

تأثير التقاطع على الهوية الجنسية والصراع الاجتماعي في رواية "فتيات تشرشل
المتميزات"

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The Effect of Intersectionality on Gender Identity and Social Conflict in Caryl Churchill's Top Girls

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ملخص

تجادل هذه الورقة البحثية بأن مسرحية "فتيات القمة" لكارييل تشرشل تستخدم بنيتها الدرامية المبتكرة وشخصياتها المعقدة لإظهار كيف أن التقاطع - الطبيعة المترابطة للتصنيفات الاجتماعية كالجنس والطبقة والسياق التاريخي - يُشكل جوهر الهوية الأنثوية، وبالتالي، يحول دون تشكيل جبهة نسوية موحدة، مما يُؤد صراعاً اجتماعياً عميقاً. تتجاوز الدراسة التحليل القائم على الجنس فحسب، إذ تُفكك أسطورة "الأخوة" العالمية من خلال تسليط الضوء على التوترات التي تنشأ عندما تُبنى طموحات وامتيازات بعض النساء على اضطهاد الأخريات. يركز التحليل على حفل العشاء السريالي الشهير في الفصل الأول وتداعياته الموضوعية والمادية في الصراعات الواقعية في الفصلين الثاني والثالث، لا سيما في ديناميكيات مكان العمل في وكالة التوظيف "فتيات القمة" والمواجهة الحاسمة بين مارلين وشقيقتها جويس. في نهاية المطاف، تُعد المسرحية تدخلاً نقدياً، إذ تُشير إلى أن النسوية التي تفشل في مراعاة الطبقة والعوامل المتقاطعة



الأخرى ليست ناقصة فحسب، بل قد تكون متواطئة في إدامة أنظمة القمع التي تسعى إلى تفكيكها. تستكشف المسرحية كيف تحقق النساء النجاح في مجتمع أبوي ورأسمالي في آن واحد. تُسلط وكالة توظيف "توب جيرلز" الضوء على عالم الأعمال الصعب الذي يهيمن عليه الرجال. يُظهر الفرق بين حفلات العشاء الفاخرة ومنازل الطبقة العاملة حياة النساء المتنوعة والتحديات التي يواجهنها. تدور أحداثها في فترة تولي مارغريت تاتشر السلطة، وتدرس صراع الأفكار النسوية المختلفة في ثمانينيات القرن الماضي. ومن المواضيع الرئيسية الأخرى التضحيات التي قدمتها النساء، ليس فقط في المجتمعات الغربية الحديثة، بل أيضاً عبر مختلف الثقافات وعلى مر التاريخ. الهدف الرئيسي من هذا المشروع هو إظهار كيف يقترح تشرشل إعادة النظر في النسوية من خلال تضمين أصوات متنوعة للمساعدة في بناء مستقبل أكثر إشراقاً .

Abstract

This paper claims that Caryl Churchill's Top Girls uses its unique dramatic style and deep character development to show how intersectionality—the way different social categories like gender, class, and history connect—shapes women's identities. This connection makes it hard for women to unite as feminists, leading to significant social conflict. The study goes beyond just looking at gender issues and breaks down the idea of a universal "sisterhood" by pointing out the conflicts that arise when some women's success comes at the expense of others' suffering. It focuses on the famous surreal dinner party in Act I and how it affects the more realistic struggles in Acts II and III, especially at the "Top Girls" job agency and during the intense confrontation between Marlene and her sister, Joyce. In the end, the play acts as an important critique, suggesting that feminism that ignores class and other overlapping factors is not only lacking but can also support the very systems of oppression it aims to fight against. The play looks at how women find success in a society dominated by men and capitalism. The "Top Girls" employment agency represents a harsh business world led by men. The contrast between the elegant dinner party and the working-class home scenes highlights the different lives women experience and the obstacles they face. Set during Margaret Thatcher's rise to power, it explores various feminist ideas clashing in the 1980s. Another important theme is the sacrifices that women have made, not only in today's Western societies but also in various cultures and throughout history. The primary aim of this project is to demonstrate how Churchill encourages us to rethink feminism by incorporating different perspectives to help build a better future.



Introduction

Hussein Ali's texts for children's theater. Harf is an essential area for understanding how theatrical language creates values and influences the mind of the young audience. This is because the hero character in these stories serves more than simply a narrative component; they are the center around which the dramatic action (event, conflict, transformation) converges, and through which the educational and artistic message is transmitted. Furthermore, the child's age and psychological traits determine how much the hero influences their attitudes, emotions, and responses. The kid understands heroism as a model of conduct, choice, and the capacity to act. As a result, the development of the hero—linguistically, behaviorally, and semantically—has a direct influence on the theatrical text's educational, socialization, and value-instilling functions .

As a result, the research issue is framed by the question: How does Hussein Ali Harf create the picture of the hero in his books for children, and what artistic and semantic features contribute to its educational and aesthetic value? More specifically: To what degree do these writings convey the characteristics of heroism via motivation, conflict, transformation, action, dialogue, and imagination, and how do these components help to develop a value system (such as courage, responsibility, justice, community, and cooperation) that corresponds with the individual requirements of the child audience?

As a result, this study's thesis is based on the premise that Hussein Ali Harf's children's theater texts create heroism through a complex network of connected elements that do not simply glorify strength, but rather balance the behavioral dimension (action and reaction), the psychological dimension (motivation and transformation), the value dimension (moral stance), and the stylistic dimension (the hero's language, dialogue, and imagery).

This balance transforms the hero into a symbolic signifier, adding meaning and assuring the child's involvement with the story. The research also argues that the success of the hero archetype or problem in these tales is related to the degree to which the dramatic structure (kind of conflict, sequence of events, functions of supporting/antagonistic characters) fits with the educational goal, without sacrificing the need of theatrical pleasure based on imagination and illusion.



Research Objectives

This study seeks to attain a set of integrated goals that will help to reveal the intersectional elements in the drama Top Girls, as well as its influence on gender identity and social conflict. These goals are :

- 1.Examining the play's dramatic structure and determining how the dramatist uses novel theatrical approaches (such as interwoven language and non-linear structure) to support her critical thesis on the interaction of oppression patterns .
- 2.Examining and deconstructing the prevalent feminist discourse of the 1980s, showing how the play redefines empowerment and feminist success from a critical class viewpoint, calling into question the liberal individual ideal .
- 3.Use intersectionality theory as a primary theoretical framework to comprehend the complexity of individuals and their varied experiences, illustrating how gender, socioeconomic, and racial identities (explicit or implicit) combine to influence characters' fates and fuel dramatic conflict .
- 4.Connecting the text to its historical and social context, which includes the rise of Thatcher and neoliberalism in Britain, and examining how the play depicts and challenges the economic and societal changes that occurred during that time .
- 5.Exploring the dimensions of social conflict within feminism by examining relationships between women (such as Marlene and Joyce, and the agency employees) and demonstrating how this conflict is not isolated but an inevitable outcome of ignoring intersectional considerations .
- 6.Examining the play's significance to today, taking into account the rise of feminist capitalism ideas and the convergence of feminist discourse with market and consumer values.

Chapter One : Introduction and Background

1.1Introduction and Background

Top Girls (1982), by British playwright Caryl Churchill, is a watershed moment in modern feminist theater. It does not interpret women's success as a story of total moral or social victory, but rather highlights the problematic nature of this success when it is achieved within a patriarchal and capitalist economic/social system that favors integration into the



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logic of the market and competition above values such as solidarity, care, and social justice. The drama has cemented its place as a classic in modern theatre; it debuted at the Royal Court Theatre in 1982 and is still performed today as a masterwork that mixes simplicity and complexity .

The play's significance is also due to the fact that it was written during a time of considerable change in Britain, with the advent of policies and ideas known as Thatcherism. According to a reliable encyclopedic description, this collection of political and economic trends was linked with Margaret Thatcher's tenure (1979-1990) and was distinguished by a focus on privatization, decreasing the role of the government, widening the function of the market, reducing taxes, and encouraging individualism and self-determination .

Against this backdrop, the concepts of "success," "advancement," and "merit" are more than just moral language; they form a political and economic discourse that changes society's view of freedom, responsibility, and justice, shifting the emphasis from "relationships" to "achievement," from "care" to "profit," and from "the community" to "the individual " .

In this sense, Top Girls can be viewed as a theatrical work that addresses a fundamental question: Does women's empowerment in the workplace, according to neoliberal ideology, always result in larger liberation for women as a whole? Or could this empowerment lead to individual success that perpetuates the very inequalities it seeks to eradicate? The play places this issue at the center of its dramatic structure, not just through direct theorizing, but also by dismantling the myth of success via the intertwined lives of several female protagonists, and by exposing the human and social costs buried underneath the picture of the successful woman in the present system.

1.2 Research Problem and Study Question

The research begins with a basic observation: the play does not depict feminism as a single, uniform project, but instead contrasts two distinct models of feminist independence :

One concept defines liberation as individual achievement and integration into existing social and economic values (ambition, competition, self-promotion)

The other concept defines freedom via solidarity, care, class awareness, and opposition to market logic when it becomes the sole moral benchmark.

The research challenge is to figure out how this conflict is created inside the text, not just in terms of storyline, but also in terms of theatrical form, language techniques, character development, and voice distribution. The



distinction between the two methods is more than simply expressed via obvious concepts; it is also embodied in the dramatic style, with a sharp transition between the surreal and the realistic, a polyphonic structure, interwoven dialogue, and the creation of constant tension between celebration and exposé .

As a result, the study's central question is: How does the play Top Girls reflect the intricacy of feminist identity from an intersectional standpoint, and how does this complexity create a social conflict between the notions of individual success and class solidarity?

1.3 Research Hypothesis

This study proposes that Top Girls provides an understanding of intersectionality prior to the concept's widespread use in its fundamental theoretical form. It highlights that female characters' identities cannot be reduced to gender alone, but are influenced by the interaction of many variables, including social class, historical background, and a woman's place in the network of work and caregiving .

According to the study, these characteristics produce contradictory feminist views both within the story and in real life. As a result, the research claims that the play's major conflict stems not only from the women's battle with the patriarchal system, but also from their internal conflict within the market economy .

This is because a woman's ascension to the position of Top Girl frequently depends directly or indirectly on the marginalization of other women or the exploitation of their invisible work, notably domestic/reproductive labor, which remains outside the market's calculations yet is critical for its success.

1.4 Theoretical Framework: Intersectionality and a Critique of Liberal Feminism

Drawing on Kimberly Crenshaw's seminal work, "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color," this study employs an intersectional theoretical framework, which contends that approaches that divide race and gender (and sometimes class) fail to comprehend women's experiences because systems of injustice and privilege actually interact to create particular forms of marginalization. (Crenshaw, 1991)

Utilizing this framework, it becomes possible to interpret Marilyn's success within the play as a success conditioned by a market/class structure, rather than an absolute feminist victory. A character may gain privileges in one place while perpetuating inequality in another.





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The study also draws on Bell Hooks' critique of liberal feminism, which reduces liberation to women entering the labor market "as it is" and competing with men within the same rules, without dismantling the exploitative economic structures that reproduce inequality. This critique emphasizes that women's liberation cannot be genuine if it is based on replicating the values of the system that produces exploitation, or on neutralizing elements such as class, invisible labor, and caregiving. (hooks, 2000)

Thus, the play is read as a critique of a feminism that reduces women's role to "adapting to the system" rather than changing it, and it demonstrates how feminist discourse itself can be commodified and used to embellish a competitive structure rather than dismantle it. This perspective is supported by later critical readings that have linked the play to the rise of a "neoliberal feminism" that redefines empowerment as an individual skill for social climbing rather than a collective project of transformation. (Goddard, 2019)

1.5 Research Methodology and Methodological Distinctions

The study adopts a clearly defined, integrated methodology based on two complementary levels:

First: Textual Analysis

This focuses on deconstructing the structure of the play from within through:

The construction of scenes and the transition between realism and surrealism as a shift from "symbol" to "social substance".

Dialogue techniques (interruption, interruption, silence) as representations of conflicting positions and experiences.

Character development, motivations, and transformations: how Marilyn's identity is constructed in contrast to Joyce, and how Angie becomes a dramatic consequence of this tension.

The mechanisms of conflict production within the theatrical event, and how it is embodied in the intense moments of dialogue, not just in the narration.

The impact of the ending as an ideological and emotional summary that encapsulates the "cost of success".

This level is based on reading the play's form as a vehicle for political meaning; that is, technique is not a dramatic embellishment but a structure that produces meaning.

Second: Contextual-Historical Analysis

This is a "supportive" analysis that interprets the text in light of the Thatcherite context and neoliberal values (reducing the role of the state,

market centralization, individualism, self-determination), but without transforming the study into a comprehensive political history. Rather, it focuses on illuminating the significance of scenes and discourses within the play.

Procedural Summary: Textual analysis examines “how meaning is constructed within the text,” while contextual analysis clarifies “why this meaning produces its significance within its political and social time”.

1.6 Units of Analysis and Working Procedures

To avoid fragmentation, the units of analysis are defined by three major textual axes:

The surreal banquet scene: as a clash between multiple “feminist worlds” that do not easily converge, and as an exposure of a single, homogeneous feminist narrative.

The employment office scenes: as an embodiment of the commodification of “empowerment” within the market and a professional standard that imposes discipline, image, and competition.

The confrontation between Marilyn and Joyce + Angie: as the climax that reveals the price of individual success and the burden of caregiving and invisible labor, and exposes the contradiction between individual advancement and justice within the family/class.

Chapter Two: Textual Analysis and Cross-Cross-Conflict in the Play

2.1 The Surreal Banquet: A Collision of Cross-Cross-Worlds

The text opens with an unusual banquet scene, bringing together historical/legendary female figures at a single table. On the surface, the scene appears to be a celebration of women's achievements throughout the ages, but it quickly transforms into a space of confrontation, revealing that the "feminist experience" is not monolithic, and that speaking of "feminist sisterhood" as a stable reality may be a misleading oversimplification.

The power of this scene lies not only in its objective content but also in its dialogic technique: voices overlap and interruptions follow one another, genuine listening is absent, and the scene appears as a discordant soundscape that exposes the differences in positions and experiences. Theater criticism has addressed this technique as indicative of the difficulty of establishing a "unified feminist" discourse because historical and class-based experiences are not easily integrated into a single narrative. (Marohl, 1987)

From an intersectional perspective, the banquet produces a “map of difference” rather than a “celebration of unity.” The characters do not represent women as a monolithic entity, but rather as diverse positions of oppression and privilege. In this way, the dramatic form itself becomes a





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translation of the idea of intersectionality: the multiplicity of women's positions makes their experiences sometimes contradictory, and they cannot be reduced to a single factor such as "gender" alone. (Crenshaw, 1991)

These characters are also used as symbols of different forms of oppression and resistance, thus producing a "critical lineage" of feminist history: women who have penetrated the patriarchal system but have not necessarily broken it; women who have paid a heavy physical and psychological price; and women who have only been granted opportunities for "liberation" through social, class, and historical privileges.

The scene thus exposes the idea that success is a "neutral individual path," as it suggests that success is always linked to unequal conditions: class, power, history, and position within a system of symbolic and material discrimination.

2.2 Harsh Realism: The Employment Office as a "Feminist Marketplace"

After the celebration, the narrative suddenly changes to a very materialistic setting: a job agency and daily life that expose the reality of the economic system. This change is not just a new environment; it signifies a shift from a surreal metaphor to real-life situations where ideas are tested against market conditions .

In these situations, it becomes evident that the agency does not truly "empower women" in a freeing manner. Instead, it categorizes them based on market standards like attractiveness, discipline, ambition, and the skill to market themselves as desirable products. Here, "value" is determined by what can be sold within the organization .

This dramatic depiction connects with the backdrop of Thatcherism, which, as described in an encyclopedia, focuses on personal responsibility, self-sufficiency, growth of the market, and reduced government involvement. Therefore, achieving "success" turns into an individual goal rather than a collective effort .

In this context, feminism is reinterpreted into a professional framework: those who excel are those who comprehend and navigate the institution's logic, not those who challenge it. "Advancement for women" hinges on conforming to established norms: improving appearance, mastering persuasive speech, managing emotions, and turning oneself into a "project" .

Recent analyses have clearly linked the play to aspects of Thatcherism, examining how feminism is being reframed within a neoliberal narrative that values personal accomplishments over systemic changes .



Marilyn's character is seen as particularly complex: her early success looks like an achievement, but it ultimately showcases her complete embrace of neoliberal ideals. She does not oppose the system but rather accepts it, especially when she views emotions as barriers to progress. This perfectly aligns with Hooks' criticism of the concept of "liberation," which becomes simply about entering the market without questioning its exploitative nature; success then replicates the values of the system instead of rising above them .

From an intersectional viewpoint, this represents "inverted intersectionality": while Marilyn may face bias as a woman, she gains a new class privilege that elevates her above other women, thereby altering power dynamics within the feminist community itself.

2.3 The Great Confrontation: Marilyn/Joyce and the Conflict Between “Success” and “Solidarity”

The play culminates in the confrontation between Marilyn and her sister Joyce, a confrontation that cannot be reduced to a mere family quarrel; it embodies a clash between two political and social projects:

One project sees freedom in individualism and abandoning “losing” obligations (class/caregiving/family)

The other project sees freedom in solidarity, taking responsibility for relationships and caregiving, and resisting the market.

In this scene, Joyce emerges as the one who bears the burden of invisible reproductive labor: raising children, caring for them, toiling—things that are not measured by market standards but that make the success of others possible. Herein lies the essence of the intersectional thesis: the liberation of one woman within the system may occur in part because another woman bears the cost of this liberation in the form of unpaid or unrecognized labor. Crenshaw's framework allows us to name this inequality: it is not merely a personal contradiction but a structure where class, gender, and invisible labor intersect. (Crenshaw, 1991)

Hooks's critique also supports this interpretation, as the confrontation scene illustrates that a woman's integration into the system may entail adopting its values: emotional repression, competitiveness, and self-centeredness, ultimately leading to the dismantling of the bonds that caregiving work primarily produces. (Hooks, 2000)

Thus, the conflict between them becomes a difference in “way of life”: Marilyn represents freedom “from” obligations, while Joyce represents freedom “to” more just and humane relationships. This division makes the play a double critique: a critique of the system on the one hand, and a





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critique of a liberating discourse that may—unintentionally—become complicit in the system on the other.

2.4 Angie: A Scattered Outcome and a “Frightening” Fate

Angie stands as a clear example of how the “Top Girl” project has failed in its human aspect. She shows that just because one person makes progress, it doesn’t mean that everyone will have a safe future, and what seems like a win for one woman might lead to problems for others .

In the workplace, her existence acts as a subtle danger to the legend of Marilyn Monroe, as she signifies what Marilyn left behind: things like love, care, family, and obligations .

When she concludes with the term “frightening,” it’s not just a sign of her personal anxiety; rather, it captures the idea of a world devoid of support, favoring competition and emotional distance instead.

In this sense, Angie becomes a mirror reflecting the fact that the system is capable of producing professional “success,” but incapable of fostering healthy human connections if freedom is founded on a break with care and solidarity. This aligns with the interpretation that the politics of “individualism/the market” are invoked in the play as a historical and moral horizon of conflict. (Britannica, n.d.; Goddard, 2019)

The analysis reveals that the play not only criticizes patriarchal society but also demonstrates how the capitalist/neoliberal system can co-opt the discourse of liberation and transform it into a privilege for a specific class, thus turning feminism into a “market function” rather than a collective project. Furthermore, the intersectional approach proves that the real conflict is situated within a network of overlaps: gender/class/patronage/privilege, and that women’s unity is not spontaneous but rather conditioned by a structural awareness of these differences (Crenshaw, 1989; Fraser, 2013).

The analysis reveals that the play not only criticizes patriarchal society, but also exposes how the capitalist/neoliberal system can co-opt the discourse of liberation and transform it into a privilege for a specific class, thus turning feminism into a "market tool" rather than a collective project of liberation.

Conclusion

Additionally, the intersectional approach shows that the main issue is found in a web of connections: gender, class, influence, and advantage. It suggests that "women's unity" doesn't happen automatically; it needs a clear understanding of the inequalities created by the system. The research found that Top Girls doesn't just talk about “feminist topics” in a vague way, but instead gives a detailed critique of the idea of personal achievement within a patriarchal and neoliberal capitalist system, which



can take the language of freedom and change it into benefits for certain groups. The examination revealed that the struggle in the play is not only between women and a patriarchal society, but is also influenced by the feminist experience itself, where identities, social classes, and caregiving duties, along with unseen work, come together. This highlights that the intersectional idea is more than just a theoretical idea; it is a “material reality.”

Methodologically, the study clearly distinguished between textual and contextual analysis. Textual analysis was applied to the dramatic structure, dialogue techniques (especially interruption/interruption/silence), character development, and the trajectory of conflict and transformation, while contextual analysis was used to interpret the implications of this structure in light of Thatcherite values, individual meritocracy, and market logic, without resorting to a lengthy historical narrative

This distinction allowed for the demonstration of how theatrical form functions as a mechanism for producing political meaning: the surreal banquet, with its multiple voices and the absence of genuine listening, reveals the impossibility of a homogeneous “feminist sisterhood”; the employment office scenes illustrate the commodification of feminism and its market-driven standard; and the Marilyn/Joyce confrontation presents the culmination of the conflict between two discourses: one that defines liberation as integration into the market, and another that defines it as solidarity, care, and class resistance.

Accordingly, the study answers its central question by asserting that the play embodies feminist identity as a complex identity formed within a class and historical struggle, and that this complexity is what produces the central social tension between individual success and collective solidarity. The conclusion emphasizes that the play's value is renewed today in light of the spread of what might be termed “market feminism,” which markets liberation as a brand, while the structures that produce inequality remain intact. Therefore, the most painful message in *Top Girls* is that true liberation is not achieved simply by a few climbing to the top, but requires questioning the “mountain” itself: the system that forces everyone to climb under unfair conditions.

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