

The Ambition And Power In Caryl Churchill's Top Girls

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Abstract: *This writing aims to describe the ambition and power of feminist in Caryl Churchill's Top Girls. Churchill reveals how women are ambitious to achieve power by taking male roles in the middle of the patriarchal system. Churchill addresses feminism issues from the class distinction and sacrifices similar to the current problems. This writing traces the sacrifice of the main character, Marlene, in reaching her goal as a career woman. This writing used qualitative methods to explore the object and inventory techniques to collect the data.*

Keywords: *Feminism, Ambition, Power, Sacrifice, Top Girls.*

INTRODUCTION

Literature is a branch of art that is a verbal art dealing with human life, which includes their activities and experiences using words as its medium. Literary works have become increasingly important and provide thousands of meanings in them, especially in reviewing the life of social reality. As a social reflection of society that presents various problems that occur in life, literature is a place where discrimination against women was brought to society's attention, created, and mainstreamed. One of the sexist ideas in the literature is feminism. (Wahana, 2022).

Churchill's Top Girls drama is one of a big collection of literary works that use feminism as the central theme. According to Jackson and Jones (1998), feminist theory seeks to analyze the conditions that shape women's lives and explore cultural understandings of what it means to be a woman ... feminists refuse to accept the inequalities between women and men as naturally inevitable and insist that they should be questioned.

Feminism is a subject that runs through the Churchill's Top Girls drama, where women face inequality in social life. Churchill depicts the struggle of women to build a successful career in the middle of male domination and discrimination in the workplace. Social feminism

for women's unity to achieve their rights and freedom, but these terms started to split women based on race, culture, and class.

She also addressed class distinction and other issues, such as sacrifice and adopting masculine qualities that give women control over themselves when they have the lead. Social feminism is similar to Marxist feminism. Marxists agree that two main classes have emerged since the production organization has been dominated by capitalism. The two classes are the workers, who sell their labor power to produce goods worth more than they receive in wages, and the capitalists, who expropriate this surplus value and live by accumulating capital. (Ramazanoglu, 1986, p.97).

This type of feminism takes into consideration the differences between classes, as they do not have equal rights and freedoms and suffer different levels of oppression. Women in the working class, who are paid less than men, they are more oppressed and exploited than women from the middle class who reach a position of power to control others, they start to behave like men, oppressing women from the working class and from them, they are taking away their chance to improve, even with the fact that feminism had been at its highest prevalence point.

The characters in this drama viewed the image of feminism in Churchill's *Top Girls*. The whole characters in this drama are female, there is no male character in the play, even though the topic of the conversation always about male. Marlene, the main character in this drama, who has an ambition for her personal success. Mustafa (2011) said that ambitious persons seek to be the best at what they choose to do for attainment, power, or superiority.

In this play, Churchill illustrates the ambition of modern women who do not want to be limited with their roles and seek a deeper understanding of this problem in the broader social and political context. The women in this drama are depicted as successful women, overpowering and breaking glass ceilings in the patriarchal system. Their successful power is worth nothing, they use their power for a certain class society, which is that they do not use it to take care of the less capable society. Churchill's *Top Girls* tried to convey that we have to sacrifice something in our lives to achieve something.

THEORETICAL STUDY

Sociology is being used in this writing, which means that it is approaching literature that considers the social aspects. Literature and society always depend on each other. The reason of this interdependent relationship is that a reciprocal relationship between a literary phenomena and social structure, sociological study of literature proves very useful to understand the socio-economic situations, political issues, the world view and creativity of the writers, the system of the social and political organizations, the relations between certain

thoughts and cultural configurations in which they occur and determinants of a literary work. (Watkins, 2016). Sociology of literature is an approach to literature that is important to the analysis and interpretation of literature. This literary sociology approach emphasizes on several aspects, among others the influence of literary on the audience and the circumstances of the targeted audience of literary works; function of literary work to society, community characteristics, and the thoughts and ideas that exist in literary work (Apituley, 1991).

RESEARCH METHODS

This study used a qualitative research method to explore the power and ambition in Caryl Churchill's drama, "Top Girls". Gay (2006) said that "Qualitative research is the collection, analysis, and interpretation of comprehensive narrative and visual data in order to gain insights into a particular phenomenon.". The data collection used two sources of data, which are primary data and secondary data. Primary data is directly collected by reading the script of Caryl Churchill's Top Girls drama. Meanwhile, the secondary data is additional data required to assist the object of the writing, such as journals and books. This writing also used the inventory technique, which is a technique of data collecting by discovering and collecting data in accordance with characterization by identifying the way of the character was revealed. (Fajrin, 2008).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Churchill's play presents Marlene, the protagonist, as a high-achieving career woman who embodies ambition and power. However, this writing delves deeper into the complexities of Marlene's ambition, shedding light on the personal and social associated with the relentless pursuit of power. The reason for her ambition is because her young self saw her mother being abused by her father without the least desire to defend itself or respond to that sort of abuse. So, Marlene has taught herself how to escape her fate as a working-class woman like her mother.

JOYCE : You say Mother has a wasted life.

MARLENE : Yes I do. Married to that bastard.

JOYCE : What sort of life did he have? / Working in the fields like an animal.

MARLENE : I don't want to talk about him.

JOYCE : You started, I was talking about her. She had a rotten life because she had nothing. She went hungry.

MARLENE : She was hungry because he drank the money. / He used to hit her. ...

She didn't hit him. ... 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. (Caryl Churchill's Top Girls, p. 74-75).

According to the dialogue above, Marlene's father represents men in general, who are more dominant and have the power to control their family, and that situation does not suit her at all. She hates her abusive father and considers him to be an obstacle to her success. Despite her hatred, Marlene wants his power and control, so she left her house when she was thirteen, went to America to find out her own future.

Marlene's ambition is juxtaposed with the sacrifices she made in her personal life, particularly in her strained relationship with her family. She was leaving her family at the age of thirteen. Then, at the age of seventeen, she knew that she was pregnant, and she thought that her pregnancy would hinder her career. Despite the fact that it would obstruct her career, Marlene did not abort her pregnancy and still gave birth to a daughter, Angie, whom she later gave to her sister, Joyce. She gave her daughter to Joyce because she knew Joyce did not have any child since her three years of marriage.

JOYCE : I don't know how you could leave your own child.

MARLENE : You were quick enough to take her. (Caryl Churchill's Top Girls, p. 79).

MARLENE : You couldn't have one so you took mine... Like hell, / Married three years. (Caryl Churchill's Top Girls, p. 79).

Marlene's decision to prioritize her career over motherhood serves as a poignant commentary on the societal pressures women face in balancing personal and professional aspirations. The play challenges traditional notions of femininity and motherhood. Through the characters of Marlene, Churchill offers a nuanced portrayal of the sacrifices and obstacles women face as they navigate the chase of ambition and power.

Marlene's ambition gives her high achievement in her promotion as a managing director in an employment agency. She celebrates it by having a dinner party. She invites five women: Isabella, the world traveler; Lady Nijo, the thirteenth-century Japanese courtesan who turned to a nun and walked across Japan on foot; Dull Gret, the pheasant woman who is the subject of Brueghel's surrealist painting; Pope Joan, the legendary; and Patient Griselda, the obedient wife from Canterbury Tales by Geoffrey Chaucer.

They were ordinary women from different periods of time, and they were either historical figures or fictional characters from literature and art. Those women "symbolize the exploitation of women throughout the ages, providing the perspective for evaluating the

contemporary model of success in Marlene." (Innes, 1992, p. 465). Marlene thinks that those women are equal in her position. She treats them well and shows her good attitude. This can be seen in overlapped dialogue that Marlene listens to them carefully and rarely interrupts them.

MARLENE : But Griselda, come on, he took your baby.

GRISELDA : Walter found it hard to believe I loved him. He couldn't believe I would always obey him. He had to prove it.

MARLENE : I don't think Walter likes women.

GRISELDA : I'm just sure he loved me, Marlene, all the time. (Caryl Churchill's Top Girls, p. 22)

In contrast, Marlene revealed her true attitude toward working-class women. She shows her power as a career woman and behaves like a boss who does not care about her employers. She uses her power to intimidate and underestimate other women, and she pretends to control society. For example, Mrs. Kidd, Howard's wife, Marlene's male colleague, accuses her of taking over her husband's position. During the scene, which shows that Mrs. Kidd is saying that her husband, Howard, is more upset about working for a woman than he is about not getting the job promotion. She is worried that he will take out his frustration on her. "*Mrs. Kidd: ... What's it going to do to him working for a woman? I think if it was a man he'd get over it as something normal.*" (Caryl Churchill's *Top Girls*, p. 58).

Mrs. Kidd is seeking support and speaking woman to woman to urge Marlene to step down from the job. Marlene refused, and she thought that she had more power than Mrs. Kidd. This is because her husband, Howard, is a part of working-class employee who works in her employment agency and is being underestimated by Marlene, who has a higher position than him.

MARLENE : Naturally I'll be tactful and pleasant to him, you don't start pushing someone round. I'll consult him over any decisions affecting his department. But that's no different, Mrs Kidd, from any of my other colleagues.

MRS KIDD : I think it is different, because he's a man. (Caryl Churchill's Top Girls, p. 58).

Marlene's attitude is breaking the stereotype of women in the society that they should be at home taking care of housework and children. So Mrs. Kidd said that Marlene is unnatural for the society and even told Marlene to resign from her position "*Mrs. Kidd: Miserable and lonely. You are not natural.*" (Caryl Churchill's *Top Girls* p. 59)

Marlene's attitude toward working-class women also shows in the interview scene with Jeanine. Even though Marlene is a woman, she is well known as a woman who has no concern for other women's feelings. Marlene does not help her client, Jeanine, who comes seeking a job and expects to get a better job than the former one. Her reaction shows a patriarchal attitude when she knows that Jeanine is engaged. Jeanine was considering an advertising job, but Marlene underestimated her by offering jobs far from her expectations. "*Marlene :I have a marketing department here of a knitwear manufacturer.... Lampshades. / This would be my first choice for you.... And the knitwear second choice.*" (Caryl Churchill's *Top Girls* p. 31).

Marlene's preventing Jennie from getting a good career opportunity. Marlene thinks that women must decide between a family and children, and a successful career. They should not mention about marriage and children. "*Marlene: So you won't tell them you're getting married?... It would probably help.*" (Caryl Churchill's *Top Girls* p. 30). Marlene also does not want another woman to be like her as a career woman, she wants to stand on the top alone.

Marlene always thinks that family and children will obstruct her from achieving a successful career. During the scene of Marlene and Joyce in act two scene two, Marlene contradicts her own thoughts and says that she wants to take Angie back with her. Marlene admitted that women can be successful in both career and family simultaneously because she saw women who have two children work in society. "*Marlene: I could have taken her with me. ... I know a managing director who's got two children, she breast feed in the board room, she pays a hundred pounds a week on a domestic help alone and she can afford that because she's an extremely high-powered lady earning a great deal of money.*" (Caryl Churchill's *Top Girls* p. 79 & 80).

Marlene was rejected by Joyce, who told her to get another child if she wanted it. "*Joyce: Have a child now if you want one. You're not old.*" (Caryl Churchill's *Top Girls* p. 80). Back then, when she left her daughter and family, Marlene was still young and just thinking about her successful career and chose to leave her with Joyce. Now, she thinks that leaving her family and her daughter was a bad choice. Moreover, after achieving her successful career, she realized that she had sacrificed something more important than her career, which was her family.

CONCLUSIONS

Caryl Churchill's drama *Top Girls* presented the issues of successful feminist women overpowering and breaking glass ceilings in the patriarchal system. Nowadays, we still face those issues in society. This writing analyses the ambition and power of the main character in *Top Girls* drama. Having discussed the way the main character in this drama fulfills her

ambition to achieve a successful career and power. From this writing, we know that Marlene used to sacrifice her motherhood and sisterhood to get power and be the "Top Girl" position. However, Churchill tried to convey that we have to sacrifice something in our life to achieve something. However, women cannot sacrifice their motherhood and sisterhood just for that matter of choice.

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