing of Pentheus" scene, where gender is literally constructed and repeated onstage as Dionysos dresses him in women's clothing, prompting his query: "Do I look like my mother?" (p. 58). This theatricalised performance ultimately enables a radical, liberating transformation of the self, as celebrated in Derek's final lines of gender comfort: "My skin used to wrap me up, now it lets the world in. Was I this all the time? ... Every day when I wake up, I'm comfortable" (p. 71).

Consequently, there is a key moment at which this formal split becomes apparent. The stage direction says: "The SPIRIT is seen and heard only by LENA" (Churchill & Lan, 1987, p. 23). The theatre is asked to create two simultaneous realities: a room that 'contains' something for everyone else, and something else undetectable to Lena alone. This doubleness is not only supernatural, but it

is similar to the gendered experience of threat and disbelief of women who might see danger, but will not be acknowledged by others. The mechanisms of the scene, therefore, arise out of the mechanics of theatre: the audience thus becomes a witness to something that cannot be collectively verified on the stage. In so doing, the play places spectatorship again in the position of responsibility. The spectator is not invited to diagnose Lena; they are forced to deal with the discomfort of seeing that which other characters do not.

Feminist critics often emphasise how embodiment can be used to communicate that which politic tries to keep unspeakable; As Charlotte Canning (1996), highlights that for feminist theatre groups, "action/experience was to take precedence over history and memory" (p. 3). This emphasis allowed theatre to serve as a vehicle for the "exploration of the experience of women together," effectively transforming "everyday lives, their dreams, feelings, and thoughts" into a physical event. By "making theatre out of these private parts of ourselves," performers were able to "take [their] own experiences seriously" and make them visible, rejecting standard conventions to give the audience a "validation of a feminist vision" that is both familiar and entirely new. This process ensured that the "essence of [the] theatre [was] to convey the collective experience" in a way that resonated as a physical, "important rite of passage" for those involved (pp. 11-12). *A Mouthful of Birds* accomplishes this distribution of perception: the form renders inequality in terms of who is permitted to see and who is permitted to be believed (Churchill & Lan, 1986). We see this inequality manifest structurally in how the voices and physical suffering of marginalised characters are systematically ignored or overwritten by institutional authorities and dominant classes.

In the "Baron Sunday" sequences, the white, middle-class spirit Sybil easily asserts her presence and is documented by the white musicologist, Curzon, as she dictates classical notation: "Quaver G, semi-quaver F, quaver E, semi-quaver D —". While Curzon listens intently and records Sybil's words, the physical host of the spirit—Marcia, a Black West Indian medium—is subjected to a agonizing, silent erasure that the dramatic form itself renders invisible: "MARCIA tries to speak.

No words come out. ... MARCIA cries out in agony. No sound is heard" (Churchill & Lan, 1986, p. 36). The Western intellectual Curzon is permitted to hear, see, and believe only the spirit that speaks his cultural language, while Marcia's physical pain is completely excluded from the field of recognised perception.

A similar division of perception governs institutional and legal definitions of gender, where the lived bodily experiences of intersex individuals are subordinated to authoritative decrees. In the Herculine Barbin sequence, Herculine remembers a time when her identity was accepted without question by those around her: "Was I really Herculine Barbin, playing by the sea, starting school at the convent, nobody doubted I was a girl". However, once her body becomes an object of medical and religious fascination, she is stripped of the right to define her own reality, culminating in the bishop's decree: "yes I should be declared a man". Because institutional perception is the only reality permitted to be believed, Herculine is driven to take her own life: "Abel Barbin, suicide, they'll find the body of a man in the morning, no one will doubt it" (Churchill & Lan, 1986, p. 51).

Finally, this inequality is dramatised within the sphere of corporate capitalism, where the systemic pursuit of profit blinds characters to the living world around them. While Paul presents a dry business report to his colleagues, an expressive pig dances onstage, entirely unseen by the other businessmen who are only permitted to perceive abstract financial metrics: "Page 103 refers back pages 78 and 22. Tables E and F correlate in major areas though not as regards beef surplus requirements..." (Churchill & Lan, 1986, p. 42). Although Paul briefly breaks through this conditioning to truly look at the animal—"Once I started looking at him ... I tried to look at them all again as so many hundred pigs, so many kilos" (Churchill & Lan, 1986, p. 44)—his newfound perception is instantly dismissed by his friend as a joke: "Applesauce!" (Churchill & Lan, 1986, p. 43). Ultimately, the bureaucratic machinery of the abattoir slaughters the animal before Paul can intervene, demonstrating that in a hyper-rationalised society, only the language of percentages and exports is permitted to hold sway.

However, if *A Mouthful of Birds* uses ritual repetition to destabilise the stable identity, *The Skriker* goes even further in its use of compulsion by making it a scenic rule. A few words of stage direction - "The PASSERBY never stops dancing" (Churchill, 1994, p. 15)—that condense a whole constraint of the body. The passerby's movement is not expressive and not chosen- it is continuous, excessive and socially unreadable. On a stage shaped by patriarchy's conventions, "normal" time is frequently productive time: bodies moving towards objectives, scenes moving towards results, desire put under the discipline of stories. The endless dance breaks such discipline. It brings in a time which cannot be handled by work, family or moral progress. In this sense, the play's dramaturgy is in line with the thesis's concern for patriarchy as a system that regulates bodies through tempo when one is supposed to speak, to reproduce, to recover, to move on.

Additionally, Churchill applies a "theatre of intrusions" around that compulsion: creatures appearing, disappearing, and rearranging the space without asking for permission, leaving the stage "littered, as it were, with both conscious and unconscious images". Instead of presenting the audience with a "self-contained work" or a coherent myth which can be translated into a single meaning, the play demands multiplicity, operating as a "meaningful polyphony open to the spectator" where "it is no longer necessary to accept pre-assigned meanings". The stage fills with presences, neither human-centred nor easily domesticated into "symbol," because "reality can intrude theatre" and "on-stage actions, or even inanimate objects placed on stage... become signs open to spectators' interpretation" (Takahashi, 1992, pp. 35-36, 38-39, 42).

Besides, patriarchal view is equally loss of its category-making strength alongside the form itself; it is the site of the counter-form. In her review of a volume of critical essays on Caryl Churchill, published by Sheila Rabillard, Liorah Anne Golomb (2000), delves into Churchill's "evolving and sometimes somewhat cryptic" dramaturgy using highly theoretical lenses, looking at issues of gender representation, ecology, and landscape. One important point to consider in this scholarship, particularly in Churchill, is the formal disruption that is employed to explore the

incomprehensibility of the repressed in the conscious mind, including a "near-impenetrable stream of words. This way, the audience is deprived of the joy of easy comprehension that would result in a 'sense of mastery' over the play, thereby making an "act of political resistance" explicit in the playwright's footnote to the play. The refusal to conform to the conventional mode of reading, a move that would leave the spectator in control of the meaning, makes Churchill's work an effective systemic critique of the possibilities for signifying the image (p. 139-140).

Therefore, the spectator cannot find a stable interpretive position; the play is continually shifting the ground. Not confusion for its own sake, what the result is, is a disruption of the cultural habit of making women's bodies (and nature's body) knowable objects.

Sarah Kane also treats stage image as an ideological contention, but often she does so by depriving the prestigious male figure of narrative dignity. The opening stage direction of *Phaedra's Love* situates a prince in a room that does not appear to represent royal privilege but more so moral waste: "Hippolytus sits in a darkened room watching television ... a scattering of used socks and underwear" (Kane, 2001e, p. 84). The effect of this dramatism is immediate. In a tradition in which the princes possess a symbolic power, Kane starts with a body, one that cannot be idealised. The idea of the masculine is not one of leadership, but of inertia, of consumption and refusal. Importantly, to the process of the undermining of patriarchy, this moves criticism away from the bad guys, and straight onto the cultural image of male entitlement—the stage picture makes entitlement look weak not strong.

Kane's challenge to patriarchal form is also evident in the way she allows the page to become a stage. In *4.48 Psychosis*, the speaker dreams of having the freedom of thought that medication and institutional control threaten to destroy: "When he wakes he will envy my sleepless night of thought and speech unslurred by medication" (Kane, 2001a, p. 208). The line is not simply thematic; it also serves as a score for performance. It implies a body whose labour is cognitive, involuntary, and exhausting; it does not want to satisfy the theatrical expectation of the need for suffering to become a

coherent "story." The form declines consolation, and the decline is significant because patriarchy often requires pain to be made meaningful— preferably in ways that restore social order. Kane's stage images, on the contrary, hold order under suspicion, staging the product of order and the beyond the reach of order.

Across Churchill and Kane, then, subversion of patriarchy is not limited to what characters say. It is ingrained in the way that the plays distribute attention, reorder time, and create the visible world. Ensemble casting, ritual repetition, compulsive choreography, and abject scenic detail all oppose the audience's habits of recognition. As Lynda Hart (1989) focuses on gender, body and spectatorship, and describes the way feminist drama often utilises "revised and revisionary endings" in order to represent social and sexual change through "transformed resolutions". By ensuring that the "disproportionate power of conclusions works for, not against, women," playwrights challenge the traditional structures of the dramatic canon (p. 15). In some instances, the promised emotional catharsis of a play is "undermined by endings that stop the conversation without solving the problems," which highlights the irresolvability of the dilemmas faced by the characters (p. 156). This compositional choice reflects what Hélène Cixous (1976), notes "writing is precisely the very possibility of change, the space that can serve as a springboard for subversive thought, the precursory movement of a transformation of social and cultural structures" (p. 879).

To sum up, Churchill and Kane reject the patriarchal promise that theatre will provide stable identities, neat causes and satisfying endings. Instead, these dramaturgies teach spectators to remain in the state of instability, the state in which patriarchal norms can be viewed, challenged, and, conceivably, re-created.

Chapter Three: The Illusion of the Self: Performativity and Patriarchal Power

3.1. Introduction

The previous chapter examines theatrical form as a site of subversion. The present chapter shifts the focus to the performance of identity, the effects of patriarchal violence, and the possibilities of agency in the works of Caryl Churchill and Sarah Kane. The chapter examines the possibilities for agency and self-creation within the deadlock of a patriarchal world. For both playwrights, identity is not an essence but a performative act, played out on a cultural stage where power, coercion and resistance abound. Drawing on feminist and poststructuralist thought, Butler (1990), argues that gender is produced through the repeated performance of socially regulated acts rather than expressed as a fixed or natural essence, which manifests as a "repeated stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory paradigm that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance, of a natural sort of being" (p. 33).

When considering the construction of patriarchy in the selected plays, Dolan (2005) posits that their work creates a space for "Utopian performatives." These represent minimal but significant instances where a performance captures the audience's attention, elevating individuals above their current situation and fostering a hopeful vision of an emotionally expansive, visually stunning, and intensely intersubjective reality. Thus, it is possible to envision the way that the "utopian performative"—a performance that actively change and challenge patriarchal constraints rather than merely repeating them (p. 5). In the plays of Churchill and Kane, such moments do not necessarily provide complete liberation; rather, they expose the possibility that gendered roles and patriarchal identities may be questioned, resisted, or performed differently. Both playwrights Churchill and Kane challenge the idea of a stable or "true" self by presenting identity as a process shaped by performance, social regulation, violence, and resistance. The characters' efforts to assert agency despite systemic oppression manifests a form of self-generation that operates without the grand scale

of exalted victory. Instead, this agency emerges as a fragile yet urgent instinct to survive, to reconstruct the self, and to extricate oneself from overpowering patriarchal narratives.

'Performance' has a dual meaning for them. Whether it's a social performance outdoors or a dramatic performance within. The patriarch, as shown in their plays, is a social institution that shapes its members into rigid roles, such as the submissive wife, the patriotic father, or the hardworking male citizen. Michel Foucault (1977), asserts that the audience should cease characterizing the effects of power in negative terms such as it 'excludes,' it 'represses,' it 'censors,' it 'abstracts,' it 'masks,' it 'conceals.' Foucault asserts that power is not a mere entity that represses; rather, it generates reality, creates realms of objects, and establishes rituals of truth. He concludes by stating the notion that this structural system fundamentally shapes human identity; The knowledge and the individual which that can be acquired about him are products of this structure. (p. 194). The primary characters of Churchill and Kane, engage deeply entangled within pervasive systems of power production, forcing them to continuously redefine and re-evaluate their own identities to resist dominant societal systems. Within this framework, theatrical performance serves as an essential medium for examining the hidden dynamics of authority, particularly by exposing how supposedly fixed identities are socially constructed. Under these circumstances, the theatre seems to be a unique domain for what Peggy Phelan (1993), describes her core objective in *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance* as an effort to uncover significance within what is elusive and immeasurable, suggesting that the text aims to formulate a theory of value for elements that lack a tangible or recognised presence within accepted reality. She deepens this investigation by analyzing the underlying premises of representational visibility and patriarchal authority, a dynamic that has profoundly shaped contemporary discussions in performance studies. Phelan posits that by emphasizing performance, described as representation devoid of reproduction, "the relationship between the real and the representational, between the looker and the given to be seen, is a version of

the relation between self and other" (pp. 1, 3). This indicates that despite performance challenges to these categories, the ability to replicate one's identity sustains them.

Additionally, the fight for agency takes place inside the confines of scripted identity. Instead, Churchill and Kane consider agency as an impossibility within the power structure, hence it is rarely sought after in these plays as an entirely unrestrained experience. Instead, it's about standing up to the script, rewriting it, or simply refusing to play it. Emergence of awareness and narrative re-appropriation, according to Churchill, are often where agency is centered. The protagonists and antagonists depicted by Churchill rise to prominence by rejecting their predetermined social and historical positions. We see this defiance when Isabella Bird declares, "I cannot and will not live the life of a lady ... Why should I? Why should I?" (Churchill, 1982, pp. 26–27), and when Marlene recounts her teenage escape from her working-class family, stating, "I knew when I was thirteen, out of their house, out of them, never let that happen to me, / never let him, make my own way, out" (Churchill, 1982, p. 85). In their revised critical edition of *Top Girls*, Bill Naismith and Nick Worrall (2012) assert that feminism challenges the notion that women are subordinate and reliant on men, as well as the idea that the social and sexual separation of labor is inherent and immutable. Indeed, as Leila Ahmed (1992) argues, historical and archaeological evidence stands "contrary to androcentric theories proposing that the inferior social status of women is based on biology and 'nature' and thus has existed as long as human beings have" (p. 11). To support this, she points out that "supremacy of a goddess figure and elevated status for women were the rule rather than the exception" across ancient Mediterranean and Middle Eastern civilizations (p. 11). The challenging of domestic confinement is dramatised when Nell rejects her suitor's proposal to become a homemaker, asserting, "I told him I'm not going to play house, not even in Ascot" (Churchill, 1982, p. 48), choosing instead to work on her own terms. From this perspective, characters acquire new modes of expression, develop distinct desires, and perceive themselves as historical agents rather than passive entities, as feminism posits that "the personal is political," thereby challenging male supremacy and female

submissiveness. This shift toward self-determination and political agency is physicalised in Dull Gret's rallying cry of collective revolt, "I'd had enough, I was mad, I hate the bastards. I come out of my front door that morning and shout till my neighbours come out and I said, 'Come on, we're going ...'" (p. 28), and in Marlene's absolute focus on individualist advancement, "Anyone can do anything if they've got what it takes" (p. 86). Both editors assert that "patriarchy has, nevertheless, proved a formidable obstacle to women," resulting that this is unsurprising due to its deeply rooted history (p. 44). This obstacle is felt deeply across history, from Pope Joan's observation that "Women, children and lunatics can't be Pope" (p. 15), to Patient Griselda's unwavering submissiveness when she surrenders her daughter, stating, "it was Walter's child to do what he liked with" (p. 23).

Therefore, the chapter does not aim to repeat the formal analysis presented in Chapter Two, but rather shifts the focus toward the embodied and psychological implications of patriarchal power, particularly through violence, identity fragmentation, and performance. This chapter also examines how the performance of identity become the key arena for political contestation in the plays of Churchill and Kane. It explores how the characters of Churchill empower themselves by deconstructing their social roles. However, this deconstruction moves against their attempt at rewriting their history, because rewriting history means creating an alternative stable identity. While, Kane's characters claim their identity through physical, embodied acts of love and resistance against unimaginable violence. By analysing their very different methods of staging this struggle, this chapter contends that though these two playwrights may differ in their respective aesthetics, both share a belief that the performance of identity is the most important battleground in the war against patriarchal oppression. Each play discuss in this chapter are examined with a specific analytical focus, ensuring that the analysis complements—rather than duplicates—the discussions presented in other chapters.

3.2. Violence and the Body in Kane's Theatre

Unlike Churchill's focus on structural power, Sarah Kane's theatre confronts the audience with violence as an embodied experience. In plays such as *Blasted* and *Cleansed*, violence is not merely represented but physically inscribed upon the body. This is made explicitly in *Blasted* when the Soldier "holds the revolver to Ian's head" and later "rapes him" (Kane, 2001b, p. 49). The collapse of the boundary between private and public violence reveals that both operate within the same institutional logic. The Soldier's account of wartime sexual violence shows that the same logic extends beyond the hotel room, as women are reduced to objects of sexual domination. The body thus becomes the primary site through which power is exercised, violated, and redefined, especially when Ian's body is reduced to an object of physical control and humiliation. Jen Harvie (2005), frames identity as "staged, culturally produced, and dynamic" (p. 3), supporting the idea that the subject is not stable. This instability is viscerally mapped in Kane's *Blasted*, as David Ian Rabey (2001), notes that the "logic of sexual behavior" is extended into "institutionalised atrocity," violating naturalistic form through physically explicit violence (p. 206).

In *Blasted*, Kane redefines the body from being a vessel for identity to a space for raw material confrontation. The hotel room, initially a site of domestic abuse, transforms into a battlefield where the material reality of the body overrides any symbolic meaning. This is most shockingly evident when the Soldier violates Ian. Blinding is transformed from a moral metaphor into a bitter physical reality forced by what is known as the "theatre of the real." The stage directions explicitly state: "Puts his head down to Ian's and sucks out one of his eyes. Then the other" (Kane, 2001b, p. 55). At this moment, violence is no longer just a dramatic tool; it becomes a physical event that strips the body of its symbolic weight, reducing it to raw material consumed before the audience's eyes.

This physical inscription of trauma reaches a peak when Ian's body breaks down, yet continues to resist disappearance through a forced "agency of endurance." Even when Ian seeks to end his suffering through suicide, the material reality of his broken body refuses to comply with his

psychological will. This is evident when he physically cannot perform the act of self-annihilation: "Ian tries to put the gun in his mouth. Can't. Puts it to his head. Can't" (Kane, 2001b, p. 60). This physical inability to self-destruct highlights Kane's vision of agency; it is not a triumph of the spirit, but the body's stubborn insistence on remaining present in a collapsing world.

The present analysis focuses on violence effects on identity and agency. In *Cleansed*, bodily violation becomes a means through which patriarchal power attempts to dismantle the characters' sense of self. The body becomes the only medium through which the characters can prove their internal realities, such as love. When Carl's hands are amputated to test his loyalty to Rod, the brutality is stated with clinical detachment: "TINKER: I'm going to take your hands off, Carl" (Kane, 2001c, p. 124). Here, the body is a site of systemic resistance; the more the system (represented by Tinker) mutilates the body, the more the characters use their remaining physical presence to assert their identity.

Grace's journey in *Cleansed* exemplifies the physical body as an instrument of political resistance and a rejection of dominant social structures. of ideological subversion. Her desire to physically merge with her dead brother Graham transcends psychological grief, becoming a radical physical demand. She tells Tinker: "I want his clothes. I want his skin. I want his thoughts" (Kane, 2001c, p. 111). This leads to a radical surgery where her body becomes a hybrid site of gender and identity. This performance of agency is intense and self-destructive; it is an insistence on her own reality—a reality defined by love and loss—in the face of a system designed to annihilate her.

Kane situates agency's performance in a far more intense and embodied sense. In Kane's post-dramatic landscapes, where social systems have been reduced to radical violence and language has frequently disintegrated, agency is expressed through bold, often self-destructive acts of rebellion and subversion. This concurs with Hans-Thies Lehmann's (2006) identification of a nodal point in post-dramatic theatre as a movement away from the "drama of character" and towards the "drama of the real", in which the body in its raw material form is the main site of performance. Lehmann argues

that, "The actor of post-dramatic theatre is often no longer the actor of a role but a performer offering his/her presence on stage for contemplation" (p. 135). In *Cleansed*, this is particularly evident in Rod's final moments. Facing death, he asserts his agency through a final, defiant ultimatum to Tinker: "Love me or kill me" (Kane, 2001c, p. 136). This statement reduces his entire existence to a binary choice between absolute connection or absolute physical termination. It is an act of revolutionary existence in the middle of a vast sea of absence and overwhelming violence. This embodied form of agency which is the ability of the subject to act, to choose, to resist through the body when it is constrained by institutions; This form develops further in Rod's final act of self-sacrifice. At the end of Scene Sixteen, Rod's cry—"Me. Not Carl. Me. Tinker. (Cuts Rod's throat.) Carl. (Struggles to get to Rod. He is held.) Rod. It can't be this. (He dies.) Tinker. Burn him." (Kane, 2001b, p. 142)—expresses a form of love that resists Tinker's logic of violent control. Although Rod cannot prevent his own death, his willingness to suffer in Carl's place preserves an ethical commitment that the institution cannot fully regulate. Agency therefore appears not as freedom from violence but as the capacity to sustain love and resistance under conditions designed to destroy both. This emphasis on bodily experience corresponds to Artaud's (1958) understanding of theatre as a concrete physical space. He argues that "the stage is a concrete physical place which asks to be filled, and to be given its own concrete language to speak" (p. 37). This physical language "is truly theatrical only to the degree that the thoughts it expresses are those which cannot be expressed and which, far more than words, would find their ideal expression in the concrete physical language of the stage" (p. 38). In *Cleansed*, bodily action therefore becomes a form of expression through which love and resistance persist when conventional language and social structures have failed.

Therefore, Kane's representation of bodily violence therefore reveals how patriarchal power attempts to subvert identity by reducing the subject to physical vulnerability. Yet the body also becomes a site from which agency may persist through endurance, love, and acts of resistance. In *Blasted* and *Cleansed*, the damaged body does not preserve a stable identity; rather, it exposes

identity as fragile, contested, and continually reconstructed under conditions of extreme violence. Graham Saunders (2008), situates Kane's work within the wider development of contemporary British theatre. He observes that "one of the first plays from the '90s to be resurrected in the 2000s in Britain ... The only other significant example is Sarah Kane's work" (p. 1). Saunders also identifies *Cleansed* as an example of postmodern British theatre that "not only polarizing representations of gender, but set them—and at times violently—in direct opposition to one another" (p. 14). These observations support the present analysis by demonstrating that Kane's representation of bodily violence, gender, and agency forms an important part of the development of postmodern British theatre.

3.3. Theatricality and Gender Performativity

The present section moves beyond structure to investigate the internalisation within the subject itself. This shift from theatrical form to performed identity may also be understood through Jackson's (2004) discussion of performance, as "a vehicle for a host of contemporary inquiries. So, for students, artists and scholars of performance and theatre, this development is interesting and complicated" (p. 1). Jackson's emphasis on "theatre's role in culture" (p. 4) demonstrates that performance is not merely a representation of social reality but a cultural practice through which social meanings may be examined and contested. Her observation that "speech actually has the power to make a world" (p. 2) is particularly relevant to Churchill's theatre, where repeated social roles contribute to the production and maintenance of gendered identities. The portrayal of characters who perform, either intentionally or inadvertently, social roles that they subsequently come to criticise is a key strategy in Caryl Churchill's writing.

Churchill's critique of capitalism and patriarchal power structures is based on the dramatic arc of her plays. Erving Goffman (1959) calls the "presentation of self", as something that Churchill's characters are actively involved in. Goffman's sociological concept implies that the person acts as a performer, a "harried fabricator of impressions" who stages a display aimed at eliciting a desired

persona or identity. This performed self is inherently a "dramatic effect" rather than an "organic thing", (pp. 252-253), and when maintaining a show that is not fully believed in, the individual can experience "a special kind of alienation from self and a special kind of wariness of others" (p. 236). A "crucial discrepancy between our all-too-human selves and our socialised selves" is reflected in this tension (p. 56). Specifically, Joan and Todd talk about their role as hat makers, which serves as a micro-level reflection of the boarder patriarchal division of labor that confines individuals to rigid socio-economic functions. Joan's aunt, Harper, plays a role of denial and protective domesticity that contrasts her "all is well" persona with the hidden violence that she and Joan's uncle are involved in. Later, when he is discussing Todd's plan of exposing the corruption (criticizing the social role he performs), he describes the personal risk and alienation involved: "TODD. I might. I'd miss you. ... JOAN. You've changed my life, do you know that? TODD. If you lose your job I'll resign" (Churchill, 2000, pp. 23, 27). This exchange signals the moment when Todd is trying to break away from his socialised self (the hat maker) against the corrupt financial basis of the job, driven by his principles.

Far Away presents role of performance as both survival tactic and a source of alienation. At the exact moment of rupture, when a character acknowledges the role as a construct and starts the challenging process of "unbecoming" what society has made of them, agency is attained. In *Far Away*, the characters reject any imposed identity, which leaves them severely alienated from others. Todd exemplifies this by adopting an identity of extreme ruthlessness and commitment to the dystopian conflict. When his reliability is questioned, his performance requires him to list violent acts to prove his dedication to his cause. His alienation is expressed in the quote, which is spoken under duress: "I've shot cattle and children in Ethiopia. I've gassed mixed troops of Spanish, computer programmers and dogs. I've torn starlings apart with my bare hands. And I liked doing it with my bare hands. So don't suggest I'm not reliable," He ultimately admits that he has "lost touch

because I'm tired," demonstrating the extreme psychological weariness of continuing to play this violent role (Churchill, 2000, pp. 34-36).

In *Top Girls*, Marlene is the quintessential performer. She has mastered the role of the Thatcherite "new woman," a performance that requires a ruthless, competitive, and masculinised persona. Her language is shortened and clipped, her ambition is obvious, and her camaraderie with other women is conditional. As Heaney (2017), points out that "The Modernist New Woman" imagined her role as a transition "from their mothers' role of corseted wives to their future as individuals with sexualities, careers, and educational prospects, or, in short, with many of the qualities that define the masculine franchise" (p. 7). This historical emergence meant that "male domination [threatened] in the face of women's aspirations to equality". This provoked a social project involving the "[policing of] men who lacked [masculine] qualities just as much as women who exhibited them" (p. 12). For example, Millicent, the quintessential New Woman, is portrayed as strategically efficient as well as capable of arranging a "general strike" (p. 54).

Due to her exceptional performance in this capacity, Marlene is elevated to the post of Managing Director, which is traditionally reserved for males. Marlene's professional trajectory serves as a primary example of Walby's (1990) structure of "patriarchal relations in paid work" (p. 177), wherein a woman achieves institutional power only by performing a competitive, individualist role that adheres to established masculine norms. With this performance she has consciously chosen to renounce her working-class origins. This is apparent when Marlene says, "I believe in the individual. Look at me," Joyce's sharp retort demands, "I'm looking at you" (Churchill, 1982, p. 229), dialogue that reeks of terrifyingly Thatcherite rhetoric in Marlene's defence. "Come on, Joyce, we're not going to quarrel over politics," she pleads as she starts the fight, and Joyce answers firmly, "We are though." She explains the guiding principles of the role in a heated argument with her sister. Marlene, to ease the tension, says, "Forget I said anything. "You say Mother had a wasted life." Joyce presses on, "Not a word about the slimy unions will cross my lips. Marlene confirms this fiercely,

"Yes I do. Married to that bastard," leading Joyce to defend him: "What sort of life had he? In the fields like," Marlene dismisses it as a "Violent life? Joyce makes it clear that he worked like "an animal," and asks "why wouldn't he want a drink?" to which Marlene scoffs, "Come off it." Finally, Marlene unleashes her class hatred, "I hate the working class / which is what you're going to go on about now, it doesn't exist anymore, it means lazy and stupid" and concludes, "I don't like the way they talk. I don't," to which Joyce simply agrees (p. 230).

However, the entire play is structured to critique this performance. From the complete obedience of Patient Griselda to the defiant violence of Dull Gret, the renowned first-act dinner party, where historical female figures gather, functions as a polyphony of female roles performed throughout history. The dinner party atmosphere establishes a compelling lineage of Marlene's historical society. As English playwright and critic, Michelene Wandor (1984), discusses the increasing emphasis in women's theatre groups on topics of reconstruction, including women in history and their roles as custodians of history (p. 80). Successful women playwrights are represented in two ways: Firstly, in the well-known, established older women playwrights, of whom only Pam Gems and Caryl Churchill are truly recognised (p. 86). This recognition places Churchill's contribution within a tradition of female authors.

Women playwrights tend to gain prominence during significant social shifts in morality or sexual ideology: for instance, during the Restoration... and, more recently, with the rise of new feminism (p. 87). Marlene's contemporary performance is evaluated alongside these historical performances. Marlene's "liberation" is revealed to be a performance of patriarchal values in a female guise when her success is compared to the suffering of other women, both historical and modern. As Victoria Bazin (2006), endorses this claim in her discussion of the different "waves" of feminism, which she perceives as interdependent on one another—"there could not be a third without a second" (p. 115). This dependence of contemporary feminism on its often disregarded or underappreciated past—a relationship that Bazin captivantly depicts through mother-daughter dynamics, portraying

third-wave feminism as the distant, always fashionable daughter who ignores her mother's influence in shaping her identity—can position Marlene as a symbol of "Thatcher" and an independent figure. The most important thing, according to Bazin, is that "the generational model carries within it an assumption that the history of feminism is progressive and somehow natural" (p. 116).

The critique comes to a head in the final scene, where the human cost of her performance is revealed in her abandoned, emotionally stunted daughter, Angie. As Naismith (2012) comments, the play "is more about challenging the type of success that is displayed than it is about celebrating successful women" (p. 55). Naismith's observation clarifies that Churchill does not present Marlene's professional achievement as an uncomplicated feminist victory. Instead, the play questions a model of success based on competition, individualism, and the patriarchal capitalist values. Here, patriarchal structures should be discussed due to various passages of times; classical patriarchy (CP) as a classical concept means something different than its expression in post-postmodernism. Since the study takes place in different eras, CP depends heavily on male dominance and the exploitation of unpaid domestic labor to fuel economic growth. Conversely, post-postmodern patriarchy (P.P.D) depends on the process of fragmentation and the control over lifestyle aesthetics rather than traditional domesticity.

In addition, this critique also raises the central question identified by Nightingale (1982), by asking "Does freedom, and feminism, consist of aggressively adopting the very values that have for centuries oppressed your sex?" (p. 27). Marlene's support for Thatcher makes this contradiction explicit: "She's a tough lady/ She just needs to hang in there. Maggie. I'd give her a job... Monetarism is not stupid... Certainly gets my vote" (Churchill, 1982, p. 229). Her professional success is therefore deeply ambivalent because it depends on a competitive and individualist performance that distances her from Joyce, Angie, and her working-class origins. Churchill consequently presents agency not as complete liberation but as a conflicted process of negotiation within the structures of patriarchal capitalism. Angie's final, haunting word, "Frightening," and says

it twice to Marelene. This is a devastating indictment of the hollowness at the core of Marlene's successful performance.

Besides, the most direct dramatization of this process can be found in *Cloud 9*. Act One contains cross-casting, which makes the characters' forced representations of Victorian gender and colonial roles seem theatrically literal. In order to conform to patriarchal expectations, Betty's Act I existence in colonial Africa in 1880 and her portrayal of the ideal wife are an ongoing, draining endeavor. This classical form of patriarchy runs counter to their public personas, serving as a distinct historical manifestation compared to the post-postmodern patriarchal capitalism analyzed elsewhere in the study. The act's ridiculous hypocrisy, in which each character rages with suppressed desires that run counter to their public personas, serves as a critique of the performance. Betty acknowledges herself to be 'a man's creation.' Betty is confined within a male-dominated world from which she cannot escape. Further textual evidence in Act I for the theme of suppressed desires and forced roles includes Clive presenting Joshua as the idealised colonised subject and Clive discussing Edward's inability to conform to masculinity. This statement implies that Betty is trapped within a defined role, which Gayle Austin (1990), situates her work within the core tenets of feminist dramatic criticism by posing the question of whether a female character is "a male creation of an idealised 'Woman' who reinforces the desires of the dominant ideology in this culture" (p. 1). The idea of being confined in a "male-scripted drama" as Austin addresses, emphasises how female characters entrapped by patriarchal narratives. Women and readers experience the "imasculation of women by men," signifying they are "taught to think as men, to identify with a male point of view, and to accept as normal and legitimate a male system of values." To break free from this masculine narrative, the critic must "become a resisting rather than an assenting reader" so as to "begin the process of exorcizing (purging) the male mind that has been implanted in us" (p. 26).

Additionally, Clive explicitly requires Betty to repress any independent desire, warning her that they must resist this dark female lust, or it will bring destruction to her. He trusts her to maintain his

"fine man" image and says, "I trust you, Betty, and it would break my heart if you did not deserve that trust" (Churchill, 1979, p. 89). But the most criticism is found in the time jump to Act Two in London in 1980. In this instance, Betty's journey is one of de-rolling, of removing the layers of her prior performance. "I'll never be able to manage, if I can't even walk down the street by myself. Everything looks so fierce. It's since I left your father" (p. 68). She concludes to Maud that independence requires self-creation, stating: "But if there isn't a right way to do things you have to invent one" (p. 94). Her speech on reclaiming bodily autonomy and self-pleasure, which is characterised as both a victory and a rebellion, completely articulates the character's coming-of-age and the pleasure she has found in herself, which she has not "performed for anyone else". Then Betty thinks that "Clive was the one who liked sex. But then I found I missed it. I used to touch myself when I was very little, I thought I'd invented something wonderful" (p. 95).

Therefore, Betty realises that she makes this only to go to sleep with or to cheer herself up. Even Betty's mother has punished her when she saw her under the table kitchen as Betty stating that she experienced structural and domestic oppression after discovering her own sexuality. This early childhood experience of bodily discovery and subsequent punishment reflects how patriarchal structures police female desire from a young age, enforcing a code of silence and shame that alienates the female subject from her own body.

3.4. Losing the Self: The Illusion of Essence

This section examines how Caryl Churchill and Sarah Kane destabilise the idea of the self as a fixed and coherent essence. By "essence," the study refers to the assumption that identity possesses a stable, natural, and pre-existing core that remains independent of social roles, language, and power. The rejection of this assumption is grounded primarily in Judith Butler's (1990) theory of gender performativity, according to which gender identity is not an expression of a pre-existing inner essence but is constituted through repeated and socially regulated acts. From this perspective, identity is not something that characters simply possess; rather, it is continuously produced,

regulated, and contested through performance and social relations. The "illusion of essence," therefore, refers to the appearance of a stable self that is produced by repeated social practices and may become destabilised when those practices are disrupted. From the perspective of Hans Robert Jauss's (1982) "Reception Theory," this fragmentation reshapes the psychological and energetic bond between the actors and the live crowd, demonstrating how "the historical life of a literary work is unthinkable without the active participation of its addressees." Rather than being a strictly feminist critique, the themes of self-annihilation and identity fracture resonate with the audience generally as a universal human experience, sustained by a "dialogical and at once processlike relationship between work, audience, and new work" (p. 19). By disrupting traditional narrative structures, the play challenges the spectator's suspension of disbelief by creating a noticeable "aesthetic distance" defined as the "disparity between the given horizon of expectations and the appearance of a new work" (p. 25). This distance pulls the audience into a state of deep immersion and flow where clear narrative triggers are replaced by a profound cognitive and emotional participation that "is able to rejuvenate cognitive vision or visual recognition (aisthesis)" (p. 142). Kane's visceral depictions of extreme psychological states and Churchill's deconstruction of social and ideological identities converge in a shared exploration of self-annihilation. In so doing, they have broken away from traditional drama structures, favoring a theatricality that focuses less on traditional character development or plot movement, and more on the visceral and the experiential.

The section distinguishes between psychological collapse and the deconstruction of identity. Psychological collapse refers to the characters' experience of fragmentation, trauma, instability, or loss of coherence within the dramatic world. Deconstruction, by contrast, refers to the theatrical and ideological process through which the assumption of a unified and natural identity is exposed as unstable. The two processes may intersect, but they are not identical. Kane often represents psychological and bodily fragmentation as an extreme experience, while Churchill more frequently exposes the social and ideological structures through which identity is constructed. In both cases, the

destabilization of the self becomes significant to the study because gendered identity is shown to be produced within relations of power rather than existing as an autonomous essence. This connection is particularly important in relation to patriarchy. Patriarchal power depends not only on direct coercion but also on the production of recognizable social identities and roles. Characters are expected to inhabit identities such as the obedient woman, the dominant man, the respectable citizen, or the socially acceptable subject. When these identities are exposed as performed, fractured, interchangeable, or unstable, the naturalness of patriarchal identity is called into question. Churchill achieves this destabilization through techniques such as fragmented structures, doubling, and the juxtaposition of different social and historical positions, while Kane intensifies the process through bodily violence, fragmented subjectivity, and the breakdown of psychological and linguistic coherence. Thus, the loss of a unified self in these plays is not merely a psychological condition; it also reveals how gender and identity are shaped by, and can resist, patriarchal power.

Churchill's dramatic technique contributes to this destabilization by presenting identity as something produced through external ideological and social forces rather than as a private and permanent essence. As Christine Olga Kiebuszinska (2001), argues that Caryl Churchill's dramatic technique involves a "collage of related fragments" that rejects linear narrative to decenter the subject, a method she identifies in works such as *Mad Forest* and *Top Girls* (p. 233). By using such methods as the "doubling and tripling of actors," Churchill emphasises the idea that personal identity is not something that is a set core, but is inextricably tied with external forces, showing that what the characters suffer should not be seen "as personal fates, but as subject to ideology" (p. 258). Kiebuszinska also contends that this demystification of theatre reveals the theatrical sign as "strangely duplicitous," for while it "asserts an identity it at the same time manifests a division," ultimately exposing the "concealed mechanisms of ideology" that rewrite the individual within the overwhelming narratives of history and power (pp. 43, 233). Thus, this investigation will focus on the conceptual

framework and dramaturgical techniques used in the portrayal of self-annihilation and examine how both playwrights are questioning conventional ideas of identity and character.

Kane approaches the instability of the self through psychological fragmentation, bodily vulnerability, and the disruption of coherent subjectivity. Her characters frequently experience a breakdown of stable identity under conditions of violence, trauma, and extreme emotional pressure. This does not mean that psychological collapse and deconstruction are identical. Rather, psychological fragmentation provides the dramatic experience through which the instability of the subject becomes visible, as *4.48 Psychosis*'s speaker states, "And my mind is the subject of these bewildered fragments," while the broader postmodern framework allows that instability to be understood as a challenge to the assumption of a coherent and autonomous identity (Kane, 2001a, p. 210). In Kane's plays, the subject is repeatedly presented as fragmented, displaced, or divided, making identity appear as a process rather than a fixed essence.

Similarly, both playwrights' works illustrate the way an individual, as a subversive character who embodies radical ideas about self and social obligation, interweaves with collective agency and social order. Caryl Churchill, in particular, shows how the oppressed, particularly the marginalised, defend the system from their voices and shows the discrimination of gender and class. As Zahra K. Ravari (2015), notes that one of the primary aims, according to Churchill, is not only "to show the plight of silenced marginalised groups, but also to make revolutionary characters to criticise patriarchy and capitalism." The characters' degree of resistance "is determined by their voices and the ability to exercise agency" (p. 412). This method is in line with Judith Butler's (1990) concept of agency, which basically means that people gain ideological subjectivity by varying the way they perform within constituting discourses and "immanent to power", rather than through external opposition. As Laura Leigh Whitaker (2007), cites Butler's assertion that an individual's subjectivity is not determined solely by gender or sex. Rather, it stems from the intersecting traits of race, class,

and ethnicity. Without any resistance, society imposes "a gender role that the subject becomes or assumes" (p. 16).

Moreover, the way identity categories are being constructed is changing from tools for regulation to platforms for lab contestation, which presents an opportunity for subversion in the ongoing re-articulation of agency. This transition is evident in Churchill's structural development in *A Mouthful of Birds*. One such critic is Fereshteh Varziri Nasab Kermany (2008), who notes that this specific text marks a departure into theatrical experimentation, which redefines Churchill's aesthetic style compared to her earlier plays. Kermany clearly states that this type of evolution is a "more concerned about the domination of language on individuals [and] the role that the prevailing discourses play in deciding the meaning and establishing the social and political structures" (p. 150).

Kane's drama introduces a distinct portrayal of death that rejects traditional biographical interpretations. Instead, her work utilises the stage to investigate a form of vulnerability that actively resist helplessness rather stands in opposition to it. Hence, the study analyses the formulation of vulnerability in *Blasted*, employing Judith Butler's subsequent redefinition of the term as a critical mechanism for resistance (Guerrero, P. B., & Calvo, A. M., 2019, p. 1). Kane's dramatic demonstrations recast the passivity of vulnerability and the victim into an active battleground, where the characters, through their traumatizing experiences of violence, regain their agency. This implies the emancipation of the corporeal from pre-inscribed meanings, so that new ideological subjectivities can emerge through performative unorthodox actions. These embodied practices— manifested specifically through characters' radical bodily transformations, self-destructive defiance, and the explicit staging of physical trauma— often involve deconstructing traditional character archetypes to reveal personified themes that defy easy categorization and force audiences to confront uncomfortable particulars of contemporary existence. These performative acts often involve deconstructing traditional character archetypes to reveal personified themes that defy easy categorization and force audiences to confront uncomfortable particulars of contemporary existence.

Indeed, the explicit representation of precarity and suffering in the theatrical space, as found in performances such as Kane's play *Blasted*, provides insight into how people in a position of precarity are able to gain agency by reconfiguring their responses and conventions, which Butler calls "self-crafting" This reformulation of vulnerability, then, is to place vulnerability as a site rather of deficit, as a site for powerful subversive mobilization, where collective resistant action and embodied forms of protest, such as hunger strikes or acts of self-destruction, are powerful forms of subversion (Mäkelä, 2018, p. 6).

This process is harshly dramatised in *Blasted*. Ian starts out the play as a player of a particular brand of patriarchal power, with his use of cynical, abusive language to dominate and reduce Cate. His identity is founded on this performance of dominance. The arrival of the Soldier breaks this performance by subjecting Ian to a greater, more systematic violence. The rape and blinding he experiences are not simply physical attacks, but rather attacks which tear down his identity. Ian states "There's no food. Cate. Can get some off a soldier. Ian. How? Cate. (Doesn't answer)" (Kane, 2001b, p. 58), which puts the pressure on how completely reliant he is on Cate for his survival and how shared precarity can create unlikely bonds and reverse traditional structures of power. The play's final scene depicts the breakdown of Ian's agency language—his primary tool—into primal cries of hunger and agony. As he begs desperately, 'I'm hungry. I know. So do I. But. I'd rather... It's not... Please, Cate. I'm blind. I'm hungry. She leaves him completely alone. "Cate? Catie? If you get some food — Fuck. " His full physical and psychological degradation is shown through shocking stage actions, revealing "Ian. masturbating. " Repeating the expletive "cunt cunt cunt cunt cunt cunt, " Ian radically spirals into self-harm by "strangling himself with his bare hands. "Ian. shitting." The scene approaches an extreme of sheer loss of dignity and trauma and then trying to clean it up with newspaper," and he is "laughing hysterically" and "having a nightmare" (p. 56).

This sudden change in power dynamics, in which the formerly dominant character is now completely dependent on the other, is an example of how extreme circumstances can help break down established hierarchies and redefine the exercise of agency within the theatrical tale. This dramatic mechanism by which characters suffer a lot can be understood as creating an experience of trauma, fundamentally changing their bodily and memorial landscape, thus creating a radical break in their recognizable and fixed identity. He is transformed from a talking subject to a suffering object. As Elaine Scarry (1985), argues "Intense pain is world-destroying. In compelling confession, the torturers compel the prisoner to record and objectify the fact that intense pain is world-destroying" (p. 29). Scarry expands on this idea by describing how language and the structures that make up the self and the world are destroyed by pain: "Physical pain does not simply resist language but actively destroys it"(p. 4). Ian's loss of articulate speech is the audible sign of his de-creation. He had no cohesive identity to rely on when the patriarchal power he held is destroyed because it is a fragile fiction.

In Kane's *Cleansed*, the systematic erosion of the self serves as the central dramatic mechanism. Within this space, the 'university' functions as a brutal apparatus for de-individuation orchestrated primarily by Tinker. The characters' identities are inherently bound to their capacity to love—a faculty that Tinker actively seeks to destroy. Carl's identity, defined by his vows of commitment to Rod, prompts a retaliatory response from Tinker, who moves to strip him of his capacity for expression: "Tinker. produces a large pair of scissors and cuts off Carl's tongue. Carl. waves his arms, his mouth open, full of blood, no sound emerging. Tinker. takes the ring from Rod's finger and puts it in Carl's mouth" (Kane, 2001c, p. 118).

Consequently, every profession of love is met by a corresponding act of dismemberment, representing a literalised deconstruction and reconstruction of the self. This violence effectively reduces Carl's agency to a state of passive, silent suffering endured for the sake of the beloved. Grace's psychological trajectory reflects an even profounder disintegration. Her primary desire lies in

shedding her female identity to embody her brother, Graham. This transition transcends a mere shift in gender; it signifies an invasion of a self, that has grown utterly intolerable. Tinker facilitates this transformation through violent bodily reconfiguration—a process that, rather than cultivating a genuine new identity, yields only a traumatised shell. By the play's conclusion, she is reduced to a spectral presence: "Grace now looks and sounds exactly like Graham. She is wearing his clothes," (Kane, 2001c, p. 149), ultimately, signifying the total erasure of her original, fixed identity.

In *4.48 Psychosis*, the instability of identity is closely connected to the operation of institutional and patriarchal power. The play presents the subject not as an autonomous and coherent individual but as a self whose identity is continually shaped, classified, and constrained by psychological, medical, and social systems. The speaker's fragmented sense of self reflects the unequal power dynamics that determine how suffering is interpreted and how the individual is expected to understand herself. Rather than presenting identity as a stable inner essence, Kane reveals it as a precarious condition produced through conflict between personal experience and the external structures that attempt to define, regulate, and control the subject. The struggle for identity therefore becomes a struggle over authority regarding the power to name the subject, interpret her experience, and determine the meaning of her existence.

This conflict also transforms agency into a difficult and paradoxical form of resistance. The speaker describes the condition as "this is the sickness of becoming great" and identifies death as "this vital need for which I would die." The movement toward the final declaration, "It is done," suggests an attempt to reclaim authority over a self that has been subjected to powerful institutional and social forces. The planned act occurs at the "happy hour when clarity visits" (Kane, 2001b, p. 242). Within the context of the play, this moment does not restore a stable identity or provide complete liberation from oppressive power. Instead, it represents a tragic and limited assertion of agency through which the speaker attempts to resist being entirely defined by the structures that

regulate and interpret her. Kane therefore presents identity as a contested site in which power, resistance, and self-determination remain in continuous tension.

To sum up, the theme of identity and agency in works by Sarah Kane, especially through the prism of Butler, reveals how theatrical performances can challenge traditional power structures and redefine vulnerability as a source of resistance. Regarding gender, Kane explores its fluidity and performativity, echoing Butler's view that gender is a social construction of identity rather than a biological fact.

Chapter Four: Subversion Through Language and Silence

4.1. Introduction

In postmodern theatrical production, language is not only a means through which dramatic action and meaning are communicated but also a major site of conflict with patriarchal power. Applying this perspective to the theatrical texts of Churchill and Kane, this chapter shifts from the formal organization of dramatic structure examined in Chapter Two to the linguistic production and negotiation of power. Chapter Two focuses primarily on theatrical form, including fragmentation, non-linear time, montage, and the disruption of conventional dramatic structure. By contrast, the present chapter examines language itself as a social practice through which authority is established, challenged, withheld, or disrupted. The distinction is therefore between the subversion of theatrical form and the subversion of linguistic authority. Bourdieu (1991), emphasises that linguistic exchanges are inseparable from social relations of power, observing that "words are loaded with unequal weights, depending on who utters them and how they are said" (p. 1). This perspective clarifies why language in the plays of Churchill and Kane functions not merely as a means of communication but also as a site in which patriarchal authority is exercised, contested, and destabilised. The struggle against patriarchal domination is therefore also conducted through the structures and meanings of speech. Within patriarchal discourse, women are frequently represented as a derivative or secondary category in relation to men rather than as autonomous subjects. Dale Spender (1980) in *Man Made Language*, states that the patriarchal order often renders the "female" as a derivation of the male rather than an autonomous category (p. 23).

From this perspective, Churchill and Kane challenge patriarchal discourse through different but complementary linguistic strategies. Churchill exposes the ways in which ordinary speech, repetition, interruption, overlapping dialogue, and competing voices reproduce or challenge social authority. Kane, in contrast, progressively fragments language and pushes it toward silence when conventional forms of expression become inadequate to articulate trauma, violence, and

psychological suffering. The movement from speech to fragmentation and silence is therefore not simply a stylistic change; it demonstrates the limits of established linguistic structures and opens space for alternative forms of expression.

Silence in this chapter is therefore not treated simply as the absence of speech. The term “the unsaid” refers to meanings, experiences, or conflicts that are not directly articulated but remain active within the dramatic situation. Silence can reproduce power when characters are prevented from speaking, when information is deliberately concealed, or when social conventions make certain experiences difficult to articulate. At the same time, silence can become resistant when a character refuses the language imposed by an authority or when the failure of conventional speech exposes the limits of dominant discourse. In this sense, silence becomes a communicative strategy whose meaning emerges from the social and theatrical context in which it occurs. Pinter's (1999) observation that communication may occur "in our silence, in what is unsaid" (p. 24) is useful here because silence can communicate fear, refusal, concealment, or resistance without becoming verbally explicit. In Churchill's *Far Away*, for example, Harper instructs Joan that she has discovered something secret and must never speak about it. Silence therefore becomes a mechanism of social control because knowledge is regulated through the prohibition of speech. In other moments, however, Churchill allows silence or minimal speech to interrupt established relations of authority, demonstrating that withholding speech can also challenge linguistic control.

Therefore, the strategic use of silence in Churchill's and Kane's drama can be understood as a refusal to participate in the linguistic structures through which patriarchal meanings are imposed. The theatrical innovations of Churchill and Kane can also be understood through Lehmann's (2006) concept of postdramatic theatre, which moves beyond the primacy of dramatic action and coherent narrative. As Lehmann explains, postdramatic theatre is no longer centred primarily on "dramatic theatre texts" (p. 26); instead, "not action but states" become central, producing a "theatre of states and of scenically dynamic formations" (p. 68). This perspective is relevant to both playwrights

because their theatrical forms often privilege fragmentation, simultaneity, interruption, and affective states over linear action. Their linguistic experimentation therefore becomes part of a broader postdramatic challenge to the structures through which patriarchal authority is represented and sustained.

The theatrical innovations of Churchill and Kane can also be understood through the concept of postdramatic theatre developed by Lehmann (2006), which describes a movement away from the primacy of dramatic action and coherent narrative. Rather than concentrating exclusively on dramatic plot, postdramatic theatre foregrounds performance, discontinuity, interruption, and the material conditions of theatrical presentation. This concept is relevant to the present chapter because both playwrights disrupt conventional patterns of dramatic communication. However, unlike Chapter Two, which examines fragmentation and other formal devices primarily as strategies of theatrical subversion, this chapter focuses specifically on how language, speech, and silence function within those disrupted forms to produce and challenge authority.

Churchill's subversion of patriarchal discourse can be understood through the concept of the performative utterance. In *Top Girls* and *Cloud 9*, speech does not merely communicate information; it also performs social actions and participates in the production of social relations. Churchill uses overlapping voices, interruptions, repetition, and competing forms of speech to prevent one authoritative voice from controlling the meaning of the scene. This linguistic disruption can be related to Austin's (1962) concept of the performative utterance, in which is "not, or not merely, saying something but doing something, as not a true or false report of something" (p. 25). The significance of Churchill's dialogue, therefore, lies not only in what is said but also in what speech does within a particular social context.

At the same time, Churchill's treatment of dialogue can be examined through the concept of symbolic power established earlier in the thesis. From Bourdieu's (1991) perspective, linguistic authority is shaped by the social conditions that determine whose speech is recognised as legitimate

and whose voice is ignored or marginalised. Churchill's overlapping dialogue challenges this unequal distribution of linguistic authority by allowing several voices to compete for recognition rather than allowing a single voice to establish an unquestioned meaning. In this way, her experimentation with dialogue becomes a means of exposing the relationship between language and patriarchal power.

This distinction is important to the argument of the present chapter. The concern is not simply that Churchill uses fragmented or overlapping dialogue as a formal technique; rather, these techniques reveal how authority is produced through speech and how that authority can be disrupted. Thus, Chapter Four extends the discussion of theatrical subversion from dramatic form to linguistic power. While Chapter Two examines how theatrical structures are fragmented, Chapter Four examines how speech itself may reinforce, negotiate, or resist structures of authority.

The movement from speech toward silence is particularly important in the work of both playwrights. Silence is not treated here as a simple absence of language, but as a communicative condition in which meanings may remain present without being explicitly articulated. The "unsaid" may indicate fear, concealment, refusal, exclusion, or resistance, depending on the dramatic context. Silence can therefore reproduce power when speech is prohibited or controlled, but it can also challenge power when a character refuses to participate in an imposed discourse. The analysis of silence in this chapter consequently considers not only what characters say, but also what they are unable or unwilling to say and how that absence acquires dramatic significance.

Churchill transforms resistance into a dialogic process that subverts patriarchal authority and destabilises the dominance of a single authoritative discourse. The challenge of patriarchal logic in Churchill's plays is highlighted by depicting "diverse female protagonists existing in patriarchal cultures" who observe rights through "dominant female protagonists struggling with original personal and societal dilemmas." 'polyphony' is defined as a method where "multiple narrative voices articulate resistance" against a totalitarian, patriarchal regime (Algobaei et al., 2025, pp. 484-485).

By having characters speak over each other, Churchill shows that the 'logic' of patriarchal discourse is not a universal truth but a social script that can be scrambled, interrupted, and made fun of. Her linguistic strategy is one of accumulation and disruption; she exposes the mechanisms of the patriarchal norms by violating them in public.

Sarah Kane, on the other hand, rejects traditional dramatic conventions entirely. to address existential trauma within a post-postmodern patriarchal framework (P.P.D). Drawing from Judith Butler's framework on identity destabilization, Kane moves beyond a mere critique of linguistic structures to explore the fundamental failure of language in the face of absolute trauma. Through this stylistic shift, she establishes innovative character constructs that emerge from psychological destruction, as exemplified by Ian in *Blasted*. Reflecting on this idea, Christophe Blattès (2007), argues that Kane's characters exhibit a distinct "lack of information available" regarding their personal backgrounds. Consequently, any personal data provided about a character "can be questioned and is frequently contradicted," making it "quite difficult or even impossible to decide on characters' motivations." Because their actions and their "dialogue lack 'coherence'" (p. 71), Plays like *Crave* and *4.48 Psychosis* demonstrate how language ceases to function as a viable tool for human connection and communication. In *Crave*, the voices express the impossibility of meaningful connection when one asks, "What's anything got to do with anything?", followed by the response, "Nothing. / Exactly. / That's the worst of it." (Kane, 2001d, pp. 164–165). Instead, language devolves into a raw material of suffering, becoming disjointed, repetitive, and ultimately inadequate. This condition becomes even more explicit in *4.48 Psychosis*, where the speaker describes the experience of "stumble[ing] over words and hav[ing] nothing to say" about her illness (Kane, 2001a, p. 209). By stripping away conventional speech acts that generate cohesive social identity, Kane exposes how extreme psychological suffering leaves behind a fragmented linguistic residue that ultimately fails to sustain the subject.

Accordingly, this chapter examines language and silence as distinct but interconnected sites of patriarchal struggle. Churchill's theatre demonstrates how linguistic authority can be disrupted from within through interruption, repetition, overlapping dialogue, competing voices, and the exposure of ideological assumptions embedded in ordinary discourse. Kane moves further toward fragmentation and the collapse of conventional language, particularly where trauma and extreme suffering exceed the representational capacity of coherent speech. Both playwrights demonstrate that the master's tools are not enough to break the patriarchal order. The chapter therefore argues that subverting patriarchy requires not only changing who speaks but also questioning the linguistic structures that determine how meaning is produced, whose voice is recognised, and what can remain unspoken.

4.2. Churchill's Linguistic Disruption and the Authority of Voice

For Churchill, language is a field of conflict rather than a transparent medium of communication. What characters say on stage is shaped by questions of audibility, authority, and access to meaning. This unequal distribution of vocal authority can be understood through Bourdieu's (1991) argument that "the efficacy of an utterance, the power of conviction which is granted to it, depends on the pronunciation (and secondarily the vocabulary) of the person who utters it," and therefore "depends on the authority of the speaker" (p. 70). Churchill's linguistic disruption challenges not only the organization of dialogue but also the social conditions thereby deconstructing the mechanisms that determine whose voice is granted authority and marginalised.

Churchill's dramaturgy repeatedly exposes the operation of patriarchal power through linguistic conventions such as turn-taking, explanation, naming, and closure. Consequently, voice operates as a structural issue before it functions as a conceptual one. As Julie Everton (2025) examines, the way Churchill employs experimental forms to subvert "authoritarian, rational and repressive power structures" by introducing non-rational, playful, and fantastical theatrical power (p. 13). Churchill's use of the "punctuation, / and *" enables multiple speech for multiple women

reclaiming the stage from linear, male-dominated narrative structures (p. 205). For instance, as Griselda recounts her submissive history, Nijo's attempt to find a tidy resolution—"Ah a boy. / So it all ended happily"*—is immediately spoken over by Isabella's bewildered horror: "But surely he wouldn't kill his children / just because —" (Churchill, 1982, p. 25). Furthermore, the asterisk (*) allows a character's speech to bypass the immediate line preceding it and link back to an earlier cue. This is physicalised when Griselda notes, "I'd seen him riding by, we all had. And he'd seen me in the fields with the sheep"*. While Isabella and Nijo chime in with intermediate remarks, Joan's line is cued directly to Griselda's sheep reference: *"He just rode up while you were minding the sheep and asked you to marry him?" (p. 22). Churchill's linguistic strategies are part of this counterforce — they rearrange the occupation of the theatre's acoustic space and the way sense is made.

In *Top Girls*, Churchill fundamentally changes the acoustic image of the theatre, not as a text to be read, but as a musical score to be orchestrated. By introducing the "forward slash" (/) notation—a typographical instruction indicating where precisely "one character starts speaking before the other has finished" (Churchill, 1982, p. viii)—she rejects the polite and linear turn-taking which is characteristic of realistic male discourse. This device is found early in the Act One dinner scene when Marlene's travel wishes are immediately cut across: "I don't know how you could bear to leave Hawaii. / I'd like to lie in the sun forever, except of course I..." to which Isabella simultaneously overlaps, "I did think of settling" (Churchill, 1982, p. 1). Similarly, this notation is used to convey a rapid, intrusive dynamic between speakers, as when Isabella asks, "This is the Emperor of Japan? / I once met the Emperor of Morocco" (p. 2), prompting Nijo's immediate, overlapping correction: "In fact he was the ex-Emperor". This technique is not simply an attempt at naturalism, but a conscious thematic strategy that ensures the characters, however distinct, "become a chorus communicating more than their individual stories" (Naismith & Worrall, 2012) and sonically reclaim the stage from linear, male-dominated theatrical structures. The structure is used to breakdown the "singular authority" of the male voice; as Amelia Howe Kritzer (1991), argues that Churchill actively rejects

both “the forms and assumptions of Aristotelian dramaturgy,” by offering “fragmentation instead of wholeness” and employing “many voices instead of one” (p. 2). Consequently, Churchill speaks in “a cacophony of voices,” mobilizing “a multiplicity of forms” (p. 14). In patriarchal theatre, silence is usually passive; whereas in Churchill's feminist postmodernism, silence is populated, ruptured, and colonised by competing female voices, creating a sonic landscape where meaning is negotiated rather than dictated.

Churchill's use of overlapping dialogue is one of her signature stylistic features, breaking up the linear patterns of speech to reflect the fractured nature of contemporary life. This technique questions the intersections of gender, power, and language and is based on the assertion claimed by Luce Irigaray. Irigaray (1985), observes that sexual difference is a product of language rather than a natural, inherent biological fact (pp. 219). We see this linguistic construction of gender in *Top Girls* when Pope Joan reflects on how easily she assumed a masculine identity simply by adopting male attire and engaging in male scholastic discourse: “First I decided to stay a man. I was used to it. And I wanted to devote my life to learning” (Churchill, 1982, p. 11). Irigaray suggests that the way gender is constructed in language reflects and helps to perpetuate patriarchal systems in the sense that femininity is a derivative or lesser version of masculinity that constructs and reinforces the idea of distinct, inherent sexual differences (Irigaray, 1985, p. 220). Within the play's corporate environment, this derivative status of the feminine is reinforced as successful women are forced to strip away their female identity and adopt a masculine style to be taken seriously, a dynamic highlighted when Louise states: “I don't care greatly for working with women, I think I pass as a man at work” (Churchill, 1982, p. 52). This binary is further maintained by a domestic social vocabulary that constructs women as naturally secondary and submissive, whether through Griselda's internalised subservience—“But of course a wife must obey her husband. / And of course I must obey the Marquis” (Churchill, 1982, p. 21)—or Mrs. Kidd's insistence on male professional superiority: “I think it is different, because he's a man” (Churchill, 1982/, p. 58). The linguistic barrier directly impacts the examination of her assertion

that the organization of sexual difference is mirrored in both language and social practices, a mirroring that is starkly physicalised in the "*Top Girls*" agency when Nell describes how the business world linguistically codes female empathy as a natural deficit: "They think we're too nice. They think we listen to the buyer's doubts. They think we consider his needs and his feelings" (Churchill, 1982/, p. 61).

In addition, the most powerful application of this technique is first at *Top Girls*'s dinner party. Here, the overlapping is like a kind of collective autobiography; collectively, they provide an historical context for women who is represented in this scene by Marlene. History, which has traditionally dealt predominately with men and been written by men, is here given feminist perspective (Naismith & Worrall, 2012, xxix). The women do not always listen to each other, but their narratives weave together conceptually to create a tapestry of female experience that transcends time. One such instance is the exchange between Lady Nijo and Isabella Bird, where two forms of female endurance clash: one born of exile, the other of restless wandering. Interrupting Nijo's lament of her loss of youth, Isabella states her own alienation, "I wanted to go home, / at home to what? Houses," which cuts right through Nijo's nostalgic longing to "Time travel back in a decade," before Nijo compliments her partner by saying, "Isabella, you are just flawless" (Churchill, 1982, p. 10).

In Churchill's play, the characters do not just disregard societal norms but also assertively occupy auditory space, dismantling the sociolinguistic assumption of female politeness. Women's dialogue throughout history in theatre has been characterised by attentive listening and reserve. In *Top Girls*, Pope Joan starkly contrasts intellectual abstraction with emotional reality, as she recites Lucretius's philosophical Latin, "Suave, mari magno turbantibus aequora ventis,... edita doctrina sapientum templa serena, / despicere unde queas alios passimque videre atque viam palantis quaerere vitae," (Churchill, 1982, p. 27). (which translates in English as "It is pleasant, when winds trouble the waters on the great sea, to look down from the serene high temples built by the teachings of the wise, where you can see others wandering everywhere and seeking the path of life.") This is against

the personal, domestic narratives of the other women, which cuts to the visceral, disconnected experiences of the women in a brutal way.

This academic discourse interjection runs through and encompasses Griselda's faltering, emotional reflection, "I do think – I do wonder – it would have been nicer were Walter not to have had to," Isabella's defensive "why should I?", Marlene's sharp "of course not," and Nijo's violent, simple confession, "I hit him with a stick," showing the huge, unbridgeable gulf between academic talk and real pain (Churchill, 1982, p. 24). This is an example of an interruption that suggests some dissonance between female experiences. The recitation of Joan's *Suave, mari magno* (a text about watching others struggle from a place of safety) ironically superposes the struggle of Griselda with the trauma of obedience. The fact that the characters all fit together makes it impossible for the audience to focus on either Griselda's suffering or Joan's intelligence in isolation; rather, they are confronted with the disorganised diversity of female history's intellectual, domestic, and adventurous aspects vying for attention.

As the play progresses, Churchill utilises specific dramaturgical strategies in *Top Girls* to portray feminist disagreement not merely as a thematic conflict, but as a structural critique of institutional power. This fragmentation of unity among women operates as a dramatic mechanism to demonstrate how patriarchy operates through social institutions and language. Even within situations of wealth and respectability, Win's suggestion that Nell 'marry him and go on working' serves as a textual manifestation of how capitalist and patriarchal scripts attempt to assimilate female labor and desire into traditional marital frameworks. Instead of a mere character choice, this dialogue functions as a structural device to expose how systemic ideologies condition female experience and lifestyle options. This structural tension underscores that the domestic, intellectual, and adventurous elements of female history cannot be seamlessly integrated into existing bourgeois frameworks, thereby challenging the spectator to examine the systemic matrix of oppression. This systemic division is further articulated through a distinct linguistic contrast regarding a liberal feminist acceptance of

patriarchy; Win employs a discourse governed by the language of choice and possibility, where lexical compromise is deceptively reframed as a form of empowerment. Nell, conversely, disrupts this discursive framework, defying its linguistic logic through a syntax of refusal. By explicitly stating that she can 'go on working and not marry him,' Nell linguistically deconstructs the patriarchal terminology that seeks to rationalise marriage as an essential socio-economic contract (Churchill, 1982, p. 167). This syntactical resistance exposes how dominant language structures attempt to preserve institutional authority and male persistence; by rejecting the very vocabulary of patriarchal domesticity, Nell's discourse structurally invalidates the linguistic mechanisms that maintain traditional patriarchal values.

However, In Act Two, Scene Two, Marlene employs overlapping dialogue syntax, indicated by using the slash (/), to interject and regulate the interview's pace with Jeanine, immediately cutting off her examination of Jeanine's credentials by saying, "Right Jeanine, you are Jeanine aren't you? Let's take a look. Os and As. / No As, those Os you probably," and Jeanine had to jump in with "six Os." Marlene takes over the rhythm by insisting that Jeanine "could have got an A. / Speeds, not brilliant, not too bad," ignoring Jeanine's quiet self-assertion that "I wanted to go to work" (pp. 170-171). Marlene continues to deploy incisive questioning to steer Jeanine away from her own ambivalent desires and colonise Jeanine's ambiguity with her own professional certainty, as when Jeanine tentatively expresses, "I'd like to travel," and Marlene quashes the possibility with, "we on't have any foreign clients. You'd have to go elsewhere." This prompt correction leaves Jeanine stuttering, "yes I know. I don't really... I just mean..." Marlene completely shifts the conversation back to domestic expectations by asking, "does your fiancé want to travel?" (pp. 174-175).

In the final act, Marlene and her sister Joyce's confrontation reaches a fever pitch due to the interruption, which stands for the dissolution of communication and the violent ideological rift. Subtly transformed from an efficient tool for overlapping or conversational efficiency, the slash (/) becomes a tool for stifling speech in the context of Thatcherism and class conflict. Joyce interjects to

undermine Marlene's defense of her individualist achievement rather than add to it, cutting in just as Marlene says: "I believe in the individual. Look at me." "I am looking at you," he fired back. Marlene responds with "violent life?" referring to their father's hard reality, and finally expresses her deep social hostility by saying "I hate the working class / which is what you're going." Their conflicting class views are directly in evidence in the overlapping text where Joyce asks "what sort of life did he have? / Working in the fields like" (Churchill, 1982, pp. 229-231).

The interruption transcends mere conversational overlap; it serves as a thematic representation of the power dynamics inherent in capitalist patriarchy, illustrating that one must suppress others to exert agency within it. The ambiguous language in this discourse highlights the challenges in reconciling their viewpoints. Marlene and Joyce engage in a structural dominance, where one voice must overpower the other for survival, in contrast to Nijo and Isabella, whose intersecting lines foster thematic significance. Under the pressure of capitalist individualism, the "slash /" signifies the fracture of sisterhood. The fluid, overlapping dialogue of the dinner party ultimately fractures into a structural dissonance that reflects the oppressive socio-political contradictions of the of 1980s ideological climate. *Top Girls* illustrates this through the dynamics of interruption; although the female voice has gained prominence, it has not consistently achieved harmony. We hear this sonic and emotional friction in Act One's overlapping dinner scene, where the characters' private griefs collide rather than coordinate. For example, as Lady Nijo painfully recalls the only time she ever saw her stolen daughter—"Everyone thought I was just a visitor"—Isabella Bird simultaneously cuts across her with a trivial memory of her favorite pet: "Birdie was my favourite. A little Indian bay mare I / rode in the Rocky Mountains." This cacophony continues as the women talk right through each other's trauma; while Pope Joan is still trying to explain how she was forced to deliver her baby in the middle of a papal procession, Lady Nijo continues to narrate her own separate experience of maternal loss: "And the child died too? / ... I saw my daughter once. She was three years old" (Churchill, 1982, p. 18). Instead of finding mutual support or harmony, the

overlapping structure of the dialogue emphasises that these "successful" women remain locked within their individual histories, isolated by their competing egos and unable to truly hear one another

Regarding the shift from a passive reception to an active cognitive involvement, Lizbeth Goodman (1993), notes that Caryl Churchill fundamentally disrupts traditional dramatic communication through structural innovations in language notation and overlapping dialogue (p. 88). Within the specific text of *Cloud 9* and *Top Girls*, this stylistic technique functions to prioritise body language and the forwarding of the unstated, turning textual silence into an active site of resistance (p. 90). For instance, during the heavy overlapping scenes among the female characters, what remains unsaid—the structural pauses, the gasps, and the physical gestures written into the stage directions—carries more political weight than the spoken word itself. This reliance on the unstated destabilises the patriarchal reliance on explicit, rational speech as the sole marker of truth. Consequently, this fractured syntax forces the audience to decode the unspoken tensions, meaning that spectators are no longer passive consumers of a pre-determined narrative. Instead, they function as collaborative decoders who active co-create the play's linguistic and dramatic meaning. By organizing the dialogue around gaps and physical presence rather than continuous male-scripted monologues, Churchill utilises silence and structural notation to dismantle the communicative authority of patriarchal discourse.

Ultimately, the rhetoric of interruption in *Top Girls* is a linguistic rejection of closure. By cutting off speeches halfway through sentences or tangents of different declarations, Churchill suggests that the female experience cannot be confined within the rigid syntax of patriarchy. This formal disruption also corresponds with Sylvia Walby's (1990) understanding of patriarchy, as a system sustained through interconnected social structures rather than through isolated acts of male authority. The overlapping voices in *Top Girls* reveal that women's oppression is reproduced across institutions, labour, family relations, and cultural expectations simultaneously. Through the

mechanism of interruption, Churchill frees the female voice from the need to be "heard" in the traditional sense and instead to be felt as a collective, overwhelming force.

On the other hand, *Cloud 9*'s original purpose is to expose the stifling rigidity of the male monologue. Contrarily, to *Top Girls*, which disrupts the drama's structure via the female characters' overlapping speech. Within the context of Victorian colonisation, Churchill portrays power. In having a full embodiment of these colonial ideals, the characters play out the part of the stereotypically 'proper' British household.

Through the use of cross-gender and cross-racial casting, Churchill shows that these identities and roles are responses to or covers for societal pressures. Set in Victorian-era Africa, the first act opens with colonial patriarch Clive legislating reality using syntax rather than speech. There is an unchangeable "logocentric" order in which his language plays an essential role, and this order applies to all members of the Empire regardless of their gender, ethnicity, or sexual orientation. The introduction of the Family occurs immediately at the play's outset, not by means of realistic dialogue, but through a rhyming song, creating a literal imprisonment of words:

Come gather, sons of England, come gather in your Pride,
 Now meet the world united, now face it side by side:
 Who call old England 'home'...
 From North and South and East and West
 Come one and all for England! (Churchill, 1979, p. 5).

Here, the rhymes patterns, such as the couplet 'pride/side', and the forced juxtaposition like 'West/England'—extend beyond mere decoration; they function coercively. Churchill deploys these rigid structures to establish the patriarchal code that dominates the dramatic space, effectively reducing the characters to static icons of Empire rather than individual subjects. As Amelia Howe Kritzer (1991), states the play "begins with the song, 'Come Gather Sons of England,' a spirited evocation of British imperialism." Consequently, Clive, the paterfamilias, introduces his household

members through highly restrictive rhymed couplets. Kritzer further demonstrates that this initial structural alignment dissociates the female body from gender and exposes "the rupture in Joshua's identity caused by his internalization of colonial values," offering a salient example of how gender and colonial ideologies perpetuate themselves (p. 113). Within this context, Clive's linguistic strategies function as explicit mechanisms of verbal enforcement, where his rhythmic utterances establish and legitimise his absolute authority over both the domestic and colonial space.

Consequently, Clive the patriarch introduces his household members through highly restrictive rhyming couplets, which Kritzer further defines as an initial structural alignment that dispossesses the female body from gender and exposes "the rupture in Joshua's identity caused by his internalization of colonial values" (p. 113), offering a salient example of how gender and colonial ideologies perpetuate themselves. Clive's speech pattern remains strictly declarative and absolute; Clive defines himself before proceeding to define all others solely in relation to his authority, asserting 'I am a father to the natives here / And father to my family so dear' (Churchill, 1979, p. 61). In a psychoanalytic context, this couplet institutionalises the "Name-of-the-Father [as] the support of the symbolic function which, from the dawn of history, has identified his person with the figure of the law" (Lacan, 1977, p. 67), establishing it as the primary organizing principle of the stage. This mirrors the Lacanian concept of the subject's entry into the Symbolic order, where "the symbolic Father, in so far as he signifies this Law, is certainly the dead Father" (p. 199), and highlights the structural prohibitions associated with the Oedipal matrix. Within this oppressive structure, there exists no visible space for a sovereign female subject; Betty, his wife, is defined exclusively through her structural lack, embodying the maternal "want-to-be, to which of course she was herself introduced by the symbolic law in which this lack is constituted" (p. 218).

Consequently, Betty's silence in Act One is not a lack of speech, but a performance of the script that Clive has written for her. The rigid domestic and imperial order Clive maintains dramatises Walby's (1990) structures of the patriarchal state and "patriarchal relations in culture" (p.

104), where institutional authority and cultural scripts work in tandem to legislate the acceptable performance of gender identity. Betty is played by a man to state how she is a male construct, a point she makes with devastating clarity: "I live for Clive, the whole aim of my life is to be what he looks for in a wife, and what men want is what I want to be" (Churchill, 1979, p. 6). This symmetrical rhyming showing that Betty does not possess a language of her own; instead, she speaks entirely in Clive's language, reflecting the complete absorption of her identity into his patriarchal framework. Instead of listening to her confession, Clive actively re-narrates her identity to fit his subjective reality. He denies her agency not just by ordering her, but by completely rewriting her character to maintain his psychological control; He explicitly states, "You are not that sort of woman," and asserting, "You are not unfaithful to me, Betty. I can't believe you are." Ultimately, he rationalises this psychological control as a form of paternal mercy, claiming, "it would hurt me so much to cast you off" (p. 39).

While both characters enforce patriarchy, they do so through fundamentally different mechanisms. Clive's dominance in Act One is physical, colonial, and explicitly structural. In contrast, Martin's subjugation of Victoria in Act Two represents a modernised, psychological patriarchy. Martin does not use physical threats; instead, he completely occupies the linguistic and emotional space through continuous therapeutic monologues. The significance of this transition in the argument is that patriarchy is not a fixed entity; it is highly adaptive. It shifts from the overt physical control of the colonial past to a covert, psychological manipulation in the modern era, proving that the new Man simply repackages male dominance under the guise of progressive rhetoric. As Victoria struggles to make ends meet, Martin uses a monologue for silencing her by occupying the entire conversation space set the stage by discussing his own sexuality and career. Asserting, "I'm not like whatever percentage of American men have become impotent as a direct result of women's liberation, which I am totally in favor of," and even claiming to support it "more I sometimes think than you are yourself." He further reframes her struggle using therapeutic language,

adding, "my analysis for what it's worth is that despite all my efforts you still feel dominated, by me (p. 71).

The parody of the Victorian colonial ideals and the superficial progressive persona of the new man in this play; despite Martin's claims that he encourages her autonomy, he constantly leaves her out of the discourse. His overly complicated, recursive, and stifling terminology silences the female voice just as well as Clive's simple rhymes. In Act Two, when Victoria remains silent, it is not because she is a passive object but because she is exhausted where this so-called masculine kindness acts as patronizing tool that subtly silences her under the guise of emotional support. In this way, *Cloud 9* shows how the "patriarchal monologue" may masquerade as progressive speech while maintaining complete control over the female subject. John M. Clum (1988), argues that the personality of Martin in *Cloud 9* represents the "confused" heterosexual male who, despite desiring to be an "ideal postmodern male," remains struggling with the transition from traditional gender roles (p. 107). Clum finds that although Martin is "ostensibly asserting his belief in Victoria's freedom," he is in the same breath chastising her for failing to appreciate his "sexual and emotional largesse", goes so far as to appropriate her experience by providing his own analysis that she feels dominated by him despite his efforts (p. 108). Clum further argues that since Martin's desire to write a novel "from the women's point of view" makes him far less like the nineteenth-century contemporaries of his whom he liberated, and his insistence that Victoria "get herself together" (p. 109). This is just a manipulation which ultimately insulting to himself rather than a true helping him in achieving her autonomy.

Similarly, the character of Joshua, in Act One, demonstrates how frail this colonial language is. Played by a white man to symbolise his assimilation of white values, at first Joshua imitates Clive's speech patterns— "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" (Churchill, 1979, p. 6). This line highlights Joshua's deeply internalised racism and total assimilation into the colonial structure. By defining his soul

through the white gaze and rejecting his own tribe, his speech mimics the oppressor's language, showing how colonial patriarchy completely erases the native identity and enforces psychological compliance. However, Churchill gives Joshua a moment of subversive storytelling that breaks what Jacques Derrida (2002), challenges as a logocentric framework, a system of containment organised around "giving it a center or of referring it to a point of presence, a fixed origin" in order to "limit what we might call the play of the structure" (Derrida, 2001, p. 351). By introducing a chaotic, female-created myth, Churchill disrupts the rigid, male-centered discourse (phallogocentrism) and subverts the foundational structures established by Clive's patriarchal order, subjecting his authority to a "historicometaphysical threatening of foundations" (p. 4). This disruptive performance demonstrates that "the center could not be thought in the form of a present-being, that the center had no natural site, that it was not a fixed locus but a function, a sort of nonlocus in which an infinite number of sign-substitutions came into play" (p. 353), thereby exposing the ultimate "lability" (p. 3) of the colonial patriarch's centered universe. When Edward asks for a story, Joshua does not tell a biblical or imperial story, but a "bad story" of creation, involving a great goddess and a monster: "First there was nothing then there was the great goddess. She was very big, and she had golden eyes..." (Churchill, 1979, p. 41). This myth, with its female creator and messy violence, is the exact opposite of Clive's ordered male-centred universe. It is an insurrection of language that foreshadows the physical violence Joshua attempts at the end of the act when he raised his gun against Clive.

A significant structural feature of *9's* is found in the way these many patriarchal syntaxes are fragmented disrupted in Act Two. The sexual revolution-era disarray is reflected in the second act's disorderly, overlapping, and halting text, which does away with the precise rhymes and distinct "types" of language. The biggest shift happens when Betty, portrayed by a female actor, has to master a language that men frown upon. Throughout the play, Betty's path involves reclaiming language. Betty is narrating the solo masturbation in her last speech. This is a linguistic and sexual experience all at once; she is finally speaking her mind about her body without the aid of a spouse or any male

construction. The syntax breaks down, becomes repetitious, and becomes very personal, which is in stark contrast to the poise of the first act's couplets. While Butler (1990), conceptualises gender as constituted through repeated citation and reiteration of socially regulated norms; Sylvia Walby's (1990) structural model clarifies why these performances remain socially necessary. In *Cloud 9*, gender roles are not sustained merely through individual repetition but through interconnected patriarchal institutions, including the family, colonial authority, and social expectations. This joint system of imperial and domestic governance dictates that a woman's entire existence is defined by her structural duties, as Maud instructs her daughter, "The men have their duties and we have ours" (Churchill, 1979, p. 14), a philosophy Clive translates into direct authority when he equates his political and domestic domains, declaring: "I look after her majesty's domains, I think you can trust to look after my wife" (p. 12). Within this family structure, gender boundaries are fiercely policed in children to prepare them for their future roles in the empire, as Betty warns young Edward: "You must never let the boys at school know you like dolls. Never, never. You won't be on the cricket team, you won't grow up to be a man like your papa" (p. 36). Ultimately, the family functions as a micro-state to enforce this obedience, a dynamic Clive explicitly links to political and religious hierarchies when instructing his young son, Edward: "Through our father we love our Queen and our God, do you understand? It is a thing men understand" (p. 38)..

Churchill therefore demonstrates that performative identity is continually reinforced by broader structures of patriarchal power, making resistance both personal and institutional. Betty says "I touched my face, it was there, my arm, my breast, and my hand went down where I thought it shouldn't, and I thought well there is somebody there," this is an intimate act of self-discovery. This physical manifestation connects her to her past, as she recalls, "it felt very sweet, it was a feeling from very long ago, it was very soft, just barely touching." The experience gets more intense and she says, "and I felt myself gathering together more and more and I felt myself gathering together more and more". This builds up her rebellion against patriarchal control as she goes on, "and I felt angry with

Clive and angry with my mother and I went on and on defying them". This consciousness offers a new independence for her to feel 'triumphant because I was a separate person from them', but also an ongoing vulnerability, concluding with, 'and I cried because I didn't want to be' (Churchill, 1979, p. 96).

The ellipses are used to indicate the birth of a new subject. Elin Diamond (1997) argues, the function of the 'gestus' is to expose "moments in a playtext when social attitudes about gender and sexuality conceal or disrupt patriarchal ideology" (p. 54). This moment is a 'gestus' of liberation in which the female body is refusing to be a signifier for male power and becomes a place of self-pleasure and self-definition as Brechtian theory attempts to conceive of a "female body in representation that resists fetishization and a viable position for the female spectator" (p.44). Finally, Betty realises that she is a "separate person," which terrifies, liberates her, and she feels victory against her old self and others.

However, Act Two's disjointed individual monologues suggest a loss of assurance and an increase in sincerity, in contrast to Act One's collective, harmonised singing. Instead of a place of coerced quiet, the feminist silence offers a safe haven for people to listen and learn about themselves. In the park, the new family members Lin, Victoria, and Edward attempt to call upon the Goddess, but their garbled and jumbled speech makes them seem helpless in contrast to Clive's thunderous power. But genuine bonding occurs in this incoherent area. Rather of ending with a proclamation, the play's Bettys—the male construct of history and the female subject of the present—embrace one another. This merging of visual elements silences Clive's last-ditch attempt to reclaim power and cling to the colonial and patriarchal identity that gave him a sense of stability and predictability in his life. Confronted with a changing reality, disbelief is expressed through dialogue with his wife, "you are not that sort of woman Betty, I can't believe you are," lamenting that an inability to "feel the same about you as I did." This personal crisis mirrors Clive's colonial anxiety as he complains that "Africa is to be communist I suppose," while nostalgically looking back to a time when he used to "be proud

to be British" because "there was a high ideal" (Churchill, 1979, p. 96). To sum up, Clive uses 'Britishness' as a source of emotional grounding, attempting to anchor himself in the stability of empire, hierarchy, and patriarchal authority as his relationship with Betty begins to collapse. Butler (1990) explains this transformation as the disruption of gender performance, whereas Walby (1990) reveals that this disruption simultaneously challenges the institutional foundations of patriarchal power. Churchill therefore demonstrates that feminist resistance is achieved not only through the re-performance of identity but also through exposing the structural organisation of patriarchy itself.

On the other hand, In *The Skriker* (1994), Caryl Churchill goes further than the overlapping interruptions of *Top Girls* and the subversion of patriarchal syntax in *Cloud 9* in discussing a language that is intrinsically "damaged." The titular character, an ancient shapeshifter from British folklore, speaks in a torrent of fragmented associations, puns, and phonetic slippages that defy the logic of the Symbolic Order. If Clive in *Cloud 9* represents the rigidity of the "Law of the Father", *The Skriker* represents the chaotic, terrifying return of the repressed "Mother" - a force that exists before and beneath the structures of civilised speech.

Departing from conventional dramatic dialogue, the play opens with a profound, stream-of-consciousness monologue that immediately overwhelms the audience with its sheer linguistic velocity. Drawing upon Julia Kristeva's (1984) concept of the 'semiotic chora', this analysis examines the signifying process that constitutes language. Kristeva describes the 'chora' as she states, "two modalities are inseparable within the signifying process that constitutes language" Kristeva describes the 'chora' as "a nonexpressive totality formed by the drives and their stases in a motility that is as full of movement as it is regulated" (p. 24-25). That is why the 'chora' is always there, ready to break the symbolic order of logic and grammar. Instead of using words to convey meaning in a linear fashion, Skriker performs the very instability of meaning. Skriker describes as "a shapeshifter and death portent." Her speech is broken down into associative wordplay, spinning from how she "heard her boast beast a roast beef eater, daughter could spin span spick and spun the lowest form of wheat straw

into gold," to mutating those words from "raw into roar," and dissolving into images of a "golden lion and lyonesse under the sea, dungeonesse under the castle for bad mad sad adders and takers away" (Churchill, 1994, p. 7)

In this case, sound, rather than reasoning, is the determining factor in word formation ("boast" becomes "beast," "raw" becomes "roar"). A monster pulling at the signifiers until they fall free gives one the impression that this "glossolalia" is lodged in the origins of language which functions as an involuntary vocalization of speech-like syllables, is triggered by emotional and psychological trauma rather than conscious reasoning. In this case, the Striker's language returns to a pre-symbolic state, echoing Kristeva's (1984) concept of the semiotic. By operating at the origins of language where sound precedes meaning, the Striker disrupts the patriarchal, structured discourse of the Symbolic Order. As Josephine Machon (2009), explores the "border between language and sound, often demonstrating the effects of language at its most damaged and destroyed in order to reve(a)l in its visceral quality" (p.74). This means that the "language works to touch the unconscious so an ineffable experience is felt in appreciation" (p. 70). Machon further elucidates the term 'shapeshift' by referring to the character: "'Shapeshift' here is taken from 'shape-shifter', naming Churchill's mythological underworld creature, Skriker, which has the ability to morph and change form as desired" (p. 197).

The Striker thus evokes Lacan's concept of 'lalangue'. This term refers to a semiotic, musical, and affective dimension of language that completely escapes the logical structures and rules of the Symbolic Order. As Graham Wolfe (2011) explains it as a "homonymic explosion" in which the phonetic material of speech exceeds its communicative role, making the listener caught in a "guessing game" of changing signifiers (p. 237). In *the Skriker's* monologues, "language runs amok, escaped from sequential meaning, fuelled by sonorous interconnections that continue to override signifying functions" (p. 238).

However, this 'broken' language is not a merely stylistic exercise but a profound structural and psychological critique. Skriker describes herself as "ancient and damaged," like a world poisoned and neglected. Her broken syntax replicates the broken ecosystem. When she speaks of the "poison in the food chain saw massacre", the collision of "food chain" and "chainsaw massacre" is one of the violent juxtapositions of the ecological collapse and cinematic horror (Churchill, 1994, p. 30). The broken of the language is symptomatic of the damage of the planet; the symbolic order, the world of human laws, science and patriarchy, have failed to contain the real of nature, which now leaks back in the form of this monstrous, incoherent speech.

The Skriker's interactions with Lily and Josie, two real human characters, demonstrate how this pre-symbolic power both captivates and terrifies. Skriker's archaic language intrudes upon Lily and Josie's reality, starkly contrasting with their easily recognizable, minimalist 1990s London vernacular. Characterised by subtly flawed syntax, an excess of passion, and a fundamental lack of technical logic, this discourse defines Skriker's performance across various even identifiable personas, such as the "American Woman" in the bar scene. Triggering a visceral gut reaction rooted in paranoia, Skriker rejects Lily's rational, scientific explanation of the way a television operates. When Lily explains, "it has to be plugged in so it's got power, right? electricity, so it's on so you can turn it on when you press the button, so the light's on and that shows it's on, ok?" Skriker defiantly pushes back, asking, "but what's / the electricity?" (Churchill, 1994, p. 15). Skriker's inability to comprehend electricity does not merely position her as epistemologically disadvantaged or entirely outside culture; rather, it highlights her resistance to a techno-patriarchal framework. Her uncanny nature does not reside in this ignorance alone, but in her capacity to expose the limitations of modern rationality, shifting the focus from technological mastery to an elemental, repressed knowledge that threatens the stable boundaries of the modern world. Then Skriker shifts dramatically from the logical mechanics of the television to the horrible realities of illness, pain and death, accusing Lily by stating, "you people are killing me, you know? I am sick, I am a sick woman." By actively resisting rational explanations, Skriker tells Lily to

"keep your secrets, I'll find out some other way, I don't need to know these things, there are plenty of other things to know," before concluding with a discourse grounded in profound emotional estrangement exposing the psychological rift and guilt trip: "just so long as you know I'm dying, I hope that that satisfies you to know I'm in pain" (p. 17).

By doing so, Skriker becomes an embodiment of the "unheimlich," or the uncanny. As Freud (1919/2003) explains, "the uncanny is that species of the frightening that goes back to what was once well known and had long been familiar" (p. 124). In this context, Skriker's discourse becomes inherently uncanny because it embodies a destabilising tension between the familiar and the unfamiliar. Her language operates at the threshold where self and other, mortality and immortality, and nature and culture collide. It is familiar because it stems from an ancestral, earthly origin, yet deeply unfamiliar to a modernised society because it rejects the structured rationality of the Symbolic Order, transforming her suppressed natural connection into a disruptive, haunting presence. The subsequent monologue she delivers regarding the world's current ecological crisis conflates individual rejection with global catastrophe. This observes when Skriker noticed: "the great quantity of meteorological phenomena in recent days? Earthquakes. Volcanoes. Drought. Apocalyptic meteorological phenomena. Nobody loves me and the sun's going to kill me. Spring will come around and nothing will be growing" (Churchill, 1994, p. 38).

The feast that she offers when she draws Josie into the realm of the Underworld is explained using terms that collapse the difference among death and nourishment as demonstrated once a Girl screams, "Don't eat. It's glamour. It's twigs. and beetles and a dead body. Don't eat or you'll never get back," before adding the final desperate plea "Don't drink. It's glamour. It's blood and dirty water... Don't eat, don't drink, or you'll never get back" (Churchill, 1994, p. 28). Covering up the decay, the glamour which operates as a form of linguistic sorcery, where the illusionary wordplay is deployed to manipulate reality and subvert traditional patriarchal discourse by utilising fragmented yet enchanting speech. Churchill sees this reversion to a pre-symbolic state not as a yearning for a "pure" past, but as a

necessary step in the face of a more poisonous natural state. Here the "feminist silence" of earlier chapters undergoes a metamorphosis into a "feminist scream"—the abandonment of civilised, understandable discourse in favor of an aggressive, violent force. As a "force of nature" that challenges the "anthropocentric arrogance" of the human subject, *the Skriker's* performance is profoundly disruptive to the established text. Elin Diamond (1997), asserts that Churchill's plays exemplify a "feminist postmodernism" that transcends mere 'enjoyment of superficiality; a repudiation of history,' instead serving as an amplification and critique of the theatrical knowledge inherited from the Enlightenment (p. 105). Diamond also argues that *the Skriker* utilises "temporal distortion of the fairy world," wherein time is non-linear. *Mad Forest* and *The Skriker* illustrate "Amnesia as a postmodern condition" and depict how "temporality itself becomes a gestus," (p. 100) which is physicalised in the jarring divergence between objective earthly time and the subjective, heavy duration of the underworld, where Lily insists "it happened in no time at all" only for Josie to counter, "Yes. But where I was it was years" (Churchill, 1994, p. 34).

Furthermore, *The Skriker's* defiance is directed primarily against the stability of the "I." She lacks a cohesive sense of self due to her fluid, multiple identities; shifting from a child, a fairy queen, an American tourist, to a pregnant woman. Her speech inherently mirrors this profound disorientation; employing a fragmented style of expression that actively resists categorization based on identity or syntax. This confrontation serves as a pivotal demonstration of the Skriker's manipulative shapeshifting, illustrating how she exploits maternal instincts as a psychological vulnerability to breach the boundaries of domestic safety. By presenting herself as a neglected child, the Skriker weaponises Lily's impending motherhood. The demand "I'm the baby" represents more than just a search for attention; it is a literal attempt to displace Lily's unborn child and usurp its place within the maternal dynamic. The horror of the scene is physicalised when the Skriker hits Lily's stomach and taunts her with "fat fat fat" and "nasty baby". This acts as a grotesque parody of sibling rivalry, where the ancient spirit views the fetus as a direct competitor for Lily's affection.

Lily's response illustrates a complete breakdown of agency under the weight of maternal guilt and coercion. Trapped in an impossible defensive compromise, Lily is forced to barter her own physical boundaries—submitting to the embrace with a soothing, pacifying "cuddle cuddle"—as a desperate strategy to protect her unborn child from immediate physical harm. By converting Lily's natural caregiving instincts into a trap, Churchill transforms the sanctuary of motherhood into a claustrophobic site of psychological captivity and hostage-taking." (Churchill, 1994, p. 25).

As a result, this regression is far from innocent, rather is weaponised to expose a state of radical dependency. This chilling dynamic is manifest when the Skriker assumes a child's guise to force Lily into a posture of maternal protection, demanding: "I've got no mum. Please let me be a sister. Say yes. Say yes. Please say yes.... I'll be its sister and you can be my mum" (Churchill, 1994, p. 24), and later physically refusing to let her go by screaming, "No no, hold me. Hold me.... Hold me tight.... Never never never / never" (p. 26). By flooding the stage with this 'broken' language, Churchill suggests that the only viable way to convey the truth of a fractured world is by breaking the vessel of language itself. The Skriker's fragmented monologues actively break apart semantic stability, transforming ordinary speech into a dark, associative slipstream where words dissolve and mutate, as she laments her existence as "a wail a whirl a world away" in a landscape populated by "bad mad sad adders and takers away" (p. 6). The play does not culminate in a return to patriarchal order. Instead, the persistent, haunting presence of Skriker's voice constantly reminds the audience that the pre-symbolic forces, which society forces them to repress, are perpetually waiting to reclaim their territory, a reclamation that is starkly realised in the play's final moments when the Skriker delivers a grotesque, third-person fairy tale of Lily's permanent displacement in time: "If she was back on earth where on earth where was the rockabye baby gone the treetop? Lost and gone for everybody was dead years and tears ago, it was another cemetery, a black whole hundred years" (p. 44). Kritzer (2008), argues that this linguistic damage serves as a kind of formal resistance. She notes that "the instability of language and narrative indicate that the difficulties in establishing identity,

communicating, and building a collective narrative or history that are presented in her plays have not annihilated the human capacity to love" (p. 79).

4.3. Kane's Linguistic Self-Collapse

Whereas Churchill disrupts the conventional structures of male discussion authority of language through interruption, layering, and the exposure of the rules governing speech, Kane follows a more radical path by representing the breakdown of language under the pressure of trauma. For Kane, the problem is not only that language may reproduce patriarchal power but also that conventional language is fundamentally inadequate to represent extreme suffering. Across Kane's earlier plays, violence is often physical and visible; in her later plays, violence increasingly affects the structure and function of language itself. The physical brutality in Kane's plays can be read through Walby's (1990) structure of "male violence" (p. 128), framing it not as random psychological trauma but as a systematic tool used by patriarchal structures to control and domesticate the female body. The fragmentation of the sentence reflects the fragmentation of the subject.

Kane's dramatic language is minimal and poetic, constituting poetics of violence. As Saunders (2002), suggests in Kane's last plays, *Crave* and *4.48 Psychosis*, the "character became more an expression of emotion than the outward manifestations of psychology and social inter-action" (p. 88). Kane acknowledges these changes in her dramatic form and language when she states that "number of words I was using was getting smaller and smaller, and my writing became stranger and stranger ... I wanted to find out how good a poet I could be while still writing something dramatic" (Armitstead, 1998, p. 12). Language is gradually deprived of its conventional communicative function and becomes a raw material of survival—a fragmentary resource to which the characters cling while confronting psychological and emotional collapse. This part will examine Kane's shift from the eruption of naturalistic speech in *Blasted* to the rhythmic, intertextual voices of *Crave* and the silence and clinical lists of *4.48 Psychosis*, for which the failure of language is the ultimate demonstration of the subject's inability to speak.

In Kane's first play, *Blasted*, language initially appears to function within a recognizable naturalistic structure before gradually collapsing under the pressure of violence and trauma. Dori Laub's (1992) account of trauma, helps to explain this gradual collapse of language in *Blasted*. He argues that "massive trauma precludes its registration; the observing and recording mechanisms of the human mind are temporarily knocked out, malfunction" (p. 57). In this context, the breakdown of coherent speech in Kane's play can be understood as a response to experiences that resist immediate comprehension and representation. As violence intensifies, language becomes increasingly incapable of organising experience into a stable or intelligible narrative. The fragmentation of speech therefore reflects not merely psychological disturbance but the difficulty of registering and communicating traumatic. This emphasis on bodily experience corresponds to Artaud's (1958) understanding of theatre as a concrete physical space. He argues that "the stage is a concrete physical place which asks to be filled, and to be given its own concrete language to speak" (p. 37). This physical language "is truly theatrical only to the degree that the thoughts it expresses are those which cannot be expressed and which, far more than words, would find their ideal expression in the concrete physical language of the stage" (p. 38). In *Cleansed*, bodily action therefore becomes a form of expression through which love and resistance persist when conventional language and social structures have failed.

Blasted opens in a mode of recognizable (albeit grim) naturalism: a hotel room in Leeds, inhabited by Ian, a racist, misogynistic tabloid journalist, and Cate, a younger, intellectually vulnerable woman. In the first half, language is used as a tool of dominance and reflects the discursive power dynamics that Kane criticises in *Blasted*. Bourdieu's (1991) account of linguistic capital, explains this domination because linguistic practices are shaped by unequal relations of authority. As he observes, words may function as "instruments of coercion and constraint" and as "tools of intimidation and abuse" (p. 2). Ian's language therefore does not merely express his misogyny; it actively reinforces his authority over Cate by attempting to define her position and limit her autonomy. Ian uses language as a weapon, employing short and declarative sentences to impose

his authority and define Cate's reality. He interrogates and intimidates her through an aggressive assertion of authority grounded in his material possessions, professional identity, and economic status. During their conversation, Cate mentions "Mum gives me money," to which Ian insults her by replying, "You're stupid. You're never going to get a job." In a response, Cate asserts, "I am. I am not" (Kane, 2001b, p. 8). Cate is already aware that her freedom might be limited, and she's trying to secure even a small amount of autonomy. Later, Ian admonishes her in an effort to purchase her compliance, demanding "Money. How much do you get paid." Cate answers, "Mum said it was a lot. I don't mind about that as long as I can go out sometimes." Then Ian retorts "Don't despise money. You got it easy" (p. 21). This exchange from Sarah Kane's *Blasted* dramatises a claustrophobic power struggle where Ian attempts to weaponise capitalist and patriarchal norms to enforce Cate's dependency and isolation, while Cate quietly resists by prioritizing personal freedom over financial status. By insulting Cate's intellect and predicting her economic failure, Ian performs a discursive violence designed to strip away her confidence and justify keeping her captive under his surveillance. His obsession with her income is an attempt to quantify her value and buy her compliance, a transactional mindset that stands in stark contrast to Cate's simple, non-materialistic desire for bodily and spatial autonomy represented by her wish to simply "go out sometimes." Ultimately, Cate's indifference to money serves as a crucial defensive strategy; by refusing to value the financial terms of Ian's world, she preserves a small, stubborn boundary of self-determination, revealing that her struggle is not for wealth, but against the suffocating captivity of patriarchal control.

In addition, Kane illustrates that this linguistic violence is not just the character trait of some person but a systemic phenomenon. The text highlights that Ian believes that words have fixed meanings. As a white male journalist, Ian assumes ownership of them. He utilises racist and homophobic slurs— calls the room service waiter a 'wog' and 'coon'— to categorise and control the world around him. As Sierz (2001), argues that a play is considered 'In-Yer-Face' play, when the

"language is usually filthy, characters talk about unmentionable subjects, take their clothes off, have sex, humiliate each another, experience unpleasant emotions, become suddenly violent... it forces audiences to react" (p. 5). Ian's aggressive language is a form of psychological defense mechanism, a callous facade of clichés and insults which he uses to deflect intimacy and to assert power. Billington (2009), argues that Kane "uses shock tactics to bring home to us the reality of global violence" (p. 357). This observation clarifies that the violence in *Blasted* is not merely intended to shock the audience; rather, it confronts the audience with forms of global violence that conventional dramatic representation may conceal, normalise, or keep at a distance.

Furthermore, Ian's dialogue and syntax serve to maintain control and keep out the chaos of the outside world, intended to keep out the chaos of the outside world, both physical and personified, his own mortality. Ian keeps trying to give Cate's seizures some meaning, viewing them more as moral failings that annoy him than as uncontrollable medical occurrences. When Cate trembles and passes out, he says in a very cold way, "That wasn't very fair. ... Don't pity me, ... 'cause I'm dying," (Kane, 1995, pp. 14-15). Later, when she starts to panic once more, he tells her to stop, acting as though the incident is intentional: "Don't start that again" (p. 31). In this harrowing sequence, Ian's reaction to Cate's somatic collapse exposes the insidious way patriarchal authority invalidates female trauma by reframing involuntary vulnerability as a hostile, deliberate performance. By coldly accusing the unconscious Cate of being "unfair" and later dismissing her panic with the authoritarian directive "Don't start that again," Ian strips her psychological suffering of its legitimacy, converting her genuine trauma response into a calculated attempt to manipulate or inconvenience him. Simultaneously, Ian weaponises his own terminal illness—demanding she "Don't pity me, ... 'cause I'm dying"—to perform a profound emotional inversion, centering himself as the ultimate victim to preemptively excuse his lack of empathy and shut down any expectation of care. Through this cruel emotional economy, Kane demonstrates how the abuser denies the victim's pain any autonomous reality, transforming a moment of profound somatic terror into a transactional battleground where the

patriarch maintains control by treating the victim's coping mechanisms as a personal affront. Pierre Bourdieu's concept of symbolic power (1991) helps explain why Ian's language functions as an instrument of domination rather than a neutral means of communication. As Bourdieu argues, "the weight of different agents depends on their symbolic capital, i.e. on the recognition, institutionalized or not, that they receive from a group" (p. 72). This citation is central to understanding the play's linguistic dynamic, as it demonstrates how Ian leverages his social position to accumulate this symbolic capital. From this perspective, it clarifies how Ian's social position as a white male journalist strengthens the authority of his speech and enables him to impose his meanings on Cate while marginalising her voice. Ian's racist, sexist, and homophobic discourse therefore operates as symbolic violence, reinforcing patriarchal authority by presenting domination as natural and unquestionable rather than merely expressing personal prejudice.

Kane conceptually destabilises this authoritative linguistic structure constructed by Ian, even before the bomb is brought down through Cate's disrupted speech patterns. While Ian's speech consists of complete, though cruel, sentences, Cate's speech is frequently broken by fear and by her condition, which manifests itself in stutters that function as cracks in the naturalistic surface: "Cate. St- Stop it. You're doing it deliberately. Ian. Doing what? Cate. C- Confusing me. Ian. No, I'm talking, you're just too thick to understand. Cate. I am not, I am not. Cate begins to tremble. Ian is laughing" (p. 8). These verbal stumbles are a preview of the complete breakdown of syntax that happens in the second half of the play; they are the tremors before the earthquake.

The sudden arrival of the Soldier and the detonation mortar bomb in Scene Three abruptly dismantle Ian's defensive composure, prefiguring the total collapse of syntax that unfolds across the second half of the play. The bomb not only brings the ceiling down, but it also brings the sentence structure down too. As the hotel room is blasted which opens to the horrors of a civil war, the play's linguistic mode shifts from naturalism to a fragmented, nightmarish expressionism. "In line with Slavoj Žižek's (2008) distinctive distinction between 'subjective violence'—the visible explosions of

altered bonds—and the underlying 'objective violence' of the social and patriarchal systems that made such an outburst inevitable, the Soldier's physical brutality represents subjective violence because it is immediate, visible, and spectacular. To clarify Žižek's framework, subjective violence is merely the palpable symptom of a deeper, systemic objective violence that is embedded within political and patriarchal discourses. Yet, Kane simultaneously exposes the objective violence already embodied within patriarchal discourse, nationalism, misogyny, and social hierarchy through Ian's language long before the bomb explodes. The theatrical catastrophe therefore reveals that spectacular violence is not an isolated event but the visible eruption of deeper structural forms of domination. Kane suggests that the must-edged and linear sentences of realism are a luxury of peace; in the face of total war, language must be reduced to rubble. Ian tries to use the categories of his profession to distance himself from the horror, insisting, 'I'm a domestic journalist, for Yorkshire. I don't cover foreign affairs.' The Soldier angrily replies, 'Foreign affairs, what you doing here? Ian, I do other stuff. Shootings and rapes and kids getting fiddled by queer priests and schoolteachers. Not soldiers screwing each other for a patch of land' (p. 48). This encounter highlights the stark inadequacy of Ian's language. His journalistic jargon and conventional media frameworks are completely unequipped to comprehend or contain the traumatic reality of war when it intrudes into the domestic space. This points to a complete breakdown in attempts at categorizing the Soldier's violence as 'foreign' and irrelevant to revealing the inadequacy of media language to comprehend the reality of war.

Additionally, this is an evident of the fracture of the Soldier's own psyche. It is a broken syntax because the experience it describes is unspeakable. As Ken Urban (2001), calls this shift as an 'Ethics of Catastrophe,' a mode of theatre in which realism collapses and the audience's critical distance is destroyed; violence is encountered as "hyperreal, reality magnified," and images such as "the soldier devouring Ian's eyes" overwhelm the spectator so that "first comes the emotion, the thinking, afterwards" (pp. 44–45). The fact that Ian is a "professional wordsmith" can't help him in

the end; his statement "I write . . . stories. That's all. Stories. This isn't a story anyone wants to hear" (Kane, 2001b, p. 48) is received with indifference; an example that in the face of visceral violence the social capital of civilised language is worthless. Here, Ian compares life to a narrative, but his own performative capacity has been utterly dismantled. Through the lens of J. L. Austin's (1962) Speech Act Theory, Ian's utterances lose their illocutionary force and fail to enact authority. The noticeable ellipsis within his dialogue indicates severe hesitation and fragmentation, proving that Ian's language is already broken down from within before he even attempts to construct a coherent narrative. To write stories means to give life form and purpose for Ian's existence, but he believes that his own narrative has been erased, undesired, or illegitimate. From Bourdieu's perspective (1991), the destruction of Ian's discourse signifies the weakening of language as a stable system of meaning. As Bourdieu explains, "the authority which utterances have is an authority bestowed upon language by factors external to it" (p. 9). Once the institutional and ideological conditions that legitimise his voice are shattered, language can no longer sustain its former power. Kane therefore demonstrates that patriarchal domination depends not only on physical force but also on symbolic systems that authorise particular forms of speech while silencing others.

By the conclusion of the play, following his blinding and sexual assault, Ian is systematically dehumanised, reduced to a state of utter abjection and primal dependency. He once uttered his own boast "Everything's got a scientific explanation" (Kane, 2001b, p. 56) is now stripped of all defences of reason, shivering in a hole in the floor. Cate returns to the ruined room, not with words, but with the essentials of survival such as bread, sausage, and gin. Her actions, like feeding the starving Ian and burying the dead baby, take the place of complex speech. The play ends in a radical stripping away of all rhetoric. Ian, who has been asserting his dominance throughout the first act with verbal abuse, is left with the most basic unit of human connection. Once Cate feeds him and pours gin into his mouth, Ian speaks his last line: "IAN: Thank you" (Kane, 2001b, p. 61). This simple phrase, "Thank you", is not polite conversation; this is a reconstruction of language from ground zero.

Having been stripped of all his racist, misogynistic and professional rhetoric, Ian is left with only gratitude. *Blasted*'s closing line can be interpreted as an indication of hope. As Graham Saunders (2002), notes that "Ian's last words to Cate indicate partial redemption for Ian, and reconciliation and forgiveness between the pair" (p. 49). Saunders also observes the "first tiny gesture of this process of spiritual rebirth through Ian's acknowledgement of 'thanks' to the woman he has systematically abused in the first half of the play" (p. 66). Saunders's reading is critically valid because this final scene marks the ultimate subversion of patriarchy on a theatrical level. By reducing Ian to a silent, grateful recipient of Cate's care, Kane strips him of his patriarchal speech, demonstrating that the linguistic and social structures of male dominance have been effectively dismantled.

Consequently, *Blasted* shows that meaningful language can only emerge after the symbolic structures sustaining patriarchal authority have collapsed. As Žižek (2008), exposes the relationship between objective violence, embedded within everyday ideological structures, and subjective violence, which erupts visibly on stage in which the play demonstrated this idea. The destruction of Ian's language therefore symbolises not merely personal suffering but the theatrical exposure of the hidden violence already governing social reality.

In contrast, If *Blasted* breaks down the physical setting of naturalism, Kane's *Crave* subverts the very vessel of dramatic character. In this play, there is no set, no plot whatsoever, and no identity. Instead, there are four voices - A, B, C and M - who speak into a void with their lines interwoven like a musical score, rather than a conversation. Kane goes beyond the "explosion" of language in her earlier work to a "dissolution" of the subject, in which the boundaries between self and other, lover and abuser, victim and perpetrator, are liquid and permeable.

The structural composition of *Crave* eschews traditional dramatic progression in a favor of symphonic arrangements, operating as a verbal fugue wherein concepts of love and trauma are continuously stated, inverted, and repeated. As David Greig (2001), describes in the introduction to Kane's *Complete Plays*, the text functions "rather like a string quartet," where meaning is created not

through linear progression, but by the "hypnotic play of different voices and themes". The characters do not talk to each other so much as they talk through each other, in a multivocal grief in which the woman's individual trauma is transformed into a soundscape. This proposes that the "Four voices become one. This effect is replicated in the stage image. overwhelming impression is that the four voices are, in fact, voices from within and without one individual life," occupying the stage as physically separate bodies but psychically fused (p. xiv). This fragmentation forces the audience to forget about the search for a stable speech, but rather connect with the text as a common consciousness or a shared psychological space where thoughts circulate without a clear origin.

For instance, the voices often finish each other's sentences or repeat phrases in a kind of canon, blurring the distinction between separate minds. When "C" (a young woman) and "M" (an older woman) speak, their voices tend to overlap or repeat each other, as if they were aspects of the same broken consciousness: "C: You're dead to me. M: My will said, Fuck this up and I'll haunt you for the rest / of your motherfucking life. B: He's following me" (Kane, 2001d, p. 155). In this dialogue, the pronoun "you" has no definite referent. Is C talking to a lover or to M or to herself? The ambiguity is deliberate. As a Belgian assistant professor, Laurens De Vos (2011), represents Sarah Kane's "linguistic turn" in *Crave* as a shift in her work in which explicit "violence was abandoned." The play is characterised by an "ambivalent relationship between A and C on the one hand, and B and M on the other." Structurally, the speech fragments in the play are described as being "shot into the air like electrons, sometimes colliding, sometimes missing each other" (pp. 23-24). The subject is no longer a person with a history but a linguistic event that takes place in the space between the people speaking.

Rather than conveying information, language in *Crave* functions as a vital mechanism for psychological preservation, enabling the speakers to resist the threat of total self-dissolution. Characters speak primarily to assert their subjective existence; often, they cite literature or the Bible as if to support these fragments or shards against their internal instability. An elderly man called "A"

famously gives a lengthy speech outlining his desires for his sweetheart, creating an avalanche of words meant to drown out the impending silence. He lists simple, everyday romantic gestures before declaring that he wants to “play hide-and-seek ... and tell you y'all, you're gorgeous.” This flood of domestic affection culminates in his desperate attempt to “somehow somehow communicate some of the ... never-ending love I have for you” (Kane, 2001d, pp. 169-170). This manic accumulation of ordinary, domestic desires functions as a defensive linguistic shield, where "A" weaponises a desperate torrent of speech to temporarily ward off the terrifying inevitability of isolation and existential silence.

This monologue represents a desperate attempt to utilise language to overcome profound psychological isolation. However, it is immediately undercut by "C," who chants under her breath, "this has to stop this / has to stop this has to stop" (p. 170). The juxtaposition of A's romantic excess and C's nihilistic repetition creates a dissonance which reflects the internal conflict of the suicidal mind - the war between the desire to connect, and the desire to cease existing. "A" himself admits the failure of his medium, lamenting, "I don't have music, Christ I wish I had music but all I have is words" (p. 172). This admission betrays the chief tragedy of the subject dissolved: they are imprisoned in a logocentric world in which words can describe pain but can never transcend it. Bourdieu (1991) helps clarify the significance of the collapse of language in *Crave*. As Bourdieu (1991) argues, "linguistic exchange is also an economic exchange which is established within a particular symbolic relation of power between a producer, endowed with a certain linguistic capital, and a consumer (or a market)" (p. 66). Thus, the fragmentation of language in *Crave* destabilises the social relations through which speech normally acquires value, authority, and legitimacy. As the characters lose confidence in language as a stable means of expression, the play also exposes the weakening of the symbolic authority that normally organises social relations. Kane's fragmented dialogue therefore reveals how patriarchal discourse loses its power when language itself becomes unstable, allowing alternative voices and silences to challenge established structures of authority.

Crave ultimately depicts a world where the concept of the 'subject' dissolves into pure voice. This fragmentation is exemplified by 'C,' who often confesses to being an "emotional plagiarist, stealing other people's pain, subsuming it into my own until" (p. 195). The tragedy of the play lies not in an external event, but in the condition of being trapped within a language that fails to bridge the gap between individuals. As "B" (a young man) succinctly observes: "M: I'm unable to know you. C: Don't want to know me. M: Utterly unknowable" (p. 167). Within this polyphonic void, the only thing that remains reality is the rhythm of the speech itself—a desperate, musical assertion of life against of an encroaching silence. The play culminates in a horrifying rise into the light, where the voices blend into a final, ambiguous release: "M: Glorious. Glorious. / B: And ever shall be / A: Happy / B: So happy / C: Happy and free" (p. 200). This ending implies that the only escape from the 'dissolved subject' is the complete obliteration of the self in death. Through the use of repetition and multiple voices, Kane constructs these closing lines as a mock-anthem, criticising how official rhetoric—wether religious, patriotic, political, or patriarchal—turns individuals into mere echo chambers of glory, happiness, or freedom, when such words no longer reflect lived reality.

Whereas in Kane's last and most radical work, *4.48 Psychosis*, Sarah Kane dramatises the ultimate linguistic struggle: the struggle between the rational discourse of medicine and the irrational poetic of the disintegrating self. If *Blasted* exploded naturalism and *Crave* dissolved character, *4.48 Psychosis* abandons the dramatic form entirely, offering up a text which is a kind of suicide note written on the verge of oblivion. The structure of the play is a visual and sonic metaphor for a mind at war with the medical institutions that seek to categorise it. On one side, there is the clinical language of diagnosis—cold, numerical, and objective—while on the other is the lyrical, metaphorical cry of the subject who does not want to be reduced to a set of symptoms. This conflict becomes explicit when the medical voice insists, "That's a metaphor, not reality. / It's a simile. / That's not reality" (Kane, 2001a, pp. 211–212). In contrast, the speaker rejects the authority of

medical treatment, declaring, "There's not a drug on earth can make life meaningful" (Kane, 2001a, p. 221).

Psychiatry generally means the branch of medicine focused on diagnosing, treating, and preventing mental, emotional, and behavioral disorders. But according to Michael Foucault's (1988), is not an unbiased or forward-thinking science, but rather a language of of madness that arises from exclusion. Psychiatry transforms conversation into monologue, interaction into categorization, and actual experience into stillness by establishing insanity as a mental disorder. According to Foucault, "a monologue of reason about madness" has been established in "archaeology of that silence" (p. xi), exposes the deeply entrenched patriarchal power relations that dictate who is sanctioned to speak and who is forcibly excluded from the discourse of sanity. Insanity while simultaneously preventing insanity from expressing itself. As Ryan Claycomb (2012), notes that there is a "perfect storm of cultural discipline against madness, against women, and against homosexuality" in Kane's works. Critics are quick to draw connections to her past, leading Claycomb to state that it is "no surprise, then, that we see *4.48 Psychosis*, in violent conversation with the language of psychiatry," and they aim to downplay the artistic value of her most recent play. The play is "under the critical erasure of a diagnosis of mental illness" (p. 95), and its relation to "the theatrical aesthetics of Artaud" is frequently disregarded by such aggressive structuring. The biomedical framework which aims to enforce a fixed, compartmentalised, and treatable identity upon the subject, is radically challenged throughout Kane's writing. In contrast to the medical system's efforts to bring order to disorder via labels and medications, the protagonist views this "sanity" as a spiritual downfall. Silence, rather than a character entering a room, initiates the play's surreal realization of collective consciousness: "a consolidated consciousness resides in a darkened banqueting hall... body no longer expellent as the cockroaches comprise a truth which no one ever utters" (Kane, 2001a, p. 205). This surreal image marks a radical departure from individual identity, depicting a state of dissolved bodily boundaries where the physical self becomes entirely passive, allowing the grotesque, invasive presence of

cockroaches to symbolise the emergence of a repressed, unspeakable truth within a shared, communal consciousness.

Kane constructs clinical entry that begins with the composed and official listing of medications such as 'Zopiclone, 7.5mg' before recording which the patient "attempted to leave hospital against medical advice" and is "restrained by three male nurses twice her size". Here, the institutional documentation functions through what J.L. Austin (1962), defines as performative speech acts; the medical language does not merely describe reality, but actively constructs the patient's identity as pathological. This exercise of institutional language aligns with Pierre Bourdieu's (1991) concept of symbolic power, where the medical staff uses codified discourse to legitimise their dominance and obscure the physical enforcement of being "restrained by three male nurses" (p. 223). In response, the patient disrupts this objective record by injecting an "angry subjective tone" and profanity ("Mood: Fucking angry"). This linguistic rebellion represents Julia Kristeva's (1980) semiotic chora—a pre-symbolic, emotional, and chaotic force that punctures the rigid, rational structures of the medical Symbolic Order, reclaiming agency through fragmented passion. This authoritative logging describes her as "threatening and uncooperative" over her "paranoid thoughts" about the medical staff, instead this sterile, objective control is ruptured when the entry ends, "Mood: Fucking angry. Affect: Very angry (p. 223). But the 'patient' subverts the objective record by putting her angry subjective tone into the medical documentation, recording an 'argument with junior doctor whom she accused of treachery after which she shaved her head and cut her arms with a razor blade.' The effect she has is "fucking angry" and her mood "very angry" and then the entry closes with the diagnostic note: "Thorazine, 100mg. Slept. calmer" (p. 224). By forcing her visceral rage and somatic rebellion directly into the sterile clinical record, the speaker subverts the paternalistic gaze of a patriarchal medical institution that attempts to codify, pathologise, and chemically pacify autonomous female emotion.

Moreover, the individual reclaims agency within the clinical space through the expression of rage and explicit profanity, actively resisting institutional submissive. This linguistic defiance

effectively reflects the system's brutality back onto itself, leading the female protagonist sarcastically remark, "Dr This writes it down and Dr That attempts a sympathetic murmur" (p. 219), criticizing the impersonality of the medical gaze. Patients feel processed instead than heard when physicians are reduced to interchangeable titles. To further illustrate how the "rational" ego crumbles, the play makes use of sight word arrangement. As Allan V. Horwitz (2002), points out that the core idea behind social constructionism is that mental diseases are not directly caused by biology but rather by social meaning systems. This view holds that the hallmarks of mental illness "reside in cultural rules that define what is normal or abnormal." Instead of referring to physical things, the terms "inappropriate," "dysfunctional," and "irrational" are "cultural definitions placed on behaviors that, in other times and places may seem normal or even functional" (p. 6). Kane undermines psychiatric categories by inverting the traditional sanity/madness divide. Kane undermines psychiatric categories by inverting the traditional sanity/madness divide, demonstrating that what clinical institutions diagnose as individual pathology is actually an acute, rational sensitivity to a fractured reality, concluding: "That is not pathological, that is logical" (Kane, 2001a, p. 228). Mental illness is portrayed as a result of societal and cultural standards that dictate what is considered normal, rather than a naturally occurring aberration, when the speaker states, "the chronic insanity of the sane, the wrenching begins" (Kane, 2001a, p. 229). By linguistically inverting the definitions of sanity and madness, the speaker dismantles the patriarchal monopoly on "rationality" that medical and social institutions use to pathologise and silence non-conforming female subjects.

The recurring and violent images of exposure defy any clinical explanation and are punctuated throughout the text. The phrase "Hatch opens / Stark light" is repeated again and again (p. 240), like a rhythmic jolt, simulating the shock of waking or the sudden intrusion of trauma. This going to be a symptom to be medicated, rather a structural reality in the character's existence. As Annette Pankratz (2010), states the theatrical space and fragmented narratives in Sarah Kane's plays "pull the rug out from under our feet. They confront us with disconcerting worlds full of suffering,

existential despair and violence" (p. 149). The protagonist also rejects the solipsism that is often attributed to mental illness as aahe conflates personal depression and historical atrocity. When she declares, "I gassed the Jews, I killed the Kurds, I bombed the Arabs" (p. 227), she took on a burden of guilt that is a metaphysical one as opposed to pathological. Medicine has no vocabulary for this "secular sin." As the protagonist asserts, "Sanity is found at the centre of convulsion, where madness is scorched from the bisected soul", meaning that the "healthy" world is based on denial, while the "sick" mind is crushed under the weight of absolute unbearable truth (p. 233). By utilising a language of macrocosmic violence and global atrocity to articulate her psychological torment, the speaker subverts the patriarchal medical gaze that seeks to trivialise, internalise, and pathologise female suffering as individual hysteria, instead using highly politicised discourse to elevate her pain into a radical, structural indictment of a violently compromised world.

In this aesthetic of fragmentation, silence is not an act of peace, but rather a loud, aggressive act in opposition to the need to speak clearly. The speaker says, " I have been dead for a long time. Back to my roots. I sing without hope on the boundary," which places language as an act of desperate solitude in which to survive on the edge of non-existence (p. 216). Kane reveals how language itself can lead to madness in *4.48 Psychosis*. Language emphasises the crucial importance of both theatrical and psychiatric meanings, grounded in textual cues rather than lived experience, to turn expression into proof and the subject into a readable symptom. Words are physical, heavy and inadequate, the speaker laments, "Just a word on a page and there is the drama," that the totality of their pain must be compressed into ink to be seen (p. 214). The speaker expresses this basic incompatibility between their experience and the logic of the world with the devastating paradox: "I have no desire for death. no suicide ever had. watch me vanish. watch me vanish" (p. 244). This line breaks the medical definition of suicidality, as it paints it not as a desire to die, but as an expression of alienation and exhaustion of a desire to live in a world that cannot be endured.

In summary, the tragedy of *4.48 Psychosis* lies in the fact that 'clinical language' controls the body, while 'poetic language' alone holds onto the truth of lived experience. The doctors can readily name the drugs, but they remain incapable of naming the pain. Consequently, the protagonist rejects the "smooth psychiatric voice of reason" precisely because it imposes the illusion that "there is an objective reality in which my body and mind are one" (p. 209). Instead, the subject embraces the 'poetics of psychosis'—a language that is fractured, screaming, and authentic. This disintegration of character assignments and syntax represents the ultimate encounter with 'symbolic violence,' which Žižek (2008) defines as the violence inherent in language itself—the imposition of a universe of meaning that can never fully capture the subject's traumatic reality. In the last moments, the text removes all medical terminology, leaving only the simple, devastating command: "please open the curtains" (p. 245). This closing line is not a line of clinical response to a doctor's inquiry, but a spiritual plea for illumination in a world that medicine has failed to clarify. Ultimately, this progression from linguistic collapse to absolute silence marks the final stage in Kane's critique of linguistic apparatus.

4.4. The Inadequacy of Language and the Turn to Silence

In realist theatre, language functions as an invisible vehicle to demonstrate a character's desires and motives. Conversely, postmodern theatre routinely conceives of language as a trap—serving both as a mechanism of social control and as an unstable attempt to give verbal form to fragmented subjectivity. It is necessary to root this crisis in the wider postmodern tradition of Harold Pinter and Suzan-Lori Parks. Pinter's theatre emerged from silence, not just the absence of speech, but something violent and active. As Andrew Wyllie (2009), notes that "Foucaultian power transactions fall precisely within the power play" that defines Pinter's work, where characters constantly maneuver for advantage (p. 53). In Pinter's plays such as *The Birthday Party* and *The Homecoming*, Wyllie identifies a specific moment where Pinter utilises a "pause to powerful effect," noting that this silence "heightens the suggestiveness" of the dialogue and hints at the "balance of

(probably abusive) power has shifted from father to son" (p. 75). This "Pinteresque" silence is a precursor to the postmodern condition found in Churchill and Kane: it is the silence of a world in which language has lost its ability to verify truth.

Whereas Harold Pinter strategically employs silence as a tool to conceal his characters' true motives and anxieties, Suzan-Lori Parks utilises repetition as a dramatic device to uncover and expose buried truths. Pinter (1999) explains this dynamic by noting that "when true silence falls we are still left with echo but are nearer nakedness," which leads to his observation that "one way of looking at speech is to say that it is a constant stratagem to cover nakedness" (p. 24). Thus, his theatrical speech, silences, and pauses function as a defensive shield, establishing a dramaturgy where language is deployed primarily to obscure and hide internal terrors. Conversely, in her concept of 'Repetition and Revision,' the American playwright and novelist, Suzan-Lori Parks (1995) in her essay *Possession*, notes that because "so much of African-American history has been unrecorded, dismembered, washed out," her task is to "locate the ancestral burial ground, dig for bones, find bones, hear the bones sing, write it down" (p. 4). Parks describes this as "re-membering" historical events and "staging" them (p. 5). This suggests that the only way to convey the traumatic history of the marginalised subject is to repeat the same phrases with slight alterations, imitating jazz form. This technique implies that identity is not set in stone but is fluid, a "doing" rather than a "being." As Deborah Geis (2008) argues that some characters are "trapped in a hell of repetition that is both metatheatrical and ritualistically or symbolically political" (p. 60). This repetitive structure is a form of "auditory haunting," by which the characters are stuck in a loop of history which they cannot express in linear time. This legacy directly influences the way Churchill and Kane deal with trauma: not as a story with a beginning, middle, and end, but as a broken record, skipping and repeating, forcing the audience to hear the "static" of the experience rather than an actual message. In both traditions, language is revealed as inadequate; whether in Pinter's terrifying pauses or Parks's rhythmic stuttering, the stage is a place where the failure to speak is the only honest thing to do.

However, the failure of language in Caryl Churchill's plays is often attributable to the fact that supernatural or authoritative powers intervene beyond the control of the characters. Eva Gil Cuder (2012), makes a compelling case regarding the anti-logocentric character of trauma and the difficulty in putting it into words in her analysis of Caryl Churchill's *A Mouthful of Birds*. Often depicting persons "beside themselves" in ways that lack logical explanation or coherent verbalization, the drama deals with possession states, violence, and ecstasy. In this context, the past is not reenacted via narrative but rather performed physically (with dance playing a significant role) or through illegible, non-linear language. Doreen's parting speech is full of sorrow, "I can find no rest," because her "head is filled with horrible images." She says that instead of seeing these horrors, "it's more that I feel them," and describes a physical pain that she feels like her "mouth is full of birds which I crunch between my teeth" until their "feathers, their blood and broken bones are choking me," while trying to keep up a normality by saying, "I carry on my work as a secretary" (Churchill & Lan, 1986, p. 71).

literal metaphors employed by Doreen mark a radical subversion that shifts from mere description to a profound somatic fragmentation. By locating her trauma directly within the shattered economy of the female body—where blood, feathers, and broken bones choke expression—Churchill effectively punctures the phallogocentric order. This feminist critique dismantles the rigid, rational, and male-centered language that historically silences marginalised subjects, proving that when the symbolic apparatus fails, the fragmented female body itself becomes the primary site of articulation and political resistance. This exemplifies "the impossibility to find the right words" while trying to describe the horrific truth. According to Leigh Gilmore (2023), "Language is asserted as that which can realise trauma even as it is theorised as that which fails in the face of trauma" (p. 7). In Act One Lena, the mother who murdered her baby, tells a fractured narrative of urgent desire for connection: 'I have to speak to you,' she says, before desperately disclosing, 'I fear Sally's drowned. Shock greets her confession, with "Roy keeps repeating the same gesture and words," and asking numbly, "What

did you say?" Lena is traumatised, trying to distance herself from the crime "it wasn't me, it was not me that did it." Reality shatters even further as a mysterious entity breaks up the room by yelling, "Teapot teapot teapot teapot. You're unborn." This results in Lena's last, terrifying hallucination when she claims, "I poured the tea pot and blood came out" (Churchill & Lan, 1986, p. 28).

Unfortunately, in the case of possession, the language becomes more primal and declarative. Instead of searching for a psychological rationale for the violent conduct, the language turns violent, fragmented by the extreme psychological strain of the possession. Just like in Act One's scene 10, "Possession," DIONYSOS makes an appearance to DOREN. Doreen is under the influence of Agave. I tore out its shoulder while holding it by the side with my foot. I broke open its ribs" (ibid). The spirit's meaningless chanting "Teapot teapot" represents the complete breakdown of meaning, as a commonplace object loses all utility and becomes a mantra of insanity. In a similar vein, Derek's repeated assertion to the audience, "He thought he wasn't a man without a job" (p. 51), centers on an identity crisis and implies how language ensnares the subject in a cycle of denial.

Consequently, repetition is the desperate grip of sanity in *A Mouthful of Birds*. In Act One, Scene Two (Telephone), Marcia, a switchboard operator, moves between the mechanical repetition of her job and the horrifying silence of her inner life. She is repeating, "Continental Lingerie, hold the line" to the outside world, while confiding to the audience, "In fact I am desperate" (p. 19). This bifurcation of language reveals the hollowness of "professional" speech, which serves as a mask to conceal the disintegration of the self. Similarly, Yvonne tries to regain control of her alcoholism by reciting the alphabet: "A - apple. B? Butterfly. C? C-dammit" (p. 54). Here, language is stripped down to its most basic building blocks, and even this elementary structure cannot contain the chaos of the addiction. In the "Hot Summer" scene, silence becomes a weapon in itself, a physical weapon. When Tony asks Doreen for salad cream, Doreen's "no" is described in a surreal stage direction: "DOREEN's 'No' is quiet, but it bounces TONY off the walls" (p. 66). This is a moment of

transformation in which the "quiet" of the oppressed woman becomes a kinetic force; Proving that silence, when put into possession, can be even more violent than screaming.

By contrast, in *Far Away* (2000), the failure of language is not a psychological one, but an ideological one. Churchill offers the audience a world of total war in which language has been drained of meaning to hide atrocities. Walby's (1990) distinction between private and public patriarchy is particularly illuminating here. The violence represented in *Far Away* is no longer rooted in domestic authority but has expanded into state institutions, labour systems, and mechanisms of state surveillance. Churchill's dystopian landscape therefore dramatises the movement of patriarchal domination from the household into public structures, confirming Walby's argument that patriarchy continually reorganises itself through institutional power. In the first scene, Harper uses comforting, domestic language to lie to Young Joan about the bloodshed she witnessed in the shed. She turns the violence into benevolence by saying to the child, "Your uncle is helping these people. He's helping them escape... Your uncle's going to take them all into the shed, and then they'll be all right" (Churchill, 2000, p. 12). This corruption of language changes care into complicity, which demonstrates how the "word" can be used to blind the innocent to the reality of terror. Harper orders Joan to follow a code of silence: "You've found out something secret... Something you must never talk about" (p. 11).

In the scene where they make hats, silence serves as a form of normalization. As Joan and Todd discuss the corruption in management, their dialogue is interrupted several times by the stage direction: "Silence. They go on working" (p. 21). This silence is not empty, but on the contrary, heavy with the weight of their complicity. They speak of "too much green" or the aesthetic of the hats, ignoring the fact that these objects are bound to adorn prisoners on their way to execution. The repetition of their labor ("They go on working") is paralleled by the repetition of the state's violence, which goes on unabated despite their mild protests. This "rhythm of complicity" shows how

language and silence work together to support totalitarian regimes; the language the author highlights (the hats) provides a strong focus, while the atrocity (the death) is absorbed by the silence.

This conversational shift happens when Todd changes the whole conversation in the last scene. He states "It's a safe haven, right?" he adds "relatively speaking, yes. Everyone thinks it's just a house." When Harper wonders if the cats had sided with the French, the reasoning totally falls apart, and Todd shows his own prejudice when he says, "I've never liked cats. They smell bad, they scratch, they only like you because you feed them, and they bite." Harper reduces the current situation to personal bias and dominance instead of addressing it, and in his paranoiac speech he claims outright that "mallards are not a good waterbird" (p. 32). This is false reassurance because the word "relatively" strips "safety" of any substance. Safety is eternally relative, never guaranteed. They support the Koreans and elephants, but they rape. But crocodiles are always in the wrong" (p. 47).

Additionally, by using the language of military strategy against nature itself, Churchill reveals words as instruments of propaganda that no longer relate a reality. In an effort to reveal war as a totalizing logic rather than a historical event, Churchill refuses to define the conflict in *Far Away*. A patriarchal system that promotes dominance, normalization of rape, and replacement of authoritarian categorization for moral inquiry is revealed by the arbitrary congruence of nations and animals with sexual violence. Righteousness, loyalty and safety begin to rely more on power than on morality. The logic of *Far Away*, in which safety, loyalty and righteousness are not ethical categories but the effects of power, could be better understood in Judith Butler's *Frames of War* by stating that frames determine intelligibility in advance of moral judgment is what Butler calls the redistribution rather than the elimination of violence. According to "cultural modes of regulating affective and ethical dispositions through a selective and differential framing of violence," sexual violence is talked about without ethical rupture, which reflects a patriarchal logic of normalizing dominance and making some lives ungrievable (Butler, 2009, p. 1). This is the patriarchal worldview that predominates, and it involves embracing power and dominance while simultaneously devaluing and despising some

human lives. The play concludes with Joan describing a world where even nature itself is suspect, mentioning that "of course birds saw me" and that she "killed two cats and a child under five, so it wasn't that different from a mission." Within this tumultuous existence, she declares, "The weather here is on the side of the Japanese, thunderstorms all through the mountains, the rats are bleeding out of their mouths and ears." She recounts the way these beings died, using common household items. "One was killed by coffee, one by pins," she observes, "they were killed by heroin, gasoline, chainsaws, hairspray, bleach, foxgloves." Joan also projects this global conflict through nature and physics as well, "the Bolivians are working with gravity" she says when keeps watching over "the Chilean soldiers upstream who had not seen me, and fourteen black and white cows drinking water downstream." This profound paranoia makes her totally unable to believe her surroundings and she acknowledges that she "didn't know which side of the river it was on; it might help me swim or drown me" (Churchill, 2000, pp. 37-38).

As a result of this dystopian scene, the subversion of patriarchy and power demands a rejection of the "official" language that has made the world unintelligible. Joan explicitly asks, "Who's going to mobilise darkness and silence?" (p. 38) and is aware that, in a world of total noise and total war, silence itself must be weaponised or reclaimed. The last image of the water lapping "round your ankles in any case" suggests that the indifference of nature is the last and only judge of man's folly.

However, For Sarah Kane, language's failure to be adequate prompts the theatre to poetics of the body, in which physical suffering is put to words that words fail to articulate. In *Phaedra's Love*, Kane rewrites the classical myth of Seneca to reveal the vacuity of royal and romantic discourse in a postmodern world filled with media and apathy. The depressed prince, Hippolytus, rejects language because he considers it "boring" and deceptive; he spends his time watching TV and eating hamburgers; he refuses to participate in the "high" language of tragedy. When Phaedra professes her love to him, he shoots down her rhetoric with savage monosyllables, and reveals the disparity

between her flowery declarations and his flesh-and-blood reality: "Phaedra. I'm in love with you. Hippolytus. Why? Phaedra. You thrill me. Silence Hippolytus. I've got gonorrhoea" (Kane, 2001e, pp. 80, 85). By puncturing Phaedra's elevated, idealised romantic rhetoric with a crude, clinical confession of venereal disease, Hippolytus refuses to perform the heroic masculine role demanded of him by classical theatrical conventions, thereby dismantling patriarchal myths of tragic nobility and romantic desire through a deliberate linguistic sabotage of high tragedy.

Hippolytus utilises the biological reality of his infected body to make Phaedra's romantic language mute. As Emma Cole (2020), who specialised in the intersection of classical reception (ancient Greek drama) and contemporary performance, notes that Sarah Kane's script of *Phaedra's Love* is a "postdramatic realization" of the classical myth using a "visual dramaturgy" that is "not subordinated to text" to point to contemporary world issues of "masculinity, sexuality, violence, and voyeurism" (p. 50). His rejection of language extends to his view of the world; he tells Phaedra, "Hippolytus. I hate people. Phaedra. They don't hate you. Hippolytus. No. They buy me bagatelles. Phaedra. I meant. Hippolytus. I know what you meant. You're right. Women find me much more attractive..." (p. 77). This is really only decreasing man's interaction with the exchange of meaningless objects. He further unravels religious discourse in his confrontation with the Priest, saying, "Hippolytus. Do you believe in God? Priest. (Looks at him.) Hippolytus. I know what I am. And always will be. But you. You sin knowing you'll confess. Then you're forgiven. And then you start all over again..." (p. 88). Here, Hippolytus reveals the hypocrisy of language that says human beings can be forgiven of their sins without our actions being altered. He is not satisfied with his own life by characterizing his own life as merely "Phaedra. You've got a life. Hippolytus. No. Filling up time. Waiting. Phaedra. For what? Hippolytus. Don't know. Something to happen. Phaedra. This is happening" (p. 80). As Leah Sidi (2023), argues Kane's writings represented as a "theatre of psychic life" in which a framework that is particularly helpful for understanding Hippolytus's spare dialogue in *Phaedra's Love*. Sidi argues that Kane's dramaturgy represents mental pain not through standard

psychological exposition, but through the literal breakdown of syntax and cohesive thought. This theoretical connection directly explains why the stuttering, repetitive statements of Hippolytus function as a linguistic embodiment of trauma. For instance, his fragmented utterance, "Waiting... Don't know," serves as a prime example of this reduction of language to its most primal, basic function, and a refusal to create meaning in a world he perceives as morally and ethically bankrupt. His speech is a symptom of his nihilistic disengagement from social life by withdrawal from linguistic and symbolic exchange, which is a form of verbal anorexia. Sidi defines "dramaturgy of psychic life" as a theatrical project that seeks to represent "acute psychic pain" experiences, including despair, disorientation and hallucinations, to the audience as "experiential" events rather than as abstract ideas (pp. 1-2). The patriarchal need for the male voice to speak, to make things, and to maintain the symbolic order is therefore disrupted by Hippolytus's refusal to create meaning.

As a result, the graphic violence in the climax of *Phaedra's Love* serves as a radical deconstruction of patriarchal sovereignty. By dismantling the physical embodiment of royal and male authority represented by the prince, Kane does not just seek "shock value"; rather, she exposes the vulnerability and ultimate collapse of the dominant political and symbolic order. This mirrors the tragic ending of Hippolytus, who is now physically dismantled by a violent crowd in Scene Eight: "Man 1. What shall we do? Man 2. Justice for all. Woman 1. He must die. Man 2. Has to die. Man 1 For our sake. Man 2. And hers." (Kane, 2001e, p. 99). Then a horrific scene where "Woman 2. cuts off his genitals" and they are "thrown onto the barbecue". When the woman cuts off Hippolytus's genitals, it is a literal and symbolic removal of his patriarchal "potency." Representing the ultimate embodiment of patriarchal authority, Theseus directly participates in this ritualistic violence by cutting Hippolytus from "groin to chest... thrown onto the barbecue" (p. 101). In a paradoxical attempt to restore institutional order or family honor, the father character systematically destroys his own lineage.

Nonetheless, violence is the consequence of a lack of speech in *Cleansed*. In this play Tinker's institution, a detention facility for lovers, gradually strips its prisoners of their ability to fall in love and communicate with each other. and the brutal depiction as the villain requests, "Tinker, I want to see your tongue." This authoritarian order leads to a disgusting act of physical abuse as the tongue of Carl is protruding. In *Cleansed*, the breakdown of language results in the replacement of speech with physical expression, where meaning is conveyed through the body rather than words. The text narrates how "with a huge pair of shears, Tinker snips Carl's tongue." The total loss of his voice is highlighted through the fact that "even though Carl's mouth is wide and full of blood, he makes no sound as he waves his arms." This is a scene full of pure suffering, which Tinker mocks by minimizing it: "play around. Down the hatch. Hello, Carl," just as he "swallows the ring" (Kane, 2001c, p. 118). As Clare Wallace (2006), states "dialogue is minimal" and the play is "structured according to visual criteria," during Kane's "spectacular" period. Because Carl is now dumb, he has no choice but to show his love via his "suffering body." Wallace also examines theme of love intertwined with madness in *Cleansed* by "translating the figurative into the literal and making the body the site of trauma" (p. 221). When the apparatus of authority chooses to stifle a person, the loss of speech is the first casualty, making the turn to silence a terrifying and real metaphor in *Cleansed*. Michael Billington (2009), describes *Cleansed* as a "dark, disturbing, extremely violent play about the precarious survival of love in a state institution designed to enforce social conformity" (p. 374). By transforming absolute silence into a site of somatic resistance against the state's violent efforts to regulate the body, Kane subverts the patriarchal and institutional monopoly on language, demonstrating that when speech is weaponised to enforce social conformity, the refusal to speak within the oppressor's vocabulary becomes a radical, non-compliant articulation of sovereign desire.

Furthermore, this description clarifies that the violence of the institution extends beyond physical punishment to the regulation of identity, love, and expression. As language becomes unreliable or is suppressed by institutional authority, the body increasingly becomes the medium

through which suffering, love, and resistance are communicated. Rod, who strives to remain forthright, admits that it is a fallacy for words to imply permanency. For instance, when Carl makes a promise, stating, "I'll always love you," Rod Laughs. When Carl continues "I'll never betray you." Rod laughs more. Finally, when Carl vows "I'll never lie to you." Rod powerfully and immediately responds with, "You just have," acknowledging that language inherently betrays the transience of the present moment (Kane, 2001c, p. 110). After some time has passed, Rod implores, "I love you now. I'm with you now. I'll do my best, moment to moment, not to betray you. Now. That's it. No more. Don't make me lie to you." In a response, Carl states reassuringly "I'm not lying to you... I'll never turn away from you" (p. 111), well aware that phrases like "forever" are deceitful in a world where the transient and painful reign. In scene three, there is a sterile room called the "White Room — the university sanatorium" (p. 112), where the syntax of the scar cuts into the flesh instead of words, highlighting the performative impotence of language. No vow can overcome this physical reality.

Grace's transformation also demonstrates the limits of linguistic categories. Rather than explaining the formal analysis of bodily transformation presented in Chapter Two, this section considers how her experience challenges the patriarchal language through which gender identity is defined. She appropriates Graham's clothing and, upon his death, assumes his physical identity—a process Tinker facilitates via a horrific gender-reassignment procedure. A profound inversion of the patriarchal symbolic order occurs in *Cleansed* through Grace's bodily alteration. Her transformation challenges patriarchal gender norms by subverting the conventional binaries of 'man' and 'woman.' Then Grace puts on "Robin's/Graham's clothes. After she's dressed, she stands for a few moments, totally still," recognizing that her identity transcends beyond linguistic boundaries. The breakdown of words into pure sound constitutes a hallmark of this transition; Grace begins "to shake. She breaks down and wails uncontrollably. She collapses," expressing her primordial anguish outside of, and prior to, the symbolic order (p. 113). "A sunflower bursts through the floor and grows above their heads. When it was fully grown, Graham pulls it towards him and smells it" (p. 120), providing the

concluding imagery of scene five. Where patriarchal language is non-existent or corrupted by violence, this nonverbal 'silent syntax' subverts established structures, allowing the body to function as a residual expressive medium when language fails.

Ultimately, both *Phaedra's Love* and *Cleansed* imply that in a world in which language has been corrupted by power (Tinker) or apathy (Hippolytus), there is no true expression left except the scream or the silence of the body. In *Phaedra's Love*, the mob tears Hippolytus apart, and a 'royal subject' is diminished to nothing but a 'piece of meat' – This is the insult levelled to Hippolytus at the end of the play. It takes a different twist on the common body paradigm that usually is consumed and objectified by women. Although in *Cleansed*, the characters are purified by the destruction of their physical forms. Kane's work assumes that the "truth" no one ever utters can be found only in the extreme states of physical experience, in which the "word" is finally and irrevocably silenced.

Chapter Five: Conclusion and Recommendations

Conclusion

The thesis demonstrates that Caryl Churchill and Sarah Kane employ a feminist contrasting methodology through which postmodern theatre becomes a site of Subversion Theatre. Rather than treating subversion as a theme added to the plays, the study demonstrates that it is produced through the formal, performative, and linguistic organisation of the theatrical work. In this sense, Subversion Theatre is the mode through which theatrical form, gender, identity, violence, language, power, and spectatorship are reorganised to challenge patriarchal assumptions and to create complete liberation at the level of theatrical and representational practice. Churchill foregrounds the social, historical, institutional, and ideological organisation of patriarchal power, whereas Kane exposes its bodily, emotional, and psychological consequences. Their different procedures therefore lead to a shared feminist objective: the complete disruption of patriarchal representation within the theatrical space.

Chapter Two demonstrates that theatrical form itself functions as a major instrument of subversion. Churchill employs non-linear time, historical juxtaposition, episodic structures, cross-casting, role-doubling, and other theatrical experiments to disrupt inherited narratives of gender and history. Kane develops a more radical formal disruption through fragmentation, spatial instability, bodily violence, and the breakdown of coherent dramatic action. Taken together, these findings show that formal experimentation is not merely decorative; it actively reorganises the production of meaning and releases the stage from conventional representational structures that can naturalise established relations of power. The chapter therefore establishes theatrical form as a central mechanism of Subversion Theatre.

Chapter Three demonstrates that identity in the selected plays is not presented as fixed, natural, or essential, but as a socially produced and continually performed process. Churchill's cross-gender performance, role transformation, and theatrical role-playing make the construction of gender visible and allow established identities to be critically re-performed. Kane, by contrast, stages

fragmented subjects and destabilised bodies in order to expose the bodily and psychological effects of coercive power. The chapter therefore establishes performance as both a site of patriarchal regulation and a means of agency, showing how the theatrical body can challenge the stability of identities imposed by patriarchal structures.

Chapter Four demonstrates that language is inseparable from authority, exclusion, and the production of social meaning. Churchill challenges linguistic hierarchy through interruption, repetition, overlapping dialogue, and polyphony, thereby disrupting the privileged position of a single authoritative voice. Kane pushes language further toward fragmentation and silence, weakening syntax, coherence, continuity, and ordinary communicative function when conventional discourse becomes inadequate to traumatic experience. The chapter therefore establishes linguistic disruption as a central dimension of Subversion Theatre: speech, fragmentation, silence, and embodied expression become means through which patriarchal authority is exposed and challenged.

The contrasting analysis of Churchill and Kane also clarifies the principal contribution of the thesis. Earlier scholarship has frequently treated Churchill through socialist-feminist and Brechtian approaches and Kane through in-yer-face theatre, violence, and the theatre of extremes. The present study places these different critical traditions in a sustained feminist contrast and demonstrates that their differences are complementary rather than contradictory. Churchill primarily reveals how patriarchal power is organised through historical, institutional, economic, and ideological structures, while Kane foregrounds the bodily, emotional, and psychological consequences of such power. This contrasting methodology therefore connects theatrical form, gender performativity, violence, language, performance, and spectatorship within a unified account of Subversion Theatre.

In conclusion, the thesis demonstrates that Subversion Theatre in the works of Caryl Churchill and Sarah Kane achieves its feminist purpose through the complete liberation of theatrical representation from fixed patriarchal assumptions about narrative, identity, gender, power, language, and the body. Fragmentation, temporal disruption, performative instability, bodily representation,

linguistic experimentation, and silence do not function as isolated techniques; together, they produce a theatre in which patriarchal representational conventions are fully disrupted and alternative forms of identity and expression become theatrically possible. Accordingly, the thesis does not treat liberation as an uncertain possibility or a partial outcome of subversion. It demonstrates that, within the theatrical and representational framework examined in the selected plays, these strategies secure complete liberation from the conventional forms through which patriarchal power is reproduced. This represents the core advancement of the thesis and the defining significance of Subversion Theatre.

Recommendations

Based on the results of the thesis, there are some directions and suggestions for future researches:

- **Eco-feminism and the Anthropocene:** A study of Churchill's later apocalyptic plays could explore the thematic link between patriarchal dominance and the exploitation of the natural world.
- **Post-Humanist Performance:** Future researches could investigate how the use of technology in contemporary stagings of Kane's work either reinforces or undermines the patriarchal "gaze."
- **Comparative Global Contexts:** A comparative analysis between these British playwrights and contemporary Iraqi dramatists could reveal how postmodern subversive techniques are adapted across different cultural manifestations of patriarchy.

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جمهورية العراق
وزارة التعليم العالي والبحث العلمي
جامعة واسط
كلية التربية للعلوم الإنسانية
قسم اللغة الإنجليزية وآدابها

تقويض النظام الأبوي: النوع الاجتماعي والسلطة والأداء المسرحي في مسرحيات ما بعد الحداثة

لـ تشريشل وكين

رسالة

مقدمة إلى مجلس كلية التربية للعلوم الإنسانية، جامعة واسط، وهي جزء من متطلبات نيل درجة الماجستير في الأدب الإنجليزي

تقدم بها:

مرتضى عبود جواد

بإشراف:

أ.د اخلاص محمد ناتي العبيدي

الخلاصة

تستكشف هذه الأطروحة ظاهرة المسرح التقويسي من خلال البحث في آليات المقاومة في الدراما البريطانية لما بعد الحداثة، مع التركيز على التفكير الموضوعاتي للسلطة الأبوية في أعمال كلٍّ من كاريل تشرشل وسارة كين. وتبحث الدراسة في الكيفية التي يرفض بها هذان الكاتبان المسرح التقليدي واتفاقيات الواقعية بصورة منهجية، موضحةً استمرار ديناميات السلطة الأبوية بالتزامن مع ظهور أشكال من المقاومة المسرحية. ومن خلال تحليل نسوي متباين للمسرحيات الرئيسية، التي تشمل *Cloud 9* و *Top Girls* و *A Mouthful of Birds* و *The Skriker* و *Far Away* لتشرشل، و *Blasted* و *Phaedra's Love* و *Cleansed* و *Crave* و *4.48 Psychosis*، لكن، تكشف الدراسة كيف يندمج التقويض في البنية الدرامية ذاتها. وعلى المستوى البنيوي، توضح الأطروحة هذا التقويض عبر فصول متتالية. يتناول الفصل الثاني مفهوم الشكل المسرحي بوصفه وسيلة للتقويض، مع الإشارة إلى استخدام تقنيات ما بعد الحداثة مثل الزمن غير الخطي، والبنى المجزأة، والمسرح ما وراء المسرحي. أما الفصل الثالث، فيوظف تحليلًا موضوعاتيًا لمقابلة الطريقة التي تؤدي بها الشخصيات الهويات الجندرية وتقاومها، مع دراسة تصوير كين للعنف الجسدي في مقابل تركيز تشرشل على العنف البنيوي. ويقدم الفصل الرابع قراءة تحليلية لكيفية تفكيك كلتا الكاتبتين للخطاب الأبوي من خلال اللغة والصمت. وأخيرًا، تستند الخاتمة إلى هذه النتائج لتخلص إلى أن كلاً من تشرشل وكين قد أسستا مسرحًا نسويًا تقويسيًا يظل ذا صلة بالجمهور المعاصر، بوصفه شاهدًا على قوة الأداء المسرحي أداةً للنقد والتقويض. وتحدد الدراسة، في نهاية المطاف، ثلاث استراتيجيات أساسية للتقويض: تفتيت الشكل المسرحي بوصفه رفضًا للسرديات الأبوية الشاملة؛ وزعزعة الهوية من خلال أدائية الجندر وتفكيك الذات؛ وتقويض اللغة، الذي يتطور من المقاطعات متعددة الأصوات لدى تشرشل إلى الانهيار الجذري في الصمت لدى كين. ومن خلال ذلك، تُظهر الدراسة أن كلاً من الكاتبتين قد أسستا مسرحًا نسويًا تقويسيًا، وأن التخلي عن الأعراف الشكلية يظل عنصرًا أساسيًا في إضعاف السلطة الأبوية.

الكلمات المفتاحية: المسرح التقويسي، الشكل الدرامي، السلطة الأبوية، الصمت، الهوية، القوة الرمزية، التجزئة، الأداء النوعي، التداخل النصي، الاضطراب اللغوي.