

# Caryl Churchill's Dystopian Femininity

*Seven Plays from 1971 to 2016*

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# Foreword

First and foremost, thanks to Tina Skouen for guidance and help.

Thanks to Kevin McCarron for teaching me how to read literature like a literature student and look for the function in everything I read. Thanks to Lis Austin for teaching me that feminism comes in many forms, and that you cannot agree with all of them. Thanks to Keith Johnstone, for teaching me how to deal with fear and be average.

Effie, I miss you.

And last but not least, thanks to Ivo and Lego, for making (/keeping) me happy every single day.





# Abbreviations

This thesis examines seven plays by Caryl Churchill from 1971 to 2016, as indicated below. For more bibliographical details on the various editions, see the list of Works Cited at the end of the thesis.

- NEO* *Not Not Not Not Not Enough Oxygen* – First performed/broadcast as a radio play on BBC Radio 3 in 1971. The edition I am using is from *Churchill: Shorts*, published by Nick Hern Books in 1990.
- TG* *Top Girls* – First performed at the Royal Court Theatre in 1982. The edition I am using is the Methuen Drama student edition, first published in 1991, and reissued in 2012 with additional commentary by Churchill herself.
- TS* *The Skriker* – First performed at the Royal National Theatre in 1994. The edition I am using is from the collection *Caryl Churchill Plays: Three*, published by Nick Hern Books, first published in 1998.
- FA* *Far Away* – First performed at the Royal Court Theatre in 2000. The edition I am using is published by the Theatre Communications Group.
- AN* *A Number* – First performed at the Royal Court Theatre in 2002. The edition I am using is published by Nick Hern Books.
- LI* *Love and Information* – First performed at the Royal Court Theatre in 2012. The edition I am using is published by Nick Hern Books.
- EA* *Escaped Alone* – First performed at the Royal Court Theatre in 2016. The edition I am using is published by Nick Hern Books.

I will also use an abbreviation for one secondary source:

- CC* *Caryl Churchill* – Elaine Aston's book outlining Churchill's life and plays, as well as providing analysis and criticism.



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# Introduction

This thesis will be dedicated to exploring seven plays by Caryl Churchill, starting with *Not Not Not Not Enough Oxygen* from 1971, then moving on to *Top Girls* from 1982, *The Skriker* from 1994, *Far Away* from 2000, *A Number* from 2002, *Love and Information* from 2012, and *Escaped Alone* from 2016. In these seven plays I have chosen to analyse, I argue that Churchill presents dystopian worlds where women have to sacrifice their femininity in order to succeed/survive. I argue that the devastating worlds the characters inhabit is a direct reflection on how humans are removing themselves from nature and femininity, and that Churchill argues that in order to save the world from destruction, men and women have to embrace the feminine, and become closer to nature and further removed from technology. I argue that what Churchill is trying to show us with these plays is that women do not need to become more like men, but that both men and women have to unite to mend the gap that has been created between humans and nature throughout history. Before I move on to discuss this further, I want to explain why I have chosen to write about Caryl Churchill, and what about her writing first peaked my interest.

Caryl Churchill is one of Britain's leading playwrights of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, and is still writing for the stage today. She is one of the few female playwrights that have been able to enter the canon of British theatre: "The innovative approach of the "woman writer" to theatre-making, the ability to "constantly re-writ[e] herself", has secured Churchill a place not only in the canon of contemporary women's theatre which, regrettably, continues to occupy a marginal position in relation to dominant theatre and culture, but also in the "malestream" of the modern British stage." (CC 45) Her popularity as a playwright, and her ability to challenge theatre convention makes her the obvious choice to me when choosing a female British playwright to examine, and as she herself explains her ever-changing writing: "I don't set out to find a bizarre way of writing ... I enjoy finding the form that seems to best fit what I'm thinking about". (Gobert 1) Elaine Aston argues that the spectre of Churchill's ability to vary her form, structure, language and themes, makes her plays so different that it is hard to find a definite stance and perspective from Churchill, but that:

"[i]f there is an underlying "shape" to her theatre and an overall "message", then perhaps these lie in Churchill's shapeshifting skills and interests; her ability to make visible to the spectator actual and potential dangers of an unequal, *manmade*, damaged world, in which women are frequently figured as the most vulnerable and the most at risk." (CC 102)

The starting point for this thesis is a comment Churchill herself has made about what kind of world she would like to live in:

“[I know] quite well what kind of society I would like: decentralized, nonauthoritarian, communist, nonsexist – a society in which people can be in touch with their feelings, and in control of their lives. But it always sounds both ridiculous and unattainable when you put it into words”, (CC 3)

Seeing as she has been so vocal about what kind of society she would like to live in, her utopia, and at the same time she creates such devastating dystopias in her plays, I wanted to see if I could find the utopia she was looking for, or at least a suggestion from her as to how to reach this utopia.

Since Churchill’s own vision of an utopia is my starting point, her opinion is naturally important to me. However, I do not believe that she has the answer to how to reach her utopia, so I will not treat her as the one who sits with all the answers. This is especially true for theatre, where there is rarely any *one* person who can sit with the answers, seeing as each word goes through many stages of interpretation. There is the playwright who sends the text to director, who together with actors, scenographers, lighting designers etc, create meaning that is in turn presented on a stage to spectators of different backgrounds and ages who interpret differently. In Germany, *Top Girls* was staged in a way that made the female characters seem stressed and depressed on the stage, and in Greece the characters very unhappy. Because of this, the play meant totally different things when staged in those countries, and Churchill herself has stated in an interview that: “that’s the sort of moment when you think you’d rather write novels, because the productions can’t be changed.” (Fitzsimmons 62) Simply because of this there can not be any *one* person with all the answers. In this sense I will therefore treat her as a fellow critic who might be looking for the same thing as I am, but she is looking for it through creative writing, and I through academic writing. She is also cited in every major work about herself, and has therefore influenced her own body of criticism, which makes her opinion important. In this thesis I will therefore treat Churchill as another critic that definitely matters, but is a collaborator, like all the other members of a production or a body of criticism.

Many critics have focused on the feminist perspective of Caryl Churchill’s plays, in particular that of *Top Girls* and *The Skriker*. That is one of the reasons why I have chosen these two plays, because they are so important in her body of work, and show clear perspectives on how Churchill aims at pushing feminism forwards.

Rabillard has united *Not Not Not Not Not Enough Oxygen*, *Fen*, *Lives of the Great Poisoners*, *The Skriker*, *Far Away* and *We Turned on the Light* as Churchill's ecological dramas, which is an umbrella term for plays with environmental concerns. (Rabillard 88) The plays she terms "ecological dramas" could just as well have been termed dystopian, the difference is that I am looking into how Churchill is using the environment as a metaphor in the play, not how the ecological crises might be a reflection of environmental concerns in general. What I have done instead is combine dystopian with female, to unite both ecological and political issues with feminist issues in ecofeminism, because Churchill feels: "strongly about both [feminism and socialism], and wouldn't be interested in a form that didn't include the other." (Aston and Diamond 4) And even though socialism is not equal to ecological, I will argue that they are similar, that nature is always a reflection of both the ways in which humans let issues of the politics harm nature, and the emotional and familial states of the relationships in Churchill's plays.

*Not Not Not Not Not Enough Oxygen* is usually discussed alongside Churchill's other radio plays at the time, and therefore the focus is usually on mental problems, and not as a feminist or dystopian play. Since it is also one of her earliest plays, coming out before *Top Girls* and her success with that, it was not published until 1990 in the anthology *Shorts*, and because of this, Elaine Aston stated in 1997: "the 'beginnings' of her writing career have not, as yet, received all the critical interest due to them from women's studies." (CC 15) Even now, twenty years later, there has not been a lot of critical writing on *Not Not Not Not Not Enough Oxygen*, but I will use what there is, mainly basing my argument on Savilonis, and her article "'She Was Always Sad': Remembering Mother in Caryl Churchill's *Not Enough Oxygen* and *A Number*." *Top Girls* is the play with the most criticism, and is most often discussed in contrast to other plays. I have chosen to use *Top Girls* as the basis of my argument, because I also think it is such an important play when it comes to Churchill's feminist perspective, as well as it has a clear dystopia for women. *The Skriker* I have chosen also because it is such an important play in Churchill's body of work, and it also combines feminist issues with a clearly dystopian world. *Far Away* is another clear dystopia, and *A Number* is in addition to having a clear dystopia, a similar play to *Not Not Not Not Not Enough Oxygen*. Since the two plays have so many similarities, they are interesting to compare and contrast, and to see what has changed in Churchill's thinking in the 31 years in between writing those two plays. Both *Not Not Not Not Not Enough Oxygen* and *A Number* are also interesting because they present dystopias where the female is absent. *Love and Information* and *Escaped Alone* I have chosen because they are two of Churchill's most

recent plays, and there is not a lot of criticism about them yet, making it very exciting to be able to be one of the first. They both present clear dystopian worlds, however with perhaps a different perspective than the earlier plays, which I will discuss later. Now, before I move on to how I am structuring this thesis and an outline of my arguments, I want to introduce the criticism I am using.

Dystopia is the opposite of “utopia”, originating in Thomas More’s novel *Utopia* from 1516 about an imaginary island where the social, legal and political system is flawless, creating a perfect society, a “utopia”. (More) Dystopia translates from Greek to “not-good place”, as opposed to “utopia” that can be translated to “good place” or “no place”, highlighting the impossibility of a perfect world. Utopias used to only be written by men, and were about finding order and make perfect the existing political structures, but as Ferns argues in his book *Narrating Utopia: Ideology, Gender, Form in Utopian Literature*: “if the overwhelming majority of utopian dreams of order have been written by men, it is equally the case that the recent resurgence in utopian dreams of freedom has been predominantly the work of women” (Ferns 27). Churchill is searching for freedom as well, freedom from patriarchy, and in *Routledge Reader in Gender and Performance* from 1998, Lizbeth Goodman describes British feminist theatre, both in the past and in the present (of when it was written) as; “in essence counter-cultural, that is, they are enacted partially through a strategy of constructing alternative sets of values and definitions ... This alternative eventually *becomes* the mainstream as other “alternatives” emerge.” (Goodman and Gay 196) In other words, the search for a female utopia that Ferns describes, is very similar to what British feminist theatre have been trying to do, create a world with different rules and conditions, so that women can live as freely as men, or in Churchill’s case, a theatre that is different: “my whole concept of what plays might be is from plays written by men”. (Gobert 8) By creating worlds with different rules and conditions from the world we live in, Churchill is trying to find an utopia for her female characters, through exploring dystopias.

The Oxford English Dictionary defines dystopia as: “[a]n imaginary place or condition in which everything is as bad as possible”, and “not a world we should like to live in, but one we must be sure to avoid”. (OED) Defining dystopia as “not a world we should like to live in” suggests that it is a world we *could* live in, but that one must be critical to one’s surroundings to be able to avoid it. This can explain the differences in a female and male utopian perspective, where what qualifies as dystopian and utopian is different, and the simple fact that most of the world is a patriarchy is enough to qualify as a dystopia for most



women. By defining it as a place “we must be sure to avoid”, it is also implicated that it *can* be avoided. Another implication of this is that this suggests that the dystopias also present a solution to *how* to avoid this path. These points are important for this thesis, as I will think of the dystopias presented by Churchill as predictions of what can happen if society follows a certain path, and that even if she does not have the answers to how we directly can avoid the dystopias, her plays suggest an idea of how to move forwards.

The first (and most famous) works to be described as dystopian are *1984* by George Orwell, and *Brave New World* by Aldous Huxley, both presenting a future one would not like to live in, that is a direct consequence of decisions taken at the time the books were written. And this is another important point, as the term “dystopia” has been developed and applied to works of fiction, it is the political choices being made today, and the bad political tendencies we see in our society at the time of writing that is developed and portrayed in modern dystopias and lead to the disastrous future. (Abrams and Harpam 378)

A dystopia does not have to be set in the future, an example of this being Kazuo Ishiguro’s *Never Let Me Go* from 2005, a clearly dystopian world where children grow up only to have their organs donated and dying early. (Ishiguro) The book is set in an unspecified past, signalled by the use of old fashioned electronics such as cassettes and the lack of more contemporary electronics, however far they have come in medicine. Dystopian works of fiction are usually set in the future and about what can happen if certain political figures or ideologies emerge, but as shown with Ishiguro’s work, can also set in an unspecified time. What these have in common is that at a certain point in time, something “wrong” has happened, which has lead to a worst-possible scenario, a dystopia.

When using the term dystopia in this thesis I try to incorporate these different definitions, but the most important aspect of this dystopia is that it is not what Churchill wants, a: “decentralized, nonauthoritarian, communist, nonsexist – a society in which people can be in touch with their feelings, and in control of their lives.” However, by using her definition of the perfect world as the definition of an “utopia”, everything outside of this description becomes a dystopia, since we have yet to discover a sustainable utopia in the world. However, by recognizing/analysing the dystopian qualities Churchill presents, one can more easily get a grasp of the utopia she is searching for, and understand exactly what she is criticising.

Looking at a text with a dystopian perspective/lens, is looking for the negative connotations in a text, what the author is criticising about our society, and how the text/author suggests we should move forward to avoid this dystopia and enter utopia. Of course, there

might not be a solution to the problem, and an author can highlight the problems without having a solution, but by looking at what is suggested and in this thesis, how these suggestions have evolved through different texts and time periods, gain insight into a possible future, or lack thereof. This lens is helpful because it looks forward in the way that it not only accepts the text as it is, but forces the analysis to go beyond the text and its world, and look at the implications it can have on society. However, many will argue that the problem with this perspective is the forcing of a political perspective. This is definitely something one must take into account when choosing to do a reading this way, but when it comes to this thesis and Caryl Churchill, she has herself stated by: “acknowledging that “socialism and feminism aren’t synonymous”, Churchill was clear that she felt “strongly about both, and wouldn’t be interested in a form that didn’t include the other.” (Aston and Diamond 4) Knowing that the political aspect of feminism and socialism in her plays is as important to her as the plays themselves, enables me to use the dystopian lens.

To help my argument further, I will later in this thesis use ecofeminism and Julia Kristeva’s theory of “the abject”. They will both be presented and their uses explained in chapter two, so I will only introduce the terms briefly in the structure of the thesis, which I am moving on to now.

## **The Structure of the thesis**

This thesis is divided into three chapters, collectively providing a study of seven plays written by Caryl Churchill, from 1971 to 2016, with due regard for social, historical, theatrical and political factors. The focus is on the dystopian worlds that are created, and how the characters cope with the conditions of their worlds, and how they are reflections of how the world has become dystopian. In my analysis I focus mainly on the play texts as texts and not as performed, but will in some instances take into account how the plays have been received both by audiences and worked on by the creative team (playwright, director, choreographer, actors etc.) Each chapter will contain relevant background information of the time it was written and the circumstances around, and close analysis of the plays chosen for each time-period. Intertextually the focus is on the characters and the worlds they have to live in, what conditions and environments they are placed in, and how they are changed by it.

The first chapter starts with a brief introduction to the history of Churchill and the circumstances in which she was writing and working, since the contemporary feminist developments are especially important for understanding *Top Girls*. The first play analysed is

*Not Not Not Not Not Enough Oxygen*, a radio play first broadcast in 1971 that portrays a devastating dystopian world, where few women characters are present or mentioned at all. This play is used to establish Churchill's first clear ecological dystopia, and I argue that the state of the characters is directly reflected in the dystopian landscape of the play. Next I will move on to Churchill's perhaps most famous and wide-spread feminist play, *Top Girls* from 1982. Here I will establish the corporate dystopia of the career-woman that has to sacrifice her femininity to be successful, and by that making way for a different kind of dystopia, for the women that do not and cannot sacrifice their femininity and is therefore stuck at the bottom of the corporate ladder. I argue that the dinner-scene is a reflection of how women always have had to sacrifice their femininity in order to survive/succeed, and that Churchill is searching for a world where the figure of "Marlene" can live without having to sacrifice her femininity, and that this is the reason why she is searching for an utopia. With these two separate dystopias, one ecological and one patriarchal, I move on to chapter two, where they are united.

The second chapter discusses *The Skriker*, *Far Away*, and *A Number*, as well as ecofeminism and Julia Kristeva's theory of "the abject". The three plays all have clear dystopian worlds that are placed outside reality, much like *Not Not Not Not Not Enough Oxygen*, and in contrast to *Top Girls*. By taking place in myth, I argue that Churchill is trying to unravel how the structures of our society is so embedded with patriarchy that there is no getting away from it even in myth, and that both the political and social needs to be changed in order to enter an utopia. In *The Skriker* the two dystopias discussed in the previous chapter is united. I argue that "The Skriker" is the personification of nature's wrath and Lily and Josie the female characters that have to sacrifice their femininity in order to survive their world, both in myth and reality. By exploring the worlds these females are placed in, I argue that by using ecofeminism as a way of approaching and uniting the dystopian worlds with the dystopian females, we can move beyond the initial readings and see how it is actually possible to reach this utopia. This is important because it enables the analysis to go further, finding a possible utopia in the merging of nature, politics and bodies. By presenting and then applying ecofeminism I unravel the hierarchical structure of the play, and argue that Churchill is using *The Skriker* to criticise how when people are not bothered to do anything it will lead to the end of our world. I argue that this is further evident in *Far Away*, a dystopia with no clear problem and no clear anything, where alliances change each second. I argue that in *Far Away*, all the characters are united as one, but that even though they are equal, they are still far removed from femininity, and that this is what also excludes them from

nature, which in turn is the cause for the dystopian world. In my analysis of *A Number* I argue that the lack of female characters is the cause of the dystopia, that when even giving birth becomes artificial the end of the world is inevitable. I argue that the lack of female characters have separated humans from nature, which is what I argue Churchill is trying to say will lead to the end of the world. Having established these three different dystopias and the females that inhabit them in this chapter, I will move on to discuss Julia Kristeva and her theory of “the abject”. By using Kristeva’s theory of “the abject”, I will unite the female characters and explain how the femininity of the characters, or the maternal figure, can be seen as “the abject”, and how only if the abject is tolerated and accepted can it become that which is not dangerous, can the dystopian worlds cease to exist and become utopias.

In the third chapter I discuss two of Caryl Churchill’s most recent plays, starting with *Love and Information* from 2012, and ending with the most recent play, *Escaped Alone* from 2016. In *Love and Information*, I argue that the abject might have been tolerated, but there is still no utopia present. *Love and Information* presents a society where femininity has been discarded and technology has taken over, and the gap between “love” and “information” has widened. I argue that this development results in humans being far removed from nature, but that Churchill perhaps does not see any solutions anymore. In my analysis of *Escaped Alone*, I argue that the way in which the characters are sitting in a garden, letting the world go under around them is another confirmation of how Churchill has given up fighting against a society she does not relate to in the same sense anymore, and is instead trying to give the burden of finding her utopia to someone else.

I conclude this thesis by going through what have been learned by the different dystopias and their females. How in *Top Girls* it started with the dystopian female being masculine and independent – fitting into patriarchy but sacrificing her femininity along the way. How in chapter two the female disappears in myth, before she is reborn again in crisis and gives up in chapter three.

# 1. Establishing Dystopian Femininity

Caryl Churchill started her career as a playwright in 1958, with a student-production of *Downstairs*, which went to the NUS festival. After a few years of student- and amateur productions with *Having a Wonderful Time* (1960), *You've No Need To Be Frightened* (1961) and *Easy Death* (1962), she had her first professional production on BBC radio in 1963, with *The Ants*. When she became a mother and stayed at home with the kids from 1963 to 1969, she continued writing radio plays for the BBC with *Lovesick* (1967) and *Identical Twins* (1968), but also felt limited in her career for being a stay-at-home mother, and this kindled her interest in feminist-political themes. Churchill's own mother had stayed at home, but this did not prevent her from having a career. This fact inspired Churchill's own thinking about the subject: "I mostly remember my mother at home, but she did talk to me about working, and the fact that she used not to wear her wedding ring to work. I had the feeling, rather early on, that having a career was in no way incompatible with staying married and being very happy." (CC 4) Using her own life and experiences about working and having children, as well as noticing class differences, became the inspiration and starting point for plays such as *Top Girls* and *Fen*. In 1971, *Abortive* and *Not Not Not Not Not Enough Oxygen* were broadcast on radio, and Churchill's fascination for dystopia can be said to have begun here, which is also the starting point for this thesis.

In 1972, *Schreber's Nervous Illness* was broadcast, and along with *Lovesick* and *The Hospital at the End of the Revolution* (unstaged), Churchill examined madness and deviations from heteronormativity. By highlighting the issues of expecting people to fall under the category of "heteronormative", she questions what it means to be "heteronormative", and what happens to people not identifying with that category. Also in 1972 was *The Judge's Wife* broadcast, as her first drama on television, and this can be seen as the point in Churchill's career where her themes started becoming more obviously political. *The Judge's Wife* is about a judge being shot, and who the guilty party really is, questioning the roles of authority and morality in society, and how society deals with "deviations" from normativity.

In the 1970's, a lot of women's theatre groups were formed, and feminist politics was on the agenda. Churchill was active in the Liberation Movement, fighting against the patriarchy and for women's rights. In an abortion march she met the women from Monstrous Regiment, a feminist theatre group, and started working with them on *Vinegar Tom* (1976) and *Floorshow* (1977). Together with Monstrous Regiment, the 'women writer' in Churchill started forming a political stance, and as stated by Gillian Hanna from Monstrous Regiment:

“We were part of a huge wave of women and we were going to remake everything.” (CC 17) As Churchill worked on developing a “feminist aesthetic” (CC 26), she struggled with the traditional theatre conventions being from a male perspective, and wanted to work *around* the male tradition: “It was not just a question of concentrating on female rather than male characters, but of thinking through ‘the “maleness” of the traditional structure of plays, with conflict and building in a certain way to a climax’.” (CC 18) With *Vinegar Tom*, Churchill experimented with form and focused on a collective women’s experience instead of focusing on one (male) individual, as was expected in a classic realist form. (CC 18-19) The result of this were reviews on both ends of the scale, but most critics began “to grasp that Churchill’s experimentation with form did not represent a failed attempt to write in a canonical (male) tradition but was a way of exploring the possibilities of a feminist aesthetic.” (CC 26) This is important because it was here that the breaking down of conventions of a male theatre tradition started, and a “‘counter-cultural’, feminist style of performance” (CC 27) emerged.

Continuing to work with feminist themes she wrote two unpublished plays: *Perfect Happiness* (1973) and *Turkish Delight* (1974). They both raised class and gender issues, focusing on objectification of women, and exploring the differences between how men and women are treated. (CC 19) In 1972, *Owners*, Churchill’s first full-length stage play was performed at the Royal Court Theatre Upstairs. The play explores how it is not the biological difference between male and female that makes for the difference in treatment and status, but that one can take on “values of the masculine” (CC 20) to succeed. The character in *Owners* named Marion thereby proves to be very similar to Marlene in *Top Girls*, who will be discussed in this chapter. When writing *Owners*, Churchill went through a miscarriage, and Aston argues that it is the result of this personal experience that: “increasingly politicized Churchill in moving from thinking of herself as a ‘writer before I thought of myself as a woman’, to thinking of herself as a ‘feminist writer’.” (CC 24)

Churchill went on to work with Joint Stock company and Max Stafford-Clark. They first did *Light Shining in Buckinghamshire* (1976) together, and enjoyed it so much that they quickly decided to do another show. Joint Stock company was very male dominated, so Churchill decided to write her second play on sexual politics that included men, instead of creating a play solely about women’s politics: “There was nothing [in feminist theatre] that also involved straight men. Max, the director even said, at the beginning ‘Well shouldn’t you perhaps be doing this with a woman director?’ He didn’t see that it was his subject as well.” (CC 37) This was then the starting point for *Cloud Nine*, a play challenging conventions about gender and sexuality, which was first performed in 1979.

This is when we arrive in 1982, and the staging of *Top Girls*. Churchill had started thinking about this play already in the late 70s, along with ideas on *Cloud Nine* and *Fen* (Gobert 2), and when Margaret Thatcher became prime minister in 1979, Churchill felt the need to comment on an individualism she had encountered in the States, and that was on its way to Britain, she told Laurie Stone in an interview. (Stone 61) The play was hugely successful, and is to this day Churchill's most iconic feminist piece.

## **Feminist theatre in Britain**

Lizbeth Goodman explains in her article: "British feminist theatres: to each her own" that to begin discussing British feminist theatres, the most natural place to start is in 1968, when after years of having sexual and cultural politics discussed: "theatre censorship was abolished by Act of Parliament in 1968". (Goodman and Gay 195, Brockett and Hildy 511) This enabled a whole new world of theatre, where everything could happen.

Women had had little to no influence in the theatre at the time, and the few who were able to work at all were: "'exceptional', in so far as they were defying socio-cultural norms and taboos that defined public spaces as a properly "masculine" domain." (Harris 57) The women that did this was often deemed "unnatural" and "immoral", and the judgement they got from people around them made the prospect of being "exceptional" quite unappealing. New feminists wanted the theatres to be available for more women, and different strategies were employed to make that happen. Many feminist theatre groups emerged in the 1970s, but it took many years before women were working in the established institutions. An exception here was Churchill, who became the first woman writer in residence at the Royal Court theatre in 1974. (CC x) A discussion started around Caroline Gardiner's article on the statistics on "the employment of women in the English theatre" from 1987 (Gardiner 97), and it was not until the 90s that women started gaining important positions in theatre.

Since feminism in theatre was relatively new in the 70s-80s, emerging female playwrights found themselves needing to find a new aesthetic, that could move away from the mainstream male-dominated theatre, "malestream" for short (a term introduced by Sue Ellen Case, and used by feminist theatre scholars since.) Melrose argues that since early theatre was written by men, for men, and performed by men, the idea of woman was formed to whatever they found useful for politics, and the invisibility of women was masked in the female characters: "Theatre as institution *staged* that political erasure, which was masked by the name of Woman attributed to a male-originating character, and 'her' depiction obedient

to a politically useful scenario.” (Melrose 134) Brechtian theatre, with the use of alienation, helped shape feminist theatre: “After Brecht, realism in particular has been singled out as a form that not only reflects specific class interests but also embodies patriarchal and heterosexist values, to the extent that Sue-Ellen Case has urged contemporary practitioners to “cast realism aside – its consequences for women are deadly” (Harris 59) Thinking about realist (and what was then) contemporary theatre as patriarchal, feminists needed to find a new and different form, and Sue-Ellen Case argues that women’s lives in general are not as linear as a man’s, because it is interrupted by having children. This, of course, is quite a generalising statement that is very debateable, but the result of this way of thinking helped evolve feminist theatre. Case argues that this fragmented experience therefore does not work with linear story telling on stage, and feminist theatre therefore needed to present women’s lives in a different way. (Case 146) The fragmentation of dialogue, plotline, characters etc. soon became the standard for feminist theatre, with Churchill as one of the first to be acknowledged for using fragmentation as a way to experiment with form in theatre.

Feminist theatre became important not only for the women working in theatre, but for women in the audience. Since the female body had for so many years been used as a tool for men to shape the idea of women in “malestream” theatre, feminist theatre wanted to change that, and show real women real female experience on stage. This all as a tool to lead to change in politics and society: “Plays allow the reader and audience to visualize, to fill in blanks and gaps. They provide the frameworks for productions that can bring out many of the issues feminism finds pressing.” (Austin 136) Keir Elam and Sue-Ellen Case among others have developed feminist semiotics for the stage. Semiotics is about the production of meaning in a play, using the term signifier (or sign) as the product of what is being shown on stage, and signified for “the meaning or message which is derived from this signifier by the ‘collective consciousness’ of the audience.” (Case 144) What sets theatre apart from, for example, literature is that there are a lot of signifiers that together try to compose meaning. The actors, directors and their direction, scenography, text and performance all impose different signifiers to other signifiers. The sheer act of going to the theatre and paying for a ticket and watching theatre without interruption also affects the way the spectators read the signified. (Case 144) This means that there are a lot of factors that can affect the meaning of a play, and for feminist theatre the gender composition of the audience is crucial for the meaning. To be able to deconstruct the former “male-produced” female character, “feminist semiotics concentrates on the notion of ‘woman as sign’.” (Case 145) By focusing on the female as a social construct that differs with different cultural associations, feminist theatre



attempts to “distinguish biology from culture and experience from ideology”, (Case 145) and create a “new” and “better” female representation on stage.

Feminist theatre criticism has developed mainly through the influences of Sue-Ellen Case, Jill Dolan and Judith Butler. Austin argues that when analysing theatre, focusing on a narrow kind of feminism is counterproductive, and trying to compensate for a past where women have been invisible can often lead to plays that are overly political. (Austin 137) Feminism emerged as an important part of politics in the 70s and 80s, and because of this, different kinds of feminisms emerged. Sue-Ellen Case and Jill Dolan have tried to distinguish different types of feminism in theatre into three categories: liberal, cultural and materialist. ‘Liberal feminism’ is what is closest to liberal humanism, focusing on equality between the sexes, and has in theatre focused mostly on getting more women employed in the theatre in general. (Austin 138) ‘Cultural feminism’ is what Dolan and Case have chosen to name ‘radical’, which is the notion that women are not just equal to men but superior: “The radical feminist point of view frequently addressed the question of a ‘female aesthetic’ as well as the desirability of a separate female culture.” (Austin 137) This point of view is often criticised for being too essentialist, and what Dolan and Case prefers is the last option, materialist, which “deconstructs the mythic subject Woman to look at women as a class oppressed by material conditions and social relations.” (Dolan 1988) As previously stated, Churchill’s own point of view, and that of most of her fellow critics, constituted a materialist feminist view, and it is this point of view that has been most developed in theatre (e.g. with Case’s semiotics), and that continued into the 90s with the emergence of Butler’s *Gender Trouble*. It is therefore also the materialist feminist view that we witness in Churchill’s plays.

### **Approaching Not Not Not Not Not Enough Oxygen and Top Girls**

In this chapter I want to focus on establishing my idea of dystopia and femininity. In order to do this I need to establish what the dystopia is, and who inhabits these dystopias. I have therefore chosen to focus on two plays to each establish one of those things. First *Not Not Not Not Not Enough Oxygen*, where we will find a clear dystopian world lacking of both oxygen and females. I argue that what is happening in the world, the dystopian landscape, is reflected in the plot with the family, and that Churchill is criticising a world of inaction that is lacking emotions and unity.

In *Top Girls*, we will encounter Marlene, which I will argue is the figure of a female who has to repress her femininity, and also a sign of the collective group of females Churchill

is looking for a world for. By exploring Marlene's position in the world of *Top Girls*, I will argue that all the characters at the dinner-party are expressions of "Marlene" placed in different times and worlds with different conditions. Many critics have focused on the negative aspects of *Top Girls*, how one can not be female and feminine and still successful. By focusing on the character of Marlene as a singular experience, and not as a sign of a larger group of real women, critics have failed to recognize how Churchill suggests how the world could and should be changed to accommodate the Marlene's of this world. By exploring and analysing the difference and similarities between Marlene and all the other characters, I aim to find the common ground which what Churchill wants to take with her on the search for a sustainable utopia for the female. And this is where we start, in the deep clutches of Thatcher, in the dystopian corporate world of Marlene and her "Top Girls".

## ***Not Not Not Not Not Enough Oxygen (1971)***

*Not Not Not Not Not Enough Oxygen* was first broadcast in 1971, and the play is set in post-apocalyptic 2010. London has lost its parks, and what is left of the oxygen is sold on spray cans. Mick and Vivian are confined in Mick's apartment, waiting for Mick's son Claude to come visit. Claude's mother is absent, and her story as a 'sad woman' is slowly revealed throughout the play. I argue that the dystopian world is a reflection of how the mother in this story has been treated, making nature a reflection of female experience, so when women are not treated properly with respect, nature acts out.

This play has received a lot of attention in later years as it is set in a dystopian 2010, which is not such a distant future as it was when first written in 1971. The environmental concerns debated in this play are especially relevant now, and as Jackie Kay puts it in conversation with Churchill: "you seem to be able to predict popular concerns before they become popular." (CC 24) Even Churchill herself admitted already in 1989: "It's more obviously relevant now than it was then" (*Shorts* 1) Although this foresight of Churchill's is not very relevant to my analysis, it is interesting that these concerns were so evident in Churchill's plays already at this time, and will be increasingly so in the following years and the next sections of this thesis. In this analysis I will be closely engaging with Margaret Savilonis and her article "'She Was Always Sad': Remembering Mother in Caryl Churchill's *Not Enough Oxygen* and *A Number*", and combine her criticism and analysis of the complex family-relations in *Not Not Not Not Not Enough Oxygen* with my own reading of the dystopian landscape and its femininity.

As emphasized in the introduction – Churchill is interested in feminism and socialism, and by "acknowledging that "socialism and feminism aren't synonymous", Churchill was clear that she felt "strongly about both, and wouldn't be interested in a form that didn't include the other." (Aston and Diamond 4) What I want to argue is that feminism and socialism, or politics, are more than linked in this play, they are dependent on each other, and the dystopian landscape is a direct reflection of the family-relations, which in turn hints at what kind of society Churchill would like, a society that is less focused on the individual and more on cooperation, and a collective consciousness.

The play is a domestic drama, but without a mother: "the absence of the maternal figure is difficult to ignore" (Savilonis 234) The first thing one notices is the lack, the lack of a mother on the stage, and the lack of oxygen in "the Londons" where the play is set. Without

ever having a single line of dialogue, the mother is still arguably one of the main characters, and she is alluded to again and again.

Melrose argues in her article “what do women want (in theatre)” that the family in drama is: “a microcosm of the state itself”, and that it has been used over and over again as a metaphor by feminists to criticise politics. (Melrose, 133) Savilonis argues that Churchill uses the family structure as a metaphor for the social and political problems, by: “drawing attention to external forces such as environmental crises, government regulations, and scientific interventions into the processes of reproduction, all of which significantly affect familial relationships.” (Savilonis 234) However, what Savilonis says here is simply that the environment affects familial relationships. What I want to argue is that it not only affects familial relationship, but that in this play, mother and nature is the same thing, and that the lack of a mother results in the lack of oxygen (or a functional environmental politics.) By analysing the lack of a mother in the family, and comparing it to the dystopian landscape and lack of oxygen, I want to argue that they are both expressions of a lack created by each other and sustained because of each other, and by affecting one, the other is affected as well. I am arguing that the world is dystopian because of failing feminist politics in the real world, signified by the lack of females in the play.

Information about the mother is only revealed through dialogue between men, including the son Claude, and ex-husband Mick, which leaves every detail about her as subjective observations through a male gaze, meaning the reliability of the portrayal is questionable. The fact that she is not physically present, but only portrayed by men, and nameless, makes her both as visible and invisible as the hostile environment we hear talk of. And just like the environment leaves visible traces, with Claude collapsing from the lack of oxygen outside, the mother has also left her traces, with the existence of Claude. (*NEO* 45) Claude, who makes his living by using oxygen, singing, is therefore also a product of both the mother and the environment, the mother as the creator and the environment as the enabler, and they can both be seen to lead to his death. The injustice of the world is what makes Claude want to kill himself, and with the lack of both oxygen and a mother it should not be so difficult.

The hostile environment of “the Londons” has scared or eliminated the birds somehow, and just like Mick and Vivian might have gotten a glimpse of a bird, the audience might have gotten a glimpse of the mother by reading the play. (*NEO* 44) This is also a striking similarity between the mother and the environment, the sheer absence of the mother is the same as the absence of the birds, something that used to be there, and was so common

that one would not even look twice. And this is perhaps just what Churchill is trying to say, that one cannot know just how different a world without women would be, because it is expected that they just are there. And just like the air, or lack thereof, is what has made the birds flee, there is something in society that is just as toxic for women, and is forcing them to flee as well.

Savilonis argues that: “[b]ecause the mothers in these plays exist only as disembodied characters (never there but also never *not* there) who feature in the stories of their husbands and sons, their physical absence simultaneously exposes and enacts the process of dehumanization, as “mother” is constructed solely through memory and myth.” (Savilonis 234) Drawing on Savilonis logic, the mother is dehumanized as she is constructed by others, the parallel can be brought further to how the society has evolved when it comes to child-policy. When killing a child is an act that enables Claude’s brother and wife to have “cleared their conscience” (*NEO* 49), one could argue that the society has been dehumanized, and the child becomes a nameless anonymous like the mother.

Mick is not portrayed as a sympathetic character, seeing as he has a general negative attitude and is enabling Vivian to cheat on her husband without letting her move in with him (*NEO* 40) - so when Claude arrives, our sympathies are already with him. This is important because it means that the spectator/reader is also more likely to feel sympathy with the absent mother, even though it is quickly revealed that she is a “fanatic”. (*NEO* 47) Mick seems anxious for Claude to come, but the first information he gives is that he wants Claude’s money: “Claude will see his poor old dad knows how to live. He can give me all the money he likes and be sure I’ll make good use of it.” (*NEO* 40) Even Mick’s affection for Claude is linked to what he can give him, when he tells Vivian how he kisses the screen sometimes when he sees his son on TV, he seemingly compares himself to Claude’s fan girls, girls who want him for his voice and looks, much like Mick wants him for his money. (*NEO* 41)

Just from these first few pages of the play it becomes clear that Mick is only interested in doing things that will affect him positively, in his search for money, and is not concerned with morals or empathy. He is dating Vivian, even though she has a husband, but will not let her move in, giving her no choice but to stay with the husband. He does accept to live with her however, *if* he gets the money from Claude, so that they can both be happy, money being the only means for happiness. (*NEO* 42) When talking about Claude coming over he wants Vivian there, not so that his son can meet his girlfriend, but because she has a service to offer him: “You’re still young. You can help us speak together” (*NEO* 42), “Open the door, Vivian”. (*NEO* 45) He also does not care so much about overpopulation and the

lack of oxygen since he has got a “[l]arge television. Lots of music. We complain about the air but the plumbing works.” (*NEO* 47) Mick even values people only for their money, describing the mother as sad and his former wife before the mother as successful because of her marriage: “My first wife married again. She did well. A rich man.” (*NEO* 48) Mick has adapted to a world based on a class system dividing people with money from those without, and does not fight the system in any way. He accepts any disadvantage he experiences, and only wants to be comfortable without too much effort.

Vivian is younger than Mick, and has not experienced “the happy time” (*NEO* 41) in the 70s as Mick puts it. Mick seems comfortable in his situation, but Vivian does not accept the end of the world in quite the same way. She is very concerned with the lack of oxygen, and is the one that has bought a spray can of oxygen for them. (*NEO* 40) She also seems more affected by the environment. Whereas Mick speaks in complete sentences, Vivian stutters in half sentences, making her use a lot more words and oxygen while communicating less effectively: “So what I bought what I bought was look an oxygen spray and spray spray oxygen in the room.” (*NEO* 40) With this Churchill shows us that even though Vivian notices the problems around her, she does not fight the powers that make them live like that, the spray can of oxygen being the ultimate object of oppression, spending money in order to have what most people (should) see as a natural right. Vivian is in other words the oppressed defending her oppressor. (On a side note – exactly this is happening in some places in the world as we speak. Norwegian air from Hardanger in Norway is being sold to especially polluted places in China, as a luxury item. (Visjø) This again shows how Churchill was perhaps quite right in her predicaments in this play.)

Vivian wants a different and better life, and sees the environmental problems around her, but being conditioned to this world by her surroundings, she does not fight the system, but rather does exactly what it says, which is that she should somehow obtain money to buy a better life. However, whereas Vivian sees the problems around her but are afraid to act, and therefore does nothing, it is not the fear that stops Mick, he is simply just comfortable waiting for things to either fall into his lap or not do anything. A good example of this is when Vivian thinks she sees a bird, and opens the window to get a better view, without thinking about the consequences, because she is hopeful that something better could be out there. Mick’s response to this is: “Spray your oxygen about. You’ll kill me.” (*NEO* 44) With this Mick states that he is not interested in what could be out there, if there is any chance he would lose his comfortable life on the way. This is even further highlighted when we learn that Claude’s mother offered to take Mick with her out in the woods and: “end our lives together.” (*NEO*

51). Whereas it can seem like the mother wants to live with him for the rest of their lives, Mick reads it only as an invitation to commit suicide together.

What unites Mick and Vivian is their desire for money and their lack of means for obtaining it, in addition to their fear of death. Claude and Alexander, Mick's other son, however, fight against this system. Claude and Alexander are the complete opposites to Mick and Vivian when it comes to money, Claude and Alexander are trying in every way they can to stay away from money, and Mick and Vivian want money. It becomes very obvious how money rules this dystopian society, and it is even more clear when they talk about Alexander. He and his wife wanted to have a child, but did not have an "exemption", and had to flee the country to be able to have the child. The way to get an exemption is either to win a lottery, or to buy one, and they tried the lottery, as Claude states: "Went in for the lottery. Thinks it's wrong to buy licences. So do I." (*NEO 49*) What is interesting here is how they think of moral, and what moral means in this play. Mick clearly does not care about morals as long as he is comfortable, and Alexander cares so much about having a just world that he is willing to kill his own child to do what is "right". However, the force/system telling him that it is "right" to kill his baby is the same force that tells them to spend money to live comfortably, so why follow it on one thing and not the other: "Five years for evading abortion but suspended since the child was dead." (*NEO 49*) One major difference is the empathy factor. Alexander and his wife killed their baby because it: "cleared their conscience", (*NEO 49*) and it is hard not to agree when Mick says: "With all his mother's money Alexander could have bought a licence." (*NEO 49*) Vivian is the only one that reacts what the spectators would perhaps deem as realistic, reacting to the death of a baby, and states that she: "couldn't kill it more than kill myself" (*NEO 49*). There are a lot of moral questions in this play, and by subverting what the reader would find immoral, Churchill highlights the importance of being critical to one's surroundings, and not accept injustice. Churchill seems to criticise people that choose to do nothing, by making the consequences of inaction clearly immoral and "wrong" to a modern spectator.

The absent mother is the complete opposite to Mick, and this is highlighted again and again, Mick sets himself as her opposite, and her actions are opposed to his. The first time she is mentioned, it is as a fanatic, that has given up her room and burned her papers, and does not want Claude's money. (*NEO 47*) Mick has always allowed himself to find ways to live in this world, but Claude's mother could not: "Mick's definition of survival is acquiescence and acceptance; his wife, on the other hand, could not inure herself to the horrors and took action." (*Savilonis 239*) The way the mother is the complete opposite of

Mick is the same way nature has become the complete opposite of what it should be. That which is supposed to give life, oxygen, is what takes life, just like the mother, a signifier for fertility and life, also ends up taking life, by removing herself from society, and Claudes' upcoming probable death.

What is lacking in the family-cosmos is the mother, and this lack causes Claude to not want to live anymore. At the same time, what lacks in the cosmos of the state is the environment, which slowly strangles the inhabitants with lack of oxygen. It is the lack in both environments that are harmful, and with this Churchill seems to suggest how toxic a world that excludes women can be. By having inhabitants of a world that choose to see the other way when it comes to moral issues, and are content with unfairness as long as it is comfortable, Churchill seems to criticise inaction more than anything else.

With the mother placed in myth, and a society on the verge of going under, we leave the 1970's dystopia and move on to the 1980s and a very different dystopia, the corporate one where women fight for their place in patriarchy, but have to sacrifice their femininity, in *Top Girls*.



## ***Top Girls (1982)***

*Top Girls* by Caryl Churchill was first performed in 1982, and the plot revolves around Marlene, a career-driven woman that succeeds in business in the 1980s. The play is divided into three parts, which all shift backwards in time, and the play ends one year previous to the first scene. Critics agree that the reoccurring theme in *Top Girls* is the struggle for women to gain power and success in a male-dominated world. This is shown first through many different women's destinies and experiences in the first act, where an assortment of historically based and invented female characters celebrate Marlene's promotion at her firm. The second act is placed before the dinner-scene in time, and shows more of the inner workings of how Marlene has become who she is, and how it is to be a woman succeeding in business. It also shows another part of Marlene; the part she has had to leave behind to become as successful as she is, what I argue is her femininity. The third act, happening even further back in time, is mainly focused on Marlene and her daughter Angie, whom she has left to be raised by her sister Joyce. I argue that what Churchill is saying is that Marlene has to sacrifice her own femininity to be able to succeed in a male-dominated business-world, and that it is this woman that Churchill wants to find an utopia for, she wants a world where women do not have to sacrifice their femininity in order to have success.

The stories told in the first act by the dinner-guests are their life-stories - of how they have gotten where they are in their own worlds. The stories are all concerned with the influence of men, and how they have been dependent on men to achieve what they want, either by controlling them or being controlled by them. In other words, they have lived in different forms of patriarchy, and the ones that have managed to become more "like a man" prove to have had most success. The only thing standing in their way is their femininity.

Lady Nijo has always been owned by a man, first by her father whom she worships, then the Emperor. She is one of the characters in act one that has existed in real life, Lady Nijo was a Japanese courtesan and a Buddhist nun who travelled on foot through Japan, born in 1258. (*TG* Notes on characters) She does everything in her life to try and please the men around her, but her husband the Emperor does not care for her. When his attention is unattainable she gets a lover, the priest Ariake. The Emperor lets yet another man have sex with her while listening on the other side of a screen. (*TG* 12) Lady Nijo is hindered by patriarchy, here in the form of the Emperor and her father, and as she is trying her best to please patriarchy and be the best she can, she is ignored. Lady Nijo can in this sense be seen as similar to Marlene in the sense that she is Marlene if Marlene did not take a stand, did not

“try to become a man”. She is similar to the woman in act two that gets a new job that is worse than the one she had, she does not sacrifice her femininity, and does not fight against the injustice she has to go through. There is one incident, however, where Lady Nijo does fight against injustice, when she beats the emperor because he let the attendants beat her and the other ladies. (*TG 29*) She states that after they beat him, things got better, showing that Nijo is similar to Marlene in the way that she does fight for herself when the world she has been conditioned to does not follow its own rules. Churchill seems to suggest here that one needs to be alert to the injustices happening around oneself, but that it is hard to see when the injustices is all one knows.

Nijo and Griselda have both been controlled by men, and as Nijo engages in conversation with the other women, and it is clear to everyone but her that she has a different cultural background and attitude towards men than the rest. When Nijo is engaged in the conversation where Griselda talks about how she lost her children, Nijo’s responses are more cynical than the rest:

GRISELDA. Oh yes, she was six years old.

NIJO. Much better to do it straight away. (*TG 24*)

Nijo does not see how she has been treated unjustly throughout her life by her father and the Emperor, and her greatest grief in life is when they died: “My father and the Emperor both died in the autumn. So much pain.” (*TG 28*) Nijo knows that the only thing she can do is to be controlled by men, and does not see the problem Griselda has when having to leave her husband: “Better to leave if your master does not want you.” (*TG 26*) Nijo is so conditioned by the world she is from that she can not relate to the other women. It is Nijo’s cultural upbringing that keeps her from standing up to the Emperor, and since her father has told her to serve him, she does so without asking any questions. Nijo exemplifies what women have let men do to them through times, and since her experiences are far regressed from a European perspective, it is provocative and outrageous what she has to go through:

“Churchill emphasizes the “social gest,” the learned patterns of behaviour, the social codes and structures underpinning gender and reproducing gendered differences.” (Bazin 123) As exemplified by Bazin here, Churchill shows that when conditioned to believe one are less worth than others, one can fail to recognize the structures and forces that oppress. To an European audience, Nijo’s oppression is clear, and by recognizing this, Churchill seems to suggest that one should examine one’s own systems of oppressions as well, and not accept patriarchy.

Griselda is based on the character Patient Griselda: “the obedient wife whose story is told by Chaucer in “The Clerk’s Tale” of *The Canterbury Tales*”. (TG Notes on characters) She arrives late to the party and is introduced by Marlene as: “Griselda’s in Boccaccio and Petrarch and Chaucer because of her extraordinary marriage.” (TG 22) She tells the story of how she married the marquis, Walter, at the age of fifteen:

GRISELDA. My father could hardly speak. The Marquis said it wasn’t an order, I could say no, but if I said yes I must always obey him in everything.

MARLENE. That’s when you should have suspected.

GRISELDA. But of course a wife must obey her husband. / And of course I must obey the Marquis.” (TG 23)

It is clear that she was never really given a choice, even though she was told she was.

Griselda naturalises her husband’s behaviour, and since she is always given a choice, she does not think badly of him: “he had to get rid of the child to keep them quiet. But he said he wouldn’t snatch her, I had to agree and obey and give her up.” (TG 24) All the women are disgusted by this, except for Nijo, who accepts and understands her situation:

NIJO: No, I understand. Of course you had to, he was your life. And were you in favour after that?

GRISELDA. Oh yes, we were very happy together. We never spoke about what happened. (25)

Griselda and Nijo are similar in the way that they both have obeyed men without question, and they confirm to Marlene that she is doing right in life by fighting for power in the patriarchy and not letting herself be controlled by men like they have. They have both obeyed their men, but do not end up happy or successful as a result of that.

Griselda and Nijo both lose their children. Nijo loses her children because she is married to the Emperor and gets pregnant with Akebono, and therefore has to fake a miscarriage so that Akebono can keep the child: “It was only a girl but I was sorry to lose it,” (TG 18) and she has another two with Ariake the priest. The last one she has she gets to keep, but she: “felt nothing for him” (TG 20). Griselda loses her children when they are young as the Marquis takes them away from her, as she puts it: “He wanted to see if I loved him enough.” (TG 26) Through these horrible actions, Griselda and Nijo’s femininity – in the form of children - is taken away from them. They both show what can happen if one is forced or allow oneself to be controlled by men. They are proof that there is no solution for women in patriarchy, going against patriarchy or adhering to it is both problematic – just in different ways.

Another proof of Griselda's mindless following of the Marquis is her way of talking about love. By describing love as beauty, Griselda proves that her arrangement with the Marquis is only for power, and the power the marquis has over her is what he values in their relationship: "The girl was sixteen and far more beautiful than me. I could see why he loved her." (TG 27) In this sense, the Marquis, much like the Emperor, only become a sign of the repressing patriarchy that represses simply for power.

Isabella Bird does not want to conform to being "a lady", but her travels are always enabled by marriage, helping her live the life she wants. Isabella decides to marry her husband because he nursed her sister: "It was Doctor Bishop's devotion to her in her last illness that made me decide to marry him." (12) Isabella is another example of someone that chooses to protect the patriarchy, simply because she is not too harmed by it. All these cases of repression of women, in different times and cultures, show how difficult it is to fight patriarchy, and together the stories weave together to resemble a Greek chorus, chiming the sorrows of the world for women. I argue that these stories show how it is impossible to fight patriarchy, and explain why women have had to choose to sacrifice their femininity in able to fit into patriarchy, which leads to the dinner-guests who *do* sacrifice their femininity.

Dull Gret stands her own ground from the beginning of the play, and describes in detail what is happening in the painting by Brueghel that she is in, *Dulle Griet*, how she beats the devils. (TG 31) She is the only character that does not lose in the end. Just like she is standing still in time in the painting, fighting, she is the representation of the masculine female in the play as well, that has been successful at taking on masculine traits to act like a man.

Joan and Marlene are the most similar characters in the first act when it comes to their way into power, they both take on the role of men to succeed. Joan does it by pretending to be a man, and Marlene similarly, by acting like one. By stating that: "[t]hey noticed I was a very clever boy" (TG 10), the character of Joan also seems to suggest that the fact that she is a woman makes her "a clever boy", meaning more than just a regular boy, reflecting a radical feminist view, that women are not equal to men, but superior. I argue that this is a reflection of how radical feminism is a result of oppression, and that Churchill warns of a widening gap between men and women if the situation is not to improve. I argue that what Churchill goes on to suggest as a part-solution in later plays, and hinting at in this play, is a need for men and women to unite and embrace the feminine together, and this display of radical feminism is one way of introducing the problems of forcing women to become masculine.

Joan has only pursued her hunt for knowledge, and by pretending to be a boy has achieved becoming Pope. She knows that she is doing something wrong because: “[w]omen, children and lunatics can’t be Pope”, (*TG* 17) and because of this she has suppressed her femininity. In the end, however, it is her body that fails her, as she becomes pregnant: “I didn’t know what was happening. I thought I was getting fatter, but then I was eating more and sitting about, the life of a Pope is quite luxurious. I don’t think I’d spoken to a woman since I was twelve”. (*TG* 17) When haunted by her own femininity she loses her success and the whole life she has built up by being a man, the only thing betraying her is her own inherent sex. Going from being as close to God as one can get, as Pope, to being killed for not having the right genitals proves the point Churchill is trying to make with Joan, the complete absurdity of having sex is a defining factor of what one can and cannot do. However, the story of Pope Joan proves that absurdity while also showing something just as important, that one can not suppress one’s own sex. Joan is in many ways Marlene’s greatest fear, that she could lose her own success by being revealed as a woman, just like Joan. Marlene’s and Joan’s femininity also comes in the same form here, a child, which further confirms their similarity.

What first seems like a celebration of strong women from different cultures and worlds, proves to be stories of how they have each been repressed by patriarchy, and being punished for being women. As Marlene sits observing all this, it can seem as a lecture to her of what *not* to do, as she is the one living character that still has a chance to make it right. The possibility of a change in Marlene however, is not something we are invited to witness, as the play continues with a time-shift back in time, to before her promotion and the dinner-party, leaving the future for the spectator only to speculate on.

*Top Girls* is not only about the power struggle between men and women, but just as much about how women judge each other, known as “intrasexual oppression”. In the first act it is clear that most of the time the women are not listening to each other, but just talking about themselves: “The inability to listen and to share experiences with women, is indicative of intrasexual oppression, and underscored in this first act through Churchill’s use of overlapping dialogue” (*CC* 39) The women judge each other based on their own cultural understandings of what it means to be a woman, but are first and foremost concerned with telling their own story. When Joan says she ran away with a boy because she wanted to study in Athens, Nijo makes the assumption that the reason is because she has romantic feelings towards the boy, and not her search for knowledge: “Ah, an elopement.” (*TG* 9) What Churchill is doing here is to make it clear that being a woman is not the same as being a

feminist. She highlights the problem of women accepting patriarchal views of women as their own, which in turn lead to many women supporting the oppressing patriarchy.

In act two, the women working at “Top Girls” and the ones applying for jobs all judge each other, either based on their own opinions and culture, or what a man would think. Marlene asks Jeanine not to mention that she is getting married in the interview (*TG* 54), because that would lower her chances of getting a good job. Marlene also decides to not offer her a high position based on the fact that she wants to get married, because that means she has no prospects or: “don’t want a long-term job” (*TG* 53). Marlene is helping the women suppress their own gender as she is also intrasexually oppressing them herself. Another interviewee, Louise describes herself as not caring: “greatly for working with women, I think I pass as a man at work”, (*TG* 58) but is still losing higher positions in the firm to younger boys, which clearly signals that she has never really been mistaken for a man in the office. This proves that she looks down on women, and by trying not to identify with the female sex believes she can fit in better and not be judged based on her sex. But just like she has been judged by her male colleagues by not being given better positions, she judges her interviewer and tries to reproduce the social inequalities that are in action in *Top Girls*, which leads to her not being very popular amongst the “Top Girls”.

Nell interviews Shona, a woman trying to say all the right things to get a job, even when it means lying. Nell is sceptical of her and shares what she thinks of women working: “whether she’s got the guts to push through to a closing situation. They think we’re too nice. They think we listen to the buyer’s doubts. They think we consider his needs and his feelings.” (*TG* 68) Needs and feelings are here portrayed as bad personality-traits that are considered feminine and as Shona tries to say the right things she confirms that she “never consider people’s feelings”, and is “not very nice”, hoping that those qualities are going to get her further. (*TG* 68) The interviewees all do not have “what it takes” to become a “Top Girl” because they have been oppressed in some way that have resulted in them not being able to pursue a career in the way needed to become a “Top Girl”: “Together, the three interviews challenge the idea of individual achievement, so important in Marlene’s ideology and in the ideology of the English middle-classes who deny the existence of class.” (Marohl 380) What Marohl highlights here is the class discussion that is also evident in *Top Girls*. A lot of the issues regarding women in this play is about class, and is a direct reflection of the politics of Margaret Thatcher, and her idea of individuality, that class does not matter, it is up to each individual to be successful. And Marlene is the embodiment of Thatcher’s politics in this sense, she has succeeded in a male-dominated world alone. Win and Nell also both

conform to the stereotype that is Marlene and the ideology of Margaret Thatcher, women who try to be men and not reveal their femininity, because it would ruin their chances of succeeding. They see female-traits as negative, and male as positive, to the point where there is no femininity left, here exemplified in the ability to have children, as is used throughout the play as the main metaphor for femininity: “I have been on the pill so long / I’m probably sterile.” (TG 90) They are able to be “individualists” because they can sacrifice their femininity for it, and those that can not are left outside. Marlene on the other hand does have a child, meaning that there is a cost to her “individuality”, which I will come back to shortly.

Even though Marlene is mostly presented as the ultimate “Top Girl”, not even she can escape intrasexual oppression. Mrs. Kidd visits her office in an outrage as Marlene has been promoted instead of Mrs. Kidd’s husband. She blames Marlene for her husband falling ill because: “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.” (TG 64) She belittles Marlene for not choosing to act like a woman should, accusing her of choosing an easier path in life: “I know office work isn’t like housework / which is all interruptions”, (TG 64) and accuses her of being: “one of these ballbreakers / that’s what you are.” (TG 65) With Mrs. Kidd, Churchill shows that even by succeeding as a woman, there are people opposed to her, and even though some women try to lift each other up, most want to protect and repeat the patriarchy, because that is what one has been taught to do.

Marlene has had to pay for her success, the cost of her success being that she has given up her child to her sister, in other words left her child to be taken care of by a woman, which makes her: “constructed as the ‘conventional man’” (Aston 40). Marlene and Joyce have become opposites because of their different choices: taking care of a child has left Joyce in the working-class without success in business, and Marlene’s choice to leave Angie has left her in the upper middle-class with a lot of success. Seeing as Marlene and Joyce both are affected by Marlene’s choice to leave Angie, they can be seen as two sides of the same coin, they are the same woman that has just made two different choices. Seeing as children has been used as a metaphor for femininity in act one, it is still the same here. Joyce has sacrificed everything to take care of Marlene’s child, even her own chance of having a child as she misconceived: “I did get pregnant and I lost it because I was so tired looking after your fucking baby” (TG 90) Joyce therefore becomes the embodiment of Marlene’s sacrifice, and Marlene becomes the embodiment of Joyce’s sacrifice. Because Marlene chose what she did she can never have a child, and because Joyce chose to take care of Angie, she can never climb the social ladder by succeeding in business. It is the choice of being feminine that

decides what class and status one can have in this world, and Churchill shows that even being an “individualist” has a price, and not everyone can live by Thatcher’s ideology.

Marlene has been conditioned to like and protect this world that can seem hopeful for people like her, and takes all her frustration out on Joyce in a final confrontation between the two in act three. Marlene protects the system that has let her be a “Top Girl”, and blames Joyce for her own misfortune: “[the working class] doesn’t exist any more, it means lazy and stupid.” (95) And it is here that Churchill ties everything back to the real world, by bringing up Margaret Thatcher. Marlene is the symbol of Thatcher in the way that she is an individualist, and proof that women can reach the top: “Marlene, blind to any interest but her own and certain that ‘equality’ means only her own ability to compete on equal terms. Thus she resembles Thatcher herself, whose apparent pioneering as the first female Prime Minister of Britain belied more ignominious achievements, such as reversing upwards trends in social mobility.” (Gobert 4) Many critics have discussed whether the character of Marlene is positive for feminism or not, but even though Marlene has made a life for herself that is positive for her, she is becoming “another man”, who accepts and repeats patriarchal views and conditions: “The Thatcherite feminism of Marlene, a kind of “girl power,” repeats and reproduces social inequalities. Ironically, in the name of feminism, the top girls, the women who succeed in the new free-enterprise culture, do so at the expense of their sisters.” (Bazin 129) Given that she becomes as successful as a man by repressing her own femininity, the femininity around her is repeatedly oppressed as well: “Marlene’s stable positioning functions as an oppressive “block” to the desires and aspirations of other women” (CC 41) Considering this, and how Churchill wants a socialist, equal society (Aston and Diamond 2), Churchill seems to present the world of *Top Girls* as her own dystopia.

To make it abundantly clear that *Top Girls* is no hopeful play about feminism, the symbol of the future is presented in the form of Angie, the product of upper middle-class Marlene and working-class Joyce, she is trapped between these two worlds. Bazin argues that Angie is a representation of the past and present of feminism at the time, and that she at the same time functions as a warning of the horrors the present can result in in the future. (Bazin 119) Angie is not the brightest, and Churchill seems to suggest that the fact that Angie has been without her biological mother have harmed her. By portraying Angie like less intelligent than her mother, Churchill shows that even though the future might seem hopeful for some, those that can be like Marlene, not everyone has the ability or means to adapt. The fact that Angie might have been harmed by the lack of a mother is a symbolism that is also present in *Not Not Not Not Not Enough Oxygen*, and is a theme that will come up in other plays as well.



I am not focusing on this in this analysis of *Top Girls*, but it is important to note that the lack of the figure of a mother, the symbol of nurture and femininity, can be read as a partial cause of how Angie might turn out, which is impossible to know as not much is suggested, other than that she probably cannot become a “Top Girl”.

Marlene argues that it is a choice to be successful, but it is clear that not all the other women in the play have had a choice in the matter: “I don’t mean anything personal. I don’t believe in class. Anyone can do anything if they’ve got what it takes.” (TG 96) Here Marlene almost echoes Thatcher’s own words: “there is no such thing as society. There are individual men and women.” (Gobert 4) However, as Elaine Aston explains: “Joyce, Angie, and the young women seeking jobs are blocked both intrasexually by the middle-class career women, and intersexually, by educational, familial and economic factors which keep them geographically and socially bound to their milieu and class.” (CC 43) However, Churchill seems to be trying to show just this, that being born a woman means one is already being intrasexually and intersexually oppressed, and not everyone has the choice to be an individualist.

However, what Churchill seems to search for in this play, is a world where Marlene can live, where the Marlene that both gives birth, raises a child and works as a “Top Girl” can live. In one way, Churchill seems to not blame Margaret Thatcher for her points of view, but with the conditions she and Marlene have had to accept have made them both into what they are, and with different conditions, they could have their success without having to sacrifice so much. I argue that *Top Girls* is the dystopia Churchill imagined right when Thatcher came to power, and her way of highlighting all the problems with contemporary feminisms and the “hopeful” individualism. By starting the play with the dinner-scene, Churchill shows that women have always been able to become a “Top Girl” somehow, but that the price they have had to pay is always the same, their femininity.

*Top Girls* uses a fragmented time line, one of the techniques described in the introduction that Churchill introduced as one way of creating a “feminist aesthetic” in the theatre. By taking a step away from realism and the “malestream” and realist theatre, Churchill is enabled to not only shift the events of the play to end as she wants, but also to have this extraordinary collection of women for dinner in act one: “This assembly of women, therefore, defies the logic of historical, chronological, and spatial representation, as Churchill plays with the dramatic conventions which traditionally govern time, place and character,” (CC 38) which is “immediately signalling the play’s fractured temporality by bringing its subjects impossibly together.” (Gobert 4) This impossibility of the assembly of characters enables

Churchill to have her problems applied to more times and destinies, which again makes it more universal and easily accessible for more people. If the play was staged chronologically, it would end with Marlene's promotion and hopeful future, instead of Angie's prophetic statement of the future: "frightening", (*TG* 97) which could lead the play to be read as more hopeful.

Churchill herself has stated that the cast of *Top Girls* was intended to consist of 16 individual actresses. (Gobert 18) However, as it has been performed with only a cast of seven, the doubling of roles has highlighted similarities in characters that were not intended to be there. However, as the spectators project meaning onto the doubled bodied in the performance, the original intent by the playwright becomes irrelevant. By having the character of Pope Joan and Louise played by the same actress, the irony that Louise describes herself as not caring: "greatly for working with women, I think I pass as a man at work", (58) is significant in the way that Pope Joan's demise is what Louise struggles with as well, it is their genitals that hinders them. The fact that these characters were not supposed to be doubled in the same body only shows that Churchill has been able to create universal women in the first act that can be found in the present of *Top Girls*, just expressed differently. In this way the first act can again be seen as an expression of the Greek choir, a timeless collection of women that represent a unity of past and present, as mentioned earlier.

Whether thinking of the doubling as intended or not, the connection between characters such as Louise and Pope Joan is striking, and the character of Louise then becomes an expression of what Pope Joan would be like if inserted into a different world with different conditions. And I believe it is here that we reach into the core of *Top Girls*. Churchill has stated that she had worked on this play for a long time, and that the idea of the dinner-party had started many years earlier. The women are expressions of women everywhere, and work as metaphors for each other and other females as well. Seeing as all the women at the dinner-party in act one are women that have had to sacrifice their femininity for success, voluntarily or not, they can be seen as different expressions of the character of Marlene. By placing Marlene in different times, dystopian societies, her story could be any one of their stories.

It is important to understand how crucial the character of Marlene is to the play. The fact that Marlene is not only the protagonist in the play, but the enabler and force that drives the play forwards (even if in time it goes backwards), she becomes the image of feminism, the embodiment of feminism, by taking over the male individual protagonist, another feminist theatre technique (Melrose 134). This is important because without feminism these stories would never be seen, seeing as historically the female has been invisible (Case 143).

Even though the play is not hopeful for women, if it had not been for the “Marlenes” of the world, being a successful businesswoman would not have been possible either. Just like there had been no play had there not been a playwright, there had been no *Top Girls* if there was no Marlene. It is all dystopias presented in the dinner-scene and in the rest of *Top Girls*, and there is no “utopia” or positivity for women even if they adhere to the patriarchy. Because of this, I argue that Churchill is focusing on Marlene, the one character that she can relate to and want to test out more dystopias on.

Churchill was a stay-at-home mother for many years while raising children, and this is when the idea for *Top Girls* started. I argue that Marlene is the embodiment of what Churchill wants, she wants a world for herself, where she did not have to stay home with the children and leave her career for a few years, but could have been working instead. And while searching for a world where Marlene can be both Marlene and Joyce in one body have tested her out in different stories and settings, resulting in the dinner-scene. What I want to keep exploring now is in what other worlds Churchill might have placed other “Marlenes”. Will Churchill find a utopia for the figure of Marlene, or will it just be a hopeless search for something that can not exist because the patriarchy is so ingrained into our society that we can not even imagine a world without?

In *Not Not Not Not Not Enough Oxygen*, we saw a world lacking of both oxygen and femininity, a world that did not fare well without women. In *Top Girls*, the female has been very present, but still oppressed. With these two opposites, both showing worlds that are not positive for women, we are leaving the 1980’s and the thatcherite Marlene, and meet a different expression of the “dystopian female” in a different dystopia in the 90s, more specifically 1994, and the world of *The Skriker*. We will there meet a female that is not only absent from society, but completely delved into myth.

## 2. Experiencing Dystopia

In this chapter, the dystopian female is no longer out fighting for her place in the patriarchy, but has disappeared from our world, and rather taken her place in myth. From the magic realism in *Top Girls*, and the devastating ecological crisis in *Not Not Not Not Not Enough Oxygen*, this chapter dives straight into the world of myth in *The Skriker*, to a dystopian world of parading war in *Far Away*, and another dystopia of cloning in *A Number*, in search for other expressions of dystopian femininity.

Having explored what it might mean to be female in a factual patriarchy, diving into myth allows for a different kind of exploring, searching for what it might mean *not to be female*: “Literature is, above all, about the human, about what it means to be human, and therefore about the non-human, about what it might mean not to be human.” (Bennet and Royle 254) “The Skriker” in *The Skriker* is a being that can not be described as human, yet takes on the form of humans as it pleases. By exploring that which is outside of our world, both in *The Skriker* and *Far Away*, there might be a clue as to where the utopia is hiding, or what is keeping it away. In *A Number*, the female is again absent, as in *Not Not Not Not Not Enough Oxygen*, and these two plays show a lot more similarities, which will be discussed.

### ***The Skriker***

*The Skriker* is a collaboration with “Second Stride”, a group Churchill also worked with on *Lives of the Great Poisoners*, a piece in which they worked across disciplines and experimented with song, dance, music, elaborate set-design and multimedia projections on stage. (CC 91-92) The ever experimentation of style seen in Churchill is especially evident in this period, and as Churchill herself put it when discussing *A Mouthful of Birds* (1986) with a critic: “I wanted to get away from words.” (CC 81) In the process of finding a feminist aesthetic for theatre, and a form of theatre that can seem hopeful for women on and off stage, Churchill decided to dive into myth, and the world of “The Skriker”. By letting words fly freely from the mouth of The Skriker, the words turn into an intelligible mess that is closer to music than dialogue, and the meaning is just as distorted as the sentences, subverting spoken word to something else entirely.

I use *The Skriker* here because I find it is a natural binding-point between *Top Girls* and her early millennial work. Churchill worked on *The Skriker* for many years, and it was “a background thing between other projects, the thing I was always coming back to and puzzling away at.” (Gobert 26) It also references many of her earlier works, and shows connections

between themes and styles throughout her work, so it not only binds *Top Girls* and *Not Not Not Not Not Enough Oxygen* to later plays, but even earlier plays to *Top Girls* and beyond. *The Skriker* can be seen as a mix between *Top Girls* and *Not Not Not Not Not Enough Oxygen*, in the way that it takes the feminist themes from *Top Girls* when it comes to the sacrificing of femininity, and the ecological dystopia of *Not Not Not Not Not Enough Oxygen*, with a world that is falling apart, as Churchill has stated herself in an interview, it is: “about damage – damage to nature and damage to people” (Gobert 29), which fits well into my idea of dystopia. There are several scholarly articles written about *The Skriker*, but none which are directly relevant to my arguments, so I will use bits and pieces from different articles that can explain certain aspects with the play that is useful for my argument, but closely engagement with any of them would be counterproductive.

With another dystopia presented in *The Skriker*, some critics, such as Elaine Aston, expected Churchill’s next period of writing to be more optimistic, with Thatcher out of power, and a new Labour Party in power from 1997. (CC 104) However, as this chapter will explore, this period can be seen as even less hopeful than the 80s with *Top Girls*.

## **Ecofeminism**

In my discussion of *The Skriker*, I am introducing ecofeminism. Ecofeminism is still such a new term, and I am using two scholars to define how I am using ecofeminism in my analysis; Chaone Mallory and Greta Gaard. Ecofeminism opens up the discussion to more systematically discuss the ecological aspects of feminism, and unite my reading of feminism and dystopia, to be able to argue that femininity is at the centre of Churchill’s dystopia, and that her solution to the problems of the world and feminism is for humans to unite and stay closer to nature, by embracing femininity instead of masculinity.

## ***Far Away***

*Far Away* presents another dystopian world, that is ridden with a world-wide war that engulfs everything and everyone, even nature. I am using this play because it has such an interesting dystopia, and is the first play to show a kind of helplessness and lack of solutions to the problems. Using a reading of ecofeminism in this play, the hierarchical structure of the play becomes clearer, and I argue that in trying to find an utopia, Churchill argues in *Far Away* that the solution is not being as close to nature as possible, but that the balance is somewhere between total masculinity and technology and completely engulfing with nature, and this

helps narrow down the possibilities of where to find the utopia, without giving any definite answers.

### ***A Number***

*A Number* is a play that at first glance can seem very similar to *Not Not Not Not Not Enough Oxygen*, and is about the consequences cloning of human beings could have on the world. Salter, a father, has cloned his son, and without him knowing, “a number” of other clones are out there somewhere. I argue that *A Number* portrays another dystopia that shows the world without femininity, just like in *Not Not Not Not Not Enough Oxygen*, and that Churchill argues that the world needs a better sense of unity to be able to live happily. This unity, I argue, can be found in the feminine, and that is exactly what Churchill is trying to show.

### **Julia Kristeva and “the abject”**

In the final part of this chapter I am using Julia Kristeva and her theory of “the abject” as a way to unite the female characters of Churchill’s in one, as the maternal “abject”. I argue that the characters I have united in the dystopian female and then in “the abject” is what is expressed in the dystopian landscapes of these plays, and if the plays can find a way to tolerate “the abject”, the “dystopia” of the world will disappear, and utopia can/should be found.

## ***The Skriker* (1994)**

*The Skriker* was first performed in 1994, and tells the story of an ancient fairy that follows and befriends two sisters and young mothers, Lily and Josie, with the intent to manipulate, seduce, and ultimately trap them. The play combines different art-forms, with various folklore-creatures dancing next to the dialogue. This choreography weaves together the dystopian world Josie and Lily are trapped in and must try to survive. “The Skriker” inhabits a world that is disconnected and ruled by technology. In my analysis I will examine the connection between the dystopian backdrop of the folklore creatures and the story of Josie and Lily, I argue that the folklore creatures reveal a world where women have always been targets of oppression, and that the character of “The Skriker” is a metaphor for nature, going to war against human beings because they are separating from nature and uniting in the masculine and technology, which leads to destruction and *is* the real dystopian aspect of this world.

In the prologue, “The Skriker” speaks as if playing a word-association game, where many words are subverted to another word with a similar sound but different meaning, or a word only connecting to the previous word, but not the one prior: “boast beast a roast beef eater” (*TS* 243) By subverting the words like this the monologue becomes barely intelligible, and “The Skriker” uses this opportunity to mix and match a lot of different narratives as it pleases. This is both a metaphor for how the play functions in itself, and a critique of the world that has led to this. It is a metaphor for how the play functions in the way that the play is full of intertwining narratives and dance, that might not always seem connected. Trying to understand everything happening on stage could become very confusing, which is partly the point as: “dance and music are employed to hold open the spaces within a more linear narrative; to interrupt and intrude.” (Worth 82) And this is exactly what the world of *The Skriker* is as well, a world interrupted all the time by different narratives. A world in which its politics is hidden by always interrupting and intruding, never giving its citizens long enough to think about what is happening before they are distracted by something else. And it is this danger of oblivion and inaction that Churchill is warning its spectators about, through the character of “The Skriker”.

Jean E. Howard argues in her article “On owning and owing” that the character of “The Skriker” is a metaphor of “devastations of late capitalism”, because it can “penetrate any space”, “compress time and space” and “create desire ... that makes one abandon infants and homes and friends.” (Howard 49) Following Howard's logic, but not her conclusion, I

want to argue that for the same reasons that Howard has interpreted “The Skriker” as a metaphor for capitalism, “The Skriker” can be seen to represent the wrath of nature as a consequence of capitalism, a nature that has not been taken care of by humans: “They poison me in my rivers of blood poisoning makes my arm swelter”, “You people are killing me, do you know that?” (*TS* 246) With my reading, the devastations point to a larger problem than just the political when it comes to capitalism, and I argue that Churchill is pointing to a problem of humans disconnecting with each other and nature.

Similarly to how nature can adapt to its surroundings (e.g. changing according to season), the language of “The Skriker” changes according to who it is talking to and where it is, as well as its appearance, making it able to “penetrate any space”: “an American woman of about 40 who is slightly drunk. It is the SKRIKER.” (*TS* 253) This ability to shape-shift helps “The Skriker” in its aim at manipulating Josie and Lily, seeing as it can become whatever it wants, and choose whatever form it would most likely be successful at getting close to the girls with. Because of this ability, it can, as Howard describes it “penetrate any space” (Howard 49), but it is also this ability that makes it as adaptive as nature, which can also penetrate any space and adapt to its surroundings. When it comes to the TV however, electronics being as far away from nature as possible, “The Skriker” does not understand how it works: “how for fuck’s sake?” (*TS* 255) For a being that can shape-shift, move through time and do magic, it is puzzling that the TV can be so hard to understand. Here Churchill seems to suggest that it is the distance from nature and the natural to technology that makes it difficult for “The Skriker” to understand, which is also what it claims is killing it: “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. Just so long as you know I’m dying, I hope that satisfies you to know I’m in pain.” (*TS* 256) If “The Skriker” simply was a metaphor for late capitalism the TV should be easy to understand, seeing as technology in general is a big part of capitalism, especially the globalisation that is a result of advances in technology that enables capitalism to be effective across borders. However, capitalism is what is destroying both “The Skriker” and the humans, and is what both crave. The fact that all “The Skriker” wants is to know how the TV works shows how important this distance to electronics is, and suggests that it is the key to knowing what is killing “The Skriker”.

“The Skriker” has manipulative power that can “create desire ... that makes one abandon infants and homes and friends.” When disguised as an old lady it asks Lily for “a hug and a kiss” (*TS* 252), and Lily goes from trying to get away from it to suddenly hugging and kissing her (*TS* 252). And by that, the Skriker has “contaminated” Lily, and: “[p]ound



coins come out of her mouth when she speaks.” (TS 252) In one way the Skriker can seem to be rewarding Lily for doing its bidding, but it soon becomes clear that the pound coins came with a price, when Lily becomes sick and Josie says: “She’s for you now. You took her money” (TS 262) “The Skriker” tries to buy Lily, by using the means humans seem to be attracted to, but as it does not succeed in this, moves on to different methods.

It is established from the beginning that Josie has killed her ten-month old child. (TS 248-9) How or why on the other hand is not stated, and although it can easily be suspected that the Skriker has had something to do with it, it is not clearly suggested until close to the ending when Josie wants to kill Lily’s baby as well, because it is a “changeling”, and not her real baby: “That’s not your baby. They’ve put one of theirs and taken yours off.” (TS 277) When Josie suggests to kill it, it is easy to be reminded of the beginning of the play, and the premise of the play, that Josie is in a mental hospital, and probably quite out of it: “[y]ou put the changeling on a shovel and put it in the fire” (TS 278). This parallel is also confirmed by Lily when she reminds us of the beginning of the play: “I wish Josie wasn’t mad” (TS 278). This also highlights the fragility of this world, making one question again how real or not real “The Skriker” actually is in the reality of the play. By adding Josie’s want to kill Lily’s baby like she killed her own, Churchill makes “The Skriker” “at once seem both more and less powerful. More because it suggests that Josie has been under the influence of “The Skriker” for a long time, and that she killed her own baby because of her. Less because it means that “The Skriker” has not succeeded in getting the baby from Josie the first time, giving it less of a probability for success this time. This also shows that no matter what “The Skriker” is a metaphor for, “The Skriker” is in no way omnipotent, which is important if “The Skriker” is nature, because the reason “The Skriker” as nature would be upset is because it is being destroyed by humans, which makes it both destructible, vulnerable and less powerful, and gives Josie and Lily more power.

“The Skriker” can manipulate time and space, and uses this to harm Lily and Josie: “Fairy time ... operates on its own logic.” (Gobert 23) The passing of time is a weapon “The Skriker” can use to its advantage, as it does not seem to affect “The Skriker”, suggesting that “The Skriker” is a being apart from time, and this “timelessness” is important in the way that it means that “The Skriker” is not a contemporary being, but rather something that has always been there, but is “about to die”. This also supports my claim that “The Skriker” is nature, if “The Skriker” was capitalism time would be of importance for it, and it would not have been as old as it is. Nature however is something that has existed for as long as humans know, and that is being destroyed by humans, like “The Skriker” is.

Caryl Churchill camouflages a lot of the action and meaning in the various British folklore creatures that appear on stage, and as Churchill has stated herself: “a number of stories are told, but only one in words.” (*Shorts*, viii) Libby Worth argues that that the mythological creatures act “as triggers for spectators’ imaginative completion.” (Worth 81) However, for these narratives to be visible and able to trigger the spectators, they must be given space by the choreographer and the creative team. Also, since their actions are a part of the background, and the average spectators’ attention is trained on the dialogue, they can be easily ignored, and therefore also functions as a metaphor for this world that has been so distracted by everything and nothing that it has destroyed itself.

Seeing as how mythology is written word constructed by humans, and not based on science, the mythological creatures in *The Skriker* can be seen as constructions of human destruction, consequences of something Josie and Lily might not have anything do to with, but that they have to live with, and be influenced by. In this way they cannot only be what Josie and Lily are influenced by in the moment, but expressions of things that have shaped them into becoming who they are. To make sure Josie and Lily do not seem weak for giving into “The Skriker’s” persuasion, Churchill places these mythological creatures on the stage to show the monsters they (especially Josie) have to face daily, and what makes them eventually give in to the pressure of the world, the pressure of history and values that are impossible to fight against.

Every single one of the mythical creatures on the stage is from British folklore. Together with “The Skriker”, they make up the dystopian landscape surrounding Josie and Lily. By doing this, Caryl Churchill merges ancient history with a contemporary story, which might suggest that the problems of the past are just as relevant today (or in the time the play was written). The play starts off with Johnny Squarefoot on the stage. Johnny Squarefoot alludes to Jimmy Squarefoot, who according to myth, was a mortal man that was a stone thrower, who threw stones at his wife. When she left him because of his abusive nature, he turned more and more into a pig, and is now said to haunt the Isle of Man, as a creature with the resemblance of both a pig and a man. (Bane 194). When he has gone off the stage, “The Skriker” comes on with her prologue, where she tells, in her fractured language, fairy stories of women being tested and then rewarded or punished. First the story of Rumpelstiltskin, made famous by brothers Grimm, about the girl who can spin straw into gold: “daughter could spin span spick and spun the lowest form of wheat straw into gold.” (*TS* 243) By having the play start with an abusive man, combined with the glimpses of fairy tales “The Skriker” tells in her fractured monologue, one can guess that the female characters will not

fare so well in this play. To make it even clearer, a Kelpie comes on, a creature part man and part horse that tries to seduce/lure women and kill them. (Rosen 226) The framing of the story has the effect of foreshadowing what is going to happen in the play, which in turn confirms that Josie and Lily are affected by the mythological creatures, symbols of the past and past traditions.

And that is just the beginning of the play, as the play goes on, more and more creatures known for harming women and/or men show up, and especially creatures that want to steal children, the hags: Hag, Nellie Longarms, Jennie Greenteeth and Black Annis are all witches trying to steal and kill children. (Rosen 232-4) Churchill makes it clear that Josie and Lily are affected by mythology, which is a symbol of the past. Just like Churchill shows different women's destinies in the dinner-scene in *Top Girls*, the mythological creatures serve the same purpose here, they show the underlying influences affecting Lily and Josie and other women in everyday life, the threats that are always there, waiting for weakness to feed off.

The Green Lady can be read as a feminization of "The Green Man". Taken from European folklore, The Green Man is a: "symbol of rebirth, fertility and regeneration that takes place in the natural world." (Rosen 247) This resonates well with one of the play's main themes, fertility and children, expressed through Lily's unborn child, and Josie's dead one. "A Young Girl" is looking through a telescope at the beginning of the play, and sees The Green Lady dancing with a Bogle. (*TS* 253) Seeing the symbol of fertility, the girl is happy, but as the play goes on and she never sees the The Green Lady again, she becomes unhappy. When at last the Green Lady goes off the stage with the "bucket and cloth man" and the "black dog", a symbol of death, it is made clear that the girl, now marked as "The Depressed Girl" will never have children. This can be a direct reference to Josie's state of mind as "the depressed girl" in a mental hospital, and how she will never have any more children, but it can also work as a metaphor of the barren world they live in, a world that is so far away from being healthy as to have become sterile.

"The black dog" seems to symbolise the gatekeeper of Hell or the Barghest of English folklore, both traditionally recognized as omens of death: "those who saw the creature clearly would die soon after, while those who caught only a glimpse might live for a few months before succumbing." (Rosen 184) Interestingly, they are also known to "appear during electrical storms" (Rosen 184), suggesting a connection between the death of fertility and "The Skriker's" problem of understanding technology (*TS* 259), which again leads to my argument that "The Skriker" is nature. If reading "The Green Lady" as fertility, seeing as she has gone off the stage with the "black dog" symbolizing death, I suggest that what Churchill

is saying is that fertility is dead. With fertility dead “The Skriker”/nature will no longer be able to survive, which might be why “The Skriker” is so intent on trying to find a baby, giving the character of “The Skriker” an explainable motivation for its actions, which has been lacking so far:

SKRIKER: You keeping the baby?

LILY: Yes of course.

SKRIKER: Because I’m looking for one (*TS* 256)

Whereas it can seem as a play about whether or not “The Skriker” gets its way, it becomes clear that “The Skriker” is not in control over the situation of the world any more than Lily and Josie are in control of their own lives. In the underworld “The Skriker” claims Josie will be better off there because there is a war going in the real world that scares “The Skriker”: “open wide world hurled hurtling hurting hurt very badly” (*TS* 271), but even though “The Skriker” tries very hard, it cannot keep Josie there against her will. Josie decides to go back, seemingly on the brink of dying, and as: “Johnny Squarefoot [is] throwing stones at Black Dog” (*TS* 273), she refuses death and comes back to Lily, proving how strong the family-bond is, and that Josie as a human cannot be fully manipulated by “The Skriker” and the mythological creatures, but can be in control: “[t]hey need us you know” (*TS* 276). By suggesting that the mythological creatures and “The Skriker” needs them, Josie shows the importance of humans in this war going on in the play. With powers trying to manipulate them in different directions, “The Skriker” loses against Lily and Josie, and when admitting defeat, admits the defeat of nature as well:

“It was always possible to think whatever your personal problem, there’s always nature. Spring will return even if it’s without me. Nobody loves me but at least it’s a sunny day. This has been a comfort to people as long as they’ve existed. But it’s not available any more.” (*TS* 282)

This is a change in the character of “The Skriker”, and by admitting defeat, it also admits that it is going to have to be there to witness it all: “I’m going to be around when the world as we know it ends.” (*TS* 283) In “The Skriker’s” desperate attempts at getting a hold of Lily and the baby, “The Skriker” seems to see Lily as the only bit of fertility left, the only thing that has not: “tried to destroy” (*TS* 284) it, and that “can save” (*TS* 286) it. But Lily cares more about her own life and her child’s, and does not help her. Instead Josie gives in to save Lily, and when the mythical creatures show up again Josie goes with the black dog, suggesting that she has decided to die, but what she has done instead is team together with death to do “The Skriker’s” bidding and kill people: “Josie went further and murder in the dark, trying to keep

the Skriker sated seated besotted” (TS 288). However, she is not able to help nature anymore, and because the humans are still concerned with capitalism, technology and removed from nature: “gobbling and gabbling, giggling and gagging, biting and beating, eating and hating, hooting and looting and lightning and thunder in the southeast northwest southwest northsouth crisis,” (TS 288) there is nothing more “The Skriker” can do. Josie has started killing for “The Skriker”: “I slipped a wire loop over her head” (TS 287), suggesting that when nature is not being treated as it should, it starts taking revenge. “The Skriker” has lost some of its power, and Josie claims it to be: “not strong enough to do an earthquake.” (TS 287) As “The Skriker” has given up fighting, it becomes sicker and sicker, and shows up to Lily as: “a very ill old woman” (TS 288). Lily, thinking she would be back in an instant from the underworld decides to go with “The Skriker”, but what is now a second in the underworld has been many years on earth: “dead years and tears ago, it was another cemetery, a black whole hundred years” (TS 290), and the play ends with Lily meeting her “daughters grand and great greater greatest” (TS 290) granddaughter, and eats food of the underworld to stay there.

If the Skriker is a vengeful metaphor of nature, so afraid of losing the last bit of fertility that it tries to steal it from Josie and Lily, then Churchill is portraying a very bleak dystopia. With this reading she seems to almost have given up, Josie and Lily’s fight against “The Skriker” is not enough, and neither “The Skriker” nor the girls can win. However, I do not believe that it just stops here, that Churchill has given up on feminism, socialism and the world in general. To take my argument onwards I want to use ecofeminism, but to start using such a new term, I first need to establish how I define and want to use ecofeminism.

## Ecofeminism

This thesis argues that since the creation of Marlene in *Top Girls*, Churchill has been searching for a world in which Marlene can live, without having to sacrifice her children or femininity. By applying different versions of Marlene to different dystopias, there are many changes and challenges to the role of the female and how she is affected by her conditions. I have established the dystopia, and the sacrificing of femininity in Marlene from *Top Girls*, and established the clear connection between dystopia and plot in *Not Not Not Not Not Enough Oxygen*, and now also the clear dystopia in *The Skriker*. However, what I now aim to do is to combine these my readings of dystopia and the dystopian female with ecofeminism. Even though it is clear already that the environment, the dystopias, of Churchill's are reflections on what is happening to the characters of the plays, and their emotional states, there is still a certain gap between the reading of the dystopia and the reading of the female. I now aim to bridge this gap by reference to ecofeminism. However, because this is such a new term, I first need to define what ecofeminism is, and what part of ecofeminism I am focusing on.

The understanding of ecofeminism I aim to use here is mostly based on Chaone Mallory's article "What Is Ecofeminist Political Philosophy? Gender, Nature, and the Political", and Greta Gaard's "Hiking Without a Map: Reflections on Teaching Ecofeminist Literary Criticism". These critics only represent one strand of ecofeminism, and do not provide any definite definitions, as Mallory also makes clear in her article: "Let my discussion, then, represent one possible way that ecofeminist political philosophy could be delineated." (Mallory 308) With this as the basis for my discussion, I first want to offer one of Mallory's definitions of ecofeminism as a starting point: "It is the principal tenet of all ecofeminisms that varieties of oppression, especially but not exclusively the oppression of women and nature, are interconnected, and that these intersections of oppressions manifest on both material and conceptual levels." (Mallory 308) In other words, it is about the oppression of both nature and women, and as we have seen in Churchill's plays this far, both nature and women are oppressed on different levels. Ecofeminism aims to unravel hierarchical structures, placing the oppressor on the top, and the oppressed on the bottom. Ecofeminists argue that by using a hierarchical way of talking and writing, we can not have an equal society. I argue that this also applies to Churchill's idea of an utopia, and that by examining the hierarchies created in her plays, the solution should be clearer. Mallory writes about Ecofeminist *political* philosophy, and argues that it is important to stress the "political" part

of ecofeminist political philosophy because “political” stands for the distribution of power. “Feminist”, she argues, is the oppression of women through “male dominance and power”, and “ecological” is the awareness that the “feminist” and “political” aspects “extend throughout the relations between human and nonhuman nature, thereby including nature in the category of beings unjustly dominated and oppressed.” (Mallory 312) In turn, using an ecofeminist reading in this thesis allows for nature to be more visible, which then again combines my dystopian landscape with feminism more significantly.

Similarly to how second-wave feminism worked to reclaim the history of the female in the theatre and elsewhere by exploiting how women have been excluded and hidden from history, ecofeminism aims to show: “how traditional philosophical categories are built on exclusions of women, nature, and subordinated others, [and] have generated a false vision of the human as un-dependent on the realm of nature.” (Mallory 317) And this is exactly what I am arguing that Churchill has been arguing even from 1971 and *Not Not Not Not Not Enough Oxygen*, that one of the major problems resulting in dystopias in her plays is human separation from nature and each other.

An ecofeminist criticism is not limited to certain genres of literature because: “confining the scope of ecofeminist literary criticism to only those texts perceived as ‘ecofeminist’ or even ‘feminist’ artificially limits the potential of such a perspective.” (Gaard 161) This is especially important because ecofeminism focuses on the way language is used to oppress and limit the role of women, and the way language is used knowingly, but also unknowingly, and works as oppression. (Gaard 157) This is good to have as a basis seeing as not all the play I have examined and will examine in this thesis are regarded as feminist. Now, even though I have mentioned the “woman-nature” connection as an ecofeminist trope, I want to discuss what exactly the “woman-nature” connection is.

The “woman-nature connection” is based on an idea that women and nature are linked, and the female body is closer to nature and more natural than a man’s. This idea comes from the way language is used to describe certain female-linked things as “natural” and feminine, such as childbirth or even cleaning. It is used as oppression in daily life by dismissing a woman’s wish because it either is or is not “natural” for a woman to do, or “natural”. It is “natural” for a woman to be in the kitchen, it is “unnatural” for a woman to fix a car. What ecofeminists have discovered with this is that things that are closer to “nature” is linked to women, and technology is linked to the masculine and men. White woman and man is most natural, and women are natural and close to nature because they can give birth, they are fertile like the earth. The words in which we use to describe fertility in a human body are

the same words we use to describe fertility in nature. Where the man is closer to machines and far from the natural, woman is somewhere in between: “science is masculinized, nature is feminized, and the pursuit of scientific knowledge becomes the metaphoric rape of virginal nature.” (Gaard 176) Ecofeminists have then placed this in a hierarchy, with men and technology at the top, and women and nature at the bottom, where the ones on the top function as the oppressor, and the bottom as the oppressed. Mallory goes on to argue that this hierarchy is used to: “cast nature as background or subordinate (along with women and other inferiorized groups), are really political, allied with the interests of groups in power.” (Mallory 320) In other words, this is where the political is present, seeing as language is manipulated in our society as a whole in this manner. What ecofeminism then aim to do is to reveal this hierarchy to in turn get rid of it, and as Ariel Salleh argues in her book *Ecofeminism as Politics: Nature, Marx, and the Postmodern* (quoted in Mallory’s article): “Women are not “closer to nature” than men in any ontological sense. Both women and men are “in/with/of nature,” but attaining the prize of masculine identity depends on men distancing themselves from that fact. Ecofeminists explore the political consequences of this culturally elaborated gender difference.” (Mallory 309) What Salleh highlights here is the consequences this attitude has when it comes to equality in general, and the political consequences for man, woman and nature. However, not only are there consequences, the main problem might lie in exactly this, with a “politics that seeks to establish and maintain the ecological superiority of humans and the cultural superiority of men.” (Mallory 309) I argue that it is exactly this is the problem reflected in Churchill’s plays as well, and it is this crisis of identity that she is trying to fight against. She does not want women to have to “become like men” as in *Top Girls* to have a place in society, and she also does not want men and women to unite in indecisiveness as in *Far Away* (as I will get to).

Ecofeminism focuses on how language is used to oppress, by enabling certain words and patterns for one sex and not the other, here one example from Gaard: “one emotion is allowed to men and denied to women: anger. In order to experience anger and focus it at its source, one must be able to name directly the source of one’s anger, but the language for anger is denied to women and to other oppressed groups (Scheman).” (Gaard 159) By using this example of anger as a feeling only enabled for men, the example being from *The Bluest Eye* by Toni Morrison, Gaard unravels not only the structure of how the language of anger can be used, but the consequences. By: “comparing the causes of anger with the actual recipients of anger in the novel is a means of unraveling social hierarchies of race, age, gender, and species”, since “anger is directed downward along the lines of social hierarchies



and oppressions, rather than upward, at the real objects of anger.” (Gaard 171) In other words, a hierarchy of oppression is unravelled by looking at the recipients of anger. By using this logic, one can see that animals are usually at the bottom, meaning the ones that are closest to the animals are the lowest rank after the animals in the hierarchy: “in a culture that denigrates nature and animals, being seen as “closer to nature” or to animals is detrimental to blacks, just as it has been detrimental to women.” (Gaard 172) In this hierarchy, the further away one is from the source of anger, the masculine, the further down one is on the hierarchy. And this is important in ecofeminism. Ecofeminism argues that by thinking of male and female as opposites, and women as closer to nature, male and nature are thereby also opposites, and this is where the problem arises that ecofeminists are working against.

Ecofeminism enables us to see what the power-structures in a text are, and by finding the hierarchy a text uses can also see what the destructive force is, and what separation causes the problems: “the fundamental realization of ecofeminism, namely, that our cultural, economic, and ecological crises stem from a separation of self from another.” (Gaard 179) I argue that it is this separating that Churchill is afraid of, and is why the ecological dystopias are created in the first place, as metaphors for a society of inaction that is not connected to each other.

### **Applying Ecofeminism**

The worlds Churchill create are all in deep ecological crisis, in addition to the problems in politics and the state of the characters in her plays. And it is this connection that I want to bridge with ecofeminism to fully understand *why* Churchill does not find/write her utopia. Churchill, in search of her utopia, might not quite find the solution to why the dystopian females are able to live well, but the world around them falls apart anyways.

In *Not Not Not Not Not Enough Oxygen*, the dystopian landscape is a clear reflection of the plot of the play, and as I have discussed, the lack of oxygen is a reflection of the lack of a mother, which in turn is a reflection of a society that is increasingly disconnected, and thereby suffocating itself. Using ecofeminism here it becomes clear that the hierarchy in the text is “money” and “masculinity” on the top, and “nature” and “femininity” on the bottom.

In *Top Girls*, the hierarchical structure is masculine on the top, and feminine on the bottom, seeing as any sign of femininity makes one fall down the corporate ladder. In one sense, Marlene is better off because she is able to “be like a man”, and is therefore on top of the hierarchy. However, by excluding her femininity to become superior, she is dislocating

the female from the body and nature, and by that becoming as destructive to nature as man. And that might be why there are such destructive dystopias in the other plays, it is simply Churchill seeing the consequences of females becoming closer to men, and therefore human beings as one further away from nature, creating the wrath of nature that we see in *The Skriker*.

### **Back to *The Skriker***

So, coming back to *The Skriker* with a new perspective from ecofeminism, I believe what Churchill is doing, consciously or not, is creating an impossible hierarchy in the text. In this hierarchy humans are removed from each other and nature, and the huge gap between humans and nature, and nature and technology, is what has created this devastation of “The Skriker”. With this in mind, it is time to move on to an even more devastating dystopia, that of *Far Away*.

## ***Far Away* (2000)**

*Far Away* was first performed in 2000, after Churchill had a break in writing from 1997, and is perhaps one of her most confusing plays, even with only three characters. Just like *The Skriker*, *Far Away* uses elements of the fantastical in the dystopian backdrop to the play, but instead of mythological creatures, nature is humanised in *Far Away*, and takes part in the world-wide war that is going on. *Far Away* follows the story of Joan, growing up from a young girl to adult, in her journey of trying to figure out what is right and what is wrong in the world. Starting with Joan being frightened in her aunt's house, the play draws a parallel to the ending of *Top Girls*, where Angie states how the world is "frightening". With a world in chaos and war, it is exactly *that* the world in *Far Away* is, 'frightening', and as Elaine Aston argues: "This is a bleak vision for a new century, but one that brings a renewed emphasis to Churchill's concern to show just how "frightening" the legacy of a world damaged by a political and social creed of self interest is – a legacy that, her theatre tells us, is not so very 'far away'." (CC 120) What I want to show with this play is Churchill's own questioning of who and what is right and wrong. I find this important because by establishing that even Churchill is not quite aware of what she is looking for, the only thing one can be certain of is what she does not want, which I argue is inaction. This play is most interesting in contrast to other plays, and a lot of the discussion will therefore be on how this plays contrasts Churchill's other plays and dystopian worlds that have already been discussed. I also argue that the gap between nature and humans is bridged in this play in their fighting with and against each other, but it does not make the world any more utopian, leading us one step closer to understanding exactly where Churchill argues that the balance is.

The world of *Far Away* is one where it is difficult to differentiate friend from foe, and one cannot even know what side nature is on, from birds and bees to rivers and forces: "Who's going to mobilise darkness and silence?" (FA 37) It is clear that there is a war going on, but already from the beginning of the play Churchill clearly invites us to question who is good and who is bad, especially when it becomes evident that Harper and her husband harm children:

JOAN: He hit one of the children.

HARPER: That would have been the child of the traitor. Or sometimes you get bad children who even betray their parents. (FA 14)

Up until this point in the play it has been easy to think of the child, Joan, as the one misunderstanding the sounds and voices she has heard, but as Harper admits to more and

more malefactions, the truth of what Harper has told Joan is questioned. However, as the play progresses, it becomes clear that the question of who is good and who is bad is not going to be answered for us, the only thing that is obvious is that there is a lot of wrongs happening in this world.

This is an important shift for Churchill, going from *Top Girls* and *Not Not Not Not Not Enough Oxygen* where there are clear problems that are linked to our world, to *The Skriker* and *Far Away*, where the enemy is suddenly everywhere and anywhere, making it impossible to know who/what to trust. This problem of not knowing who to trust and who is right is arguably first presented in *The Skriker*, where Josie/Lily thinks she is protecting the baby but is really damning it. The difference there is that it is obvious to the spectator or reader what is right and what is wrong, even though the characters are not sure. In *Far Away* on the other hand, even the spectator cannot know if the main character Joan is on the right or wrong side (assuming there is one).

Joan is clearly *trying* to fight for a good cause, by questioning her aunt in act one, and pushing Todd into doing something about their work situation in act two. But it stops there, she does not really do anything that actually spurs action, she only talks about doing something, but ends up like everybody else in act three, fighting against everything and nothing, not knowing who is on whose side. However, like Claude and the mother in *Not Enough Oxygen*, Marlene in *Top Girls*, and Josie and Lily in *The Skriker*, she *tries* to fight for a good cause, however unsuccessful. This is an important contrast to Harper and Todd, and even though we do not know whether what Joan is doing is wrong or right, the sympathy lies with her, a sympathy granted to her perhaps mostly because she tries. Whereas in other plays there have been many markers as to who to side with and what to think, the most obvious one here is simply that Joan is a fighter, even though it is not enough. What Churchill is portraying then, is a society where no-one takes social responsibility, and just lets the world fall into chaos: “*Far Away* suggests that an absence of social and political responsibility will lead to global catastrophe.” (CC 116) By criticising the lack of a well-functioning system, Churchill highlights the importance of having one.

Harper always positions herself as the one having all the answers, and has practical solutions to everything:

HARPER: Do you want a drink?

JOAN: I think I am cold.

HARPER: That’s easy enough then. There’s extra blankets in the cupboard. (FA 3)

Harpers solution to everything is something practical, there is always something to do, but just like everyone else in this play, her efforts are to no avail, they do not solve anything. In this sense she is a reflection of the dystopian world she inhabits, doing lots of things that do not help.

The perhaps most striking contradiction in the character of Joan is how she both helps the oppressing system by making the hats in act two, while seemingly fighting it as well: “although they talk about the possibility of corrupt capitalism, they carry on making new hats: their actions ‘speak’ differently to their words.” (CC 119) In this way Joan can seem similar to Vivian or Mick in *Not Not Not Not Not Enough Oxygen*. Mick and Vivian know that spending more money eventually leads to their doom, and Joan knows that making the hats just feeds the system oppressing them. However, just like Mick states in *Not Enough Oxygen* when discussing the object of oppression, money, with his son: “[w]hat do you earn it for if you won’t use it?” (NEO 49), Todd responds in the same fashion when discussing why the hats can not be reused: “we’d be out of work.” (FA 25) When Todd goes to the management to speak about all the problems they are having, the reply is: “These things must be thought about.” (FA 26) Todd’s lack of fight in him proves how he wants to seem like he is doing right but does not really want to do anything uncomfortable to change, just like Mick in *Not Not Not Not Not Enough Oxygen*, and it is this inactivity that haunts the play, and that seems to be at the centre of Churchill’s criticism.

Christine Dymkowski argues in her article “Far Away but Close to Home” that the hats are representative of how, when a natural disaster happen, the loss of national art treasures often is the focus rather than the loss of human lives. (Dymkowski 60) This is an important point as the hats are not only a representation of how they do not take social responsibility, but how war and death are used as entertainment. Churchill presents this moral issue with the parade where the hats are shown on death row prisoners on their way to execution. This is not revealed until scene five of act two, after having watched their hats become more and more extravagant in each previous scene, and Todd has revealed that he stays up every morning until four to watch the trails. (FA 18) This is another kind of inaction that Churchill seems to criticise, that in not doing anything with the horrible things happening in the world, one lets it become entertainment, and by allowing it to be entertainment, and by being entertained by it, Todd again feeds the system that oppresses him, just like he is doing every day by creating the hats.

Accepting a reality that is not ideal or even good is something Churchill seems to criticise with all these plays, and the same will also be evident in *A Number, Love and*

*Information*, and *Escaped Alone*, and it is always the lack of action that Churchill criticises. However, as I will come back to, what seems to be changing for Churchill is what she thinks is the solution to this problem of inaction. In each play discussed so far, the protagonist, or the character where the sympathy lies does something to improve the world or their own situation. In *Top Girls*, Marlene has fought for herself and positioned herself in patriarchy. In *Not Not Not Not Not Enough Oxygen*, Claude knows what is “right”, in contrast to his father, and tries to fight the system. In *The Skriker*, Josie and Lily try to fight “The Skriker”, which is recognised as the “right” thing to do. However, when arriving in the dystopian world of *Far Away*, reality is different in the way that it is impossible to know what is “right” or “wrong”, and the young protagonist is no longer the one character that can differentiate “right” from “wrong”, even though she tries. The question now becomes whether Churchill has lost her faith in humans, has human kind gotten too comfortable in dystopia? Is the world becoming more difficult to understand? I argue that Churchill goes from having been more certain about what should be done in the 70s and 80s with *Not Not Not Not Not Enough Oxygen* and *Top Girls*, and is now increasingly seeing more problems and less solutions, which leads to my analysis of nature and politics in this play.

Nature and politics are one in this play, seeing as nature can be on sides in this war, and the chaos encompasses the whole world, including the personal, political, and natural. When Harper asks Joan: ““You’re shivering. Are you hot?” (FA 4) there is a contradiction, making us wonder whether even reactions or temperatures can betray the people in this world, which is confirmed later when Joan states that: “the weather here’s on the side of the Japanese.” (FA 37) Joan is not even sure what side the river is on, and just like the river is supposed to divide two sides from each other, it does not, but instead “[t]he water laps round your ankles in any case” (FA 38), suggesting an impossibility of knowing whether anything is true. Harper is the one character that is always trying to determine what is “right” and what is “wrong”, she is the one that convinces Joan to become a part of their side, and Harper seems convinced of their righteousness:

HARPER: You’re part of a big movement now to make things better. You can be proud of that. You can look at the stars and think here we are in our little bit of space, and I’m on the side of the people who are putting things right, and your soul will expand right into the sky. (FA 14-15)

The way in which Harper is so sure of their cause, even though there are a lot of factors, such as killing children, that makes their cause questionable, is also arguably what makes her seem unreliable. In the third act, when Harper and Todd talk about the war, in one sentence they

talk about people hanging upside down, and in the next Harper claims you can trust deer now because: [t]heir natural goodness has come through. You can see it in their soft brown eyes.” (FA 35) Harper here suggests that there is still goodness in the world, and that you can know whether someone/thing is good or not simply by looking at them. However, this logic is hard to accept, considering how Joan later states that she has killed children, a definite signifier for innocence. (FA 37) Just like in *Not Enough Oxygen*, Churchill uses the ultimate signifier for innocence, children, to make us question the morals of the world, and/or perhaps force the audience to not be able to brush off the moral issues, and this is a tactic she employs in *A Number* as well.

In *The Skriker*, I argue that “The Skriker” is an expression of nature’s wrath towards humans for destroying the world with technology and capitalism. Here, in *Far Away*, the relationship between nature and humans are much more complicated because they are both on the same team and against each other. When not even nature knows who and what to side with, what has happened with the gap between humans and nature? From an ecofeminist perspective, this development should be positive, seeing as humans and nature have managed to merge. However, their merging is not a positive thing, seeing as they have merged in war, and with technology out of the equation, it seems rather than merge nature and humans, Churchill has humanised nature, and with that separated nature from the natural. With this new kind of separation, humans and nature is together destroying each other. I also argue that what Churchill is saying that even though the humans in this play are united, they are united in the masculine, and need to embrace more of the feminine. With this in mind – to be further discussed after the analysis of *A Number* - we leave *Far Away* and the merging of nature and humans, to find the opposite two years later in *A Number*, a dystopia that has been so disconnected from nature that even birth is only artificial.

## ***A Number* (2002)**

First performed in 2002, *A Number* is Caryl Churchill's most famous feminist play without any female characters on stage. Set in an alternate time where gene technology has come so far as to being able to clone human beings, *A Number* is an undisputed dystopia. A father, Salter, has cloned his first child after the mother committed suicide and the first son did not turn out quite as planned. In *Top Girls*, Churchill makes the female characters the most visible in the play, only alluding to male characters in dialogue. By doing the opposite in *A Number*, she highlights the importance of the female characters. Instead of showing how great the world can be with women, she shows a world where women are absent.

Significantly, it is the lack of women that has created the dystopian landscape in this world. Whereas a man (Salter) cannot control the scope of his children, a woman would be able to control how many children she would create, so the absence of women in this play has led to an uncontrollable mass of cloned children. With the presence of women, the cloning would not be necessary. In other words, the lack of women has resulted in a lack of control in the world, and the whole play is affected by it.

*A Number* invites its spectator to question whether it is nature or nurture that is the reason for how the clones have turned out, just like B2 expresses: "there could always be some genetic additive and then again someone with the same genetic exactly the same but a different time a different cultural." (AN 43) Because of B2's statement and the way the play is angled, Churchill seems to suggest that it is nurture and not nature that decides the way we are, which Savilonis also agrees with: "the fact that Salter was not the person responsible for rearing him allows the audience to consider the possibility that nurture may indeed trump nature." (Savilonis 250) However, adding to this, B2 blames everything on Salter, but admits that perhaps he should not, seeing as there can always be two sides to a story: "in fact of course you have that in you to be that because you were to me so it's a combination of very complicated and that's who you were so probably I shouldn't blame you." (AN 43) And this conflict in B2 is exactly what lies in the centre of this problem. What the play seems to suggest is exactly that nurture trumps nature, but that one can bring tendencies from one's nature, meaning that nature cannot be completely disregarded.

The father is the main and only influence in his son's life, B2, and has also been a great influence in B1's life, in the first 4 years they had together. Both the sons influenced by their father (and not by a woman) are unmarried and alone. It is never mentioned who B1 was adopted to when his father did not want him anymore, and the only interaction with females



we hear about is a dog: “I had this black and tan bitch wouldn’t do what it’s told, useless” (AN 29). B1 does not have a good relationship with females, and naturally not with his father, which drives him to kill “his opponent”, his father’s “new” son, B2. Savilonis argues that: “Salter’s treatment of his son has contributed to B1’s destructive, antisocial behaviour, as well as how the lack of a maternal figure has affected him.” (Savilonis 247) Just like there is a lack of a mother in B1 and B2’s lives, they lack a companion in their lives as well. To prove that it is the lack of a mother that has resulted in this other lack in the lives of B1 and B2, Churchill presents the final cloned son, Michael, in act three, as one that does not have these lacks in his life. He has grown up in a family with a mother, and has a wife and children. He is also the first son that describes himself as happy, which is another thing lacking in the lives of Salter, B1 and B2, which again alludes to the lack of a mother as a consequence. (AN 55)

It is never quite clear what happened to the mother, and why she committed suicide, or even *if* she committed suicide. The uncertainty comes from having Salter as the only source of information about the mother, neither the spectator/reader nor any of the “sons” have any knowledge apart from what Salter decides to share: “her identity is controlled almost exclusively by Salter, who constructs, and reconstructs, the image of his dead wife as it suits his purposes.” (Savilonis 243) Since the only son that has ever known his mother was too young when she died, the sons only have vague images of her, in B2’s case falsely constructed images created by Salter, since he thought his mother died when he was young, but he is actually a clone. This means that the constructed mother B2 has been shaped by is exactly that, constructed, and even though she might bear some resemblance to the “real” mother, she never was. Because of this, the sons are just as misled by Salter as the spectators, and everything he says is doubted.

This uncertainty planted by Salter is what haunts this whole play. The fact that Salter did not know they would create more clones than one is disturbing, and considering he can not control the creation of his own offspring, it is hard to trust a society that would let this happen. The title of *A Number* is another factor that highlights the uncertainty. A number could be any number, be it high or low, or just one, and just like there is “a number” of clones in the play, there is also “a number” of versions of what happened to the mother, “a number” of possibilities to how this could have happened. The mother is also just one of “a number” of people that jump in front of a train: “she was one of those people when they say there has been a person under a train and the trains are delayed she was a person under a train.” (AN 40) Seeing as so many of Bernard have been cloned, this hints at a demand of cloned

children, leading one to think that maybe this mother is not the first one to disappear from this world.

The mother chose to commit suicide, and it is important that she chose to do it herself, meaning that it was no accident, there was something that drove her to commit suicide, or drove her away from this world: “the deliberateness of suicide introduces the question of abandonment into her relationship with her sons, and the extremity of her choice, if one can believe what Salter says at this point, becomes her clearest statement.” (Savilonis 247) One way to look at it is to question how one could leave their child, and this question can either be answered by concluding that she was a horrible person, or that her life was so horrible that death was a better choice. By assuming that she was not a horrible person, but that something drove her to suicide, the world in *A Number* seems to be one that is toxic to women.

From an ecofeminist perspective, the world in *A Number* is one that has completely separated itself from nature, by making even the act of having children something that has more to do with science than nature. With such a divide other things are also separated. Salter is emotionally separated from his feelings. Women have been driven out, with fertility being the last link to nature that has been severed along with the disappearance of women. The women have not tried to become like men like in *Top Girls*, but have rather disappeared in the gap created between man and nature. Using this reading of *A Number*, what Churchill seems to try and show with the absence of women in this dystopia is how severe the consequences could be without femininity in the world. Salter has lost control over his sons because he has chosen to be apart from women after his wife died, and this part shows the world without femininity. Michael on the other hand, has chosen a life with a wife and children, and is happy and mentally balanced, meaning that living with femininity he is doing a lot better than his biological father.

Along with this contrast of living with or without females, Churchill also seems to suggest that we need to be together in community in order to have a good world. Savilonis argues that: “Salter wants something individual, separate from others, but Michael understands himself in relation to others” (Savilonis 248), and this is important because it shows how important it is to unite and work together, instead of separating more and more, which is what is happening in *A Number*, literally by separating baby from mother, child from father, nature from science. Dividing all these things is what has led to Salter not understanding feelings in the same way as Michael does. This fear of separation can be read as a fear of individualism, a fear that was most present in *Top Girls*. However, the most important link to other plays of Churchill’s is the link to *Not Not Not Not Not Enough*

*Oxygen*, and Savilonis argues that the two plays are connected in this individualism: “Mick and Salter both display a philosophy of individualism that is rooted strictly in personal concerns, resulting in an inability to nurture, the detrimental effects of which are amplified by the lack of maternal presence.” (Savilonis 250) And this maternal presence, and the symbol of the female is what I am going to come back to in the next section “the abject”.

*Not Not Not Not Not Enough Oxygen* and *A Number* are very similar plays, so similar that if Churchill has described *A Number* as a modern rewriting of *Not Not Not Not Not Enough Oxygen*, there would be no surprise. Not only is the absence of the mother a commonality, the way Salter and Mick handle the absence of their wives are very similar as well, and the dystopian worlds are similar. In *Not Enough Oxygen*, the lack of oxygen is slowly killing the inhabitants, and separating them from each other by forcing them to be inside their homes instead of being with each other. In *A Number*, the lack of a mother has made the production of children spin out of control, and this is what separates them. This is interesting because it means that perhaps the world has not evolved as much as it should (/Churchill would like), and problems that were evident and important in 1971 was still important in 2002 (and is perhaps still important today.)

For this thesis, this connection hints that Churchill has not found a version of the world that she has agreed with in between these plays, leading me to think about all the plays in between these two as different versions of dystopia with the same problem, but different expressions of that problem. The females that inhabit these worlds are also similar in that their problems have not been solved, and with all these dystopian world and females being both present and absent but always important, I want to unite these female characters, which is what I attempt to do now, by using Julia Kristeva’s theory of “the abject”.

## The Female Abject

Having established the dystopian worlds of Churchill's and the femininity that inhabit these worlds, as well as having combined these views by looking at it from an ecofeminism perspective, I now want to move on to Julia Kristeva and her theory on "Abjection". Julia Kristeva wrote in 1980 *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, where she aims to define what she calls an "abject", something that is neither subject nor object. I will argue that by finding the abject in the plays of Caryl Churchill, I am able to unite the female characters, and by that can find a way to get rid of the abject, and find utopia.

Kristeva's abject is something that is neither a subject, nor an object, but also not: "an ob-jest, an otherness ceaselessly fleeing in a systematic quest for desire" (Kristeva 1), but does, however, borrow: "one quality of the object – that of being opposed to *I*" (Kristeva 1). It is: "something" that I do not recognize as a thing" (Kristeva 2), yet not no-thing as it has a: "weight of meaninglessness, about which there is nothing insignificant" (Kristeva 2). It draws one: "toward the place where meaning collapses" (Kristeva 2), and: "does not respect borders, positions, rules." (Kristeva 4) Being opposed to the *I* and also placed somewhere meaning collapses, Kristeva compares abjection to crime, as it "draws attention to the fragility of the law" (Kristeva 2) and the more premeditated the crime, the more abject is it. It is the fact that it draws attention to a fragility that makes it abject.

Following this logic, the figure of the mother must be abject, because it draws attention to the fragility of life. A mother is someone who both gives life, makes life, and is life, while at the same time she is a mortal being of death, a being that will end up as a corpse, which Kristeva argues is the: "utmost of abjection. It is death infesting life. Abject." (Kristeva 4) The mother, even more so than the corpse, is the manifestation of the ambiguity of death and life in one.

Kristeva argues that in trying to break away from a mother, a child experience abjection, and as the child breaks away, the mother becomes an abject. (Kristeva 5-6) The effect of this absence of the mother is the creation of fear:

"Out of the haze that has petrified him before the untouchable, impossible, absent body of the mother, a daze that has cut off his impulses from their objects, that is, from their representations, out of such daze he causes, along with loathing, one word to crop up – fear." (Kristeva 6)

The loss of a mother resulting in abjection and then resulting in fear is what I will now argue that Churchill's plays are about, and I will prove that it is the exclusion of women, or unjust

treatment of women that has led to the force of the abject being so present in Churchill's plays, and if there is a change in society, in politics, something that does not lead the mother to disappear, and therefore does not turn the mother into an abject, it will be possible to "solve the problem", and get rid of the abject, and thereby also reach a society that is the utopia Churchill dreams of.

In *Not Not Not Not Not Enough Oxygen*, the air is what is slowly killing the population, and as I have argued, this lack of oxygen is an expression of the lack of a mother, meaning what strangles them (lack of oxygen and lack of a mother) is also what once gave them life (the oxygen and birth from a mother). Kristeva uses an example of seeing children's shoes in Auschwitz as an abjection because it: "interferes with what, in my living universe, is supposed to save me from death: childhood, science" (Kristeva 4). And this is exactly what happens in *Not Not Not Not Not Enough Oxygen* as well, meaning that the dystopian landscape, the lack of both a mother and oxygen is the abject.

In *Top Girls*, Marlene has rejected the figure of the mother, by choosing not to raise Angie, and this is what has led to abjection in the play, resulting in a huge gap between classes. Marlene is the prerequisite for *Top Girls*, as nothing in the play could happen without her: she is the one that invites to the dinner party, Joyce would not have Angie without Marlene, and who knows where "Top Girls" would have been without her. In other words, Marlene is what enables everything to happen in *Top Girls*, and by this logic the mother of the play's action, and therefore confirming that she is the abject. The abject in *Top Girls* is also the looming presence that causes Angie to feel "frightened", (*TG* 97) all caused by the same thing. What makes Marlene the abject as a mother, is how the society has forced her to become abject, because there is no place for femininity in business, Marlene is only the personification for the problems of the world of *Top Girls*.

"The Skriker" is a creature that can traverse the different narratives of the story, inserting her own meaning into whatever time and place she wants to. I have argued that "The Skriker" is the personification of nature's wrath, and by this "The Skriker" becomes the abject, as nature is both what gives life and takes life in this play. "The Skriker" somehow seems to be on both sides of the border of fault, without really having the power to sway or change anything. The fact that The Skriker does not respect borders or rules, but also does not have any definite control over either makes it abject.

In *Far Away* I argued that the problems should have been resolved with the merging of humans and nature, but seeing as it did not, perhaps the abject can help. The abject in *Far Away* can definitely be seen to be the absence of a mother, seeing as there is no mention of a

mother in *Far Away* either. And it might be exactly the nurturing power that is missing from the dystopia, meaning that even with the best circumstances, it is impossible to reach utopia.

In *A Number*, the abject is quite clear as well, the lack of a mother, or mothers in general, is the cause of all the problems in the play.

### **Uniting the abject**

I have established what I argue is all the abjects in the plays, and now want to unite the abject in one being, that of Marlene. By thinking of the different expressions of “abjects” as one, that the problems in all of Churchill’s plays are really the same, or has the same mother, I want to argue that it is also possible to get rid of the abject, and actually reach utopia.

By thinking of Marlene and the other abjects as one, she is the one both being influenced by the Skriker and the Skriker itself, she is the one in control of her own life but never really in control. She is the embodiment of Caryl Churchill’s own situation, of being a woman with children who wants to have a career as well as a family-life. The symbol of Marlene is the manifestation of the problems presented in the plays personified. Kristeva argues that literature is where the abjective can come to full power, since identities in literature never really exist, (Kristeva 217) and this is particularly true when it comes to the many-faced figure of Marlene, that is both the protagonist of all the plays, between all the narratives and the personification of the problems.

The abject is something that must be tolerated as it both destroys and defines life, and the figure of Marlene is that which must be both tolerated and acknowledged because by not being acknowledged she can not both be a family-person and a career-woman (*Top Girls*), by being ignored she destroys life (*The Skriker*), and by being both ignored and not acknowledged she turns into the destructive force that leads the world into chaos (*Not Not Not Not Not Enough Oxygen, A Number* and *Far Away*). So it is not Marlene as a character herself that is the abject, but the implications she brings with her, the implications that women have to sacrifice their femininity, and that femininity in general is dismissed at the bottom of the hierarchy. What needs to be done is tolerating the cause of the abject, which I argue is that Churchill argues that humans need to unite and connect closer to nature, and separate from technology and the masculine. In other words, whether we have reached Churchill’s utopia of a “decentralized, nonauthoritarian, communist, nonsexist – a society in which people can be in touch with their feelings, and in control of their lives.” (CC 3) is what we are going to explore in the final chapter.

### 3. Renewing Dystopia

In this chapter, I will discuss two of Churchill's most recent plays, *Love and Information* from 2012, and her most recent play, *Escaped Alone* from 2016. Even though *Love and Information* has been out for a few years and have had positive reviews, there is not a lot of criticism on it. I believe this is an important piece for discussion of Churchill's work, and that it presents an interesting modern dystopia that shows a clear evolution from the former chapter, which again offers new angles to look at Churchill's idea of dystopia. What I will do in my criticism is therefore to create some of the basis for discussion that I believe should be there, and will therefore go through the play thoroughly and look at the function of the different scenes (although not all of them.)

*Escaped Alone* came out in 2016, and is Churchill's most recent play. There is no criticism on this play except for reviews, so I will have to rely on my own analysis, with only a few reviews to help me out. Even though *Love and Information* and *Escaped Alone* are similar in the way that there is not a lot criticism, I am treating them very differently. In *Love and Information* I am doing a very close reading of the text, whereas when it comes to *Escaped Alone*, I am rather discussing the broad ideas Churchill is presenting. This because *Escaped Alone* is so interesting in relation to the other plays I have discussed, with a clear dystopia that is even closer to the destruction of the world than any of the others have been. I am therefore using *Escaped Alone* as a way of sewing together my earlier criticism with this third chapter as a whole, and to move on to the conclusion.

## ***Love and Information (2012)***

*Love and Information* was first performed in 2012, at the Royal Court theatre. The play is non-linear and structured in seven sections, with fifty-seven scenes, and has over 100 different characters. According to the play text: “The sections should be played in the order given but the scenes can be played in any order within each section. There are random scenes... which can happen any time.” (3) The scenes depict different situations and mind-sets, from depression to love, to loneliness, and also big problems in society, such as climate change and war. In a sense, the audience is bombarded with different characters, destinies – information that is too much to take in. And this is exactly what Caryl Churchill questions with her play; a world similar to ours where information is everywhere, and there is no escape from the constant input of new information. Just as we are desensitised in today’s society, because of the constant stream of information from the media, the spectator/reader does not get a chance to get to know any of the characters, because they do not get enough time to get the information needed to relate on a personal level. I argue that the information is both too much and not enough at the same time, that the spectator craves more information to be able to connect with the characters and stories, as well as they at the same time are experiencing an overload of information. I argue that this is exactly the point Churchill is trying to get through, to show us a society where we are not connected with each other, and that this is our dystopia.

Whereas the seemingly random and multiple structure of this plot has been remarked upon in theatre reviews and the scarce existing scholarship, there is not as yet any comprehensive discussion of the way in which individual scenes may impose some sense of structure and meaning. In my interpretation of the play I shall attempt to start this discussion by going through (almost) every scene and offer my interpretation of how these scenes can be seen in relation to each other and as a whole.

Just like in *Not Not Not Not Not Enough Oxygen* and *A Number*, the female is not present in this play, but not in the same way as the former plays. In the play text, the characters are not defined based on their sex, but only with lines of dialogue. The characters are always referred to as “persons”, and never as girl or boy, man or woman: “*one person tells a story to another.*” (LI 31) Only in the scenes are the lines referring to *him* or *her*, but it never gives any pointers to if a man or a woman should say the line. This is very different from her former plays, because women do not have one role in particular. Churchill seems to want to unite everyone, to say that there is no difference, and what really matters is what is



happening in the world when it comes to technology and the globalisation. It is difficult to determine if Churchill is criticising the globalisation or praising it, but with the high pace of the play, and the collection of stories, it seems to just be a collection of all the things that are challenging in today's society. This, I argue, is also a reflection of Churchill's want for unity between the sexes, and just like the play is full of information and connections between scenes and themes, she is trying to create that same unity between the sexes. Michael Billington argues in his review that: "For me, Churchill suggests, with compassionate urgency, that our insatiable appetite for knowledge needs to be informed by our capacity for love" (Love and Information – Review), and in this I argue that "love" in this play equals "connection" between human beings.

There are similarities between *The Skriker* and *Love and Information* in the way that dialogue is used. Churchill is always challenging her spectators with different forms of writing, and *Love and Information* is no exception. The way that "The Skriker" jumbles up different fairy-tales in its opening monologue in *The Skriker* is very similar to the structure of the scenes in *Love and Information* in the way that the scenes can seem to have a random structure, and you have to look closely to see the connections. The connection between these two plays are important because they are both reflections of the same thing, the high pace of a society that is ridden with indecision and inaction, and like in *Far Away* as well, everything and nothing is happening at the same time and everyone are fighting against each other.

To start reading *Love and Information*, one first has to take in a lot of information about the inner workings of the technicalities of the play. The play consists of seven sections, which remind of acts, where each section has several scenes in them, and each scene has a title. There are random scenes at the end that can happen at any time, and one random scene named "depression" that is indicated as essential to the play, but should be split up and happen in between scenes (LI 74). The characters should be different in every scene, except for the depression scene, which can use the same two people. There is nothing in the text indicating that there is another person speaking except for there being gaps in between lines of text. For the reader of the text, the sheer amount of information given here at the beginning already hints at the overload of information at the core of the play.

The play is, as the title states, about "love and information", and everything in between these two. Two words that could seem to be opposites, that soon after the beginning start merging, because what is love if it is not knowing someone the best? The first scene is titled "Secret", and seems to be a dialogue between two people about a secret. I will continue to say "seem" when discussing this play, because there is no indication in the text whether

there are more people than one person (except for a few scenes), but a lot of the dialogue, such as the one in this scene, seems to suggest there being a conversation with at least two people answering to each other:

then tell me  
will you stop  
it's big because you won't tell me  
no I won't (LI 4)

They talk about this secret that they are not revealing to us, and at the end one whispers the secret to the other who is clearly surprised. (LI 5) This leaves the spectator longing for more *information*, information the spectators feel entitled to, even though there is also the sense that the spectator is overhearing something we are not supposed to take part in. And this is exactly what the play is leading us to think as we are taken to the next scene.

“Census” is about knowing, and gives the reader/spectator a sense of watching something one should not. This feeling is first kindled in the “secret” scene, but is strengthened here where they are talking about people wanting to sell them stuff:

They're doing research. It guides their policy. They use it to help people.  
They use it to sell us things we don't want. (LI 6)

Churchill seems to suggest that one should be careful with how much information any one might have about you, and the next scene, “Fan”, highlights this problem. “Fan” seems to be about two young people infatuated by someone famous. The conversation seems innocent enough until they reveal that they are looking for information about him:

It's all right we'll find out  
I can't believe neither of us  
I know I used to know (LI 8)

This can seem to suggest that they sit on information that is not open to the public, perhaps they are in his house looking for clues, or has invaded his privacy some other way. Another option is that they are doing research online through articles about him. Either way, it is clear that his privacy is being invaded, and it is exactly this that is so unsettling. As the spectator wants to learn more, have more information to understand the scenes, the feeling of overhearing something one should not is just as pressing as the want for information.

In “Torture” Churchill shows the dangers of information, and how valuable information can be. Someone is being tortured for information, but exactly whether the information given in the end is true or not is not very important:

He'll get to where he'll say anything

We're not paid extra for it to be true.

I'll give him a cigarette while you have a cigarette and I'll tell him you'll be back. (*LI* 9)

Without reaching any conclusions, the play moves on to the next scene that takes on the same problematic, but about torturing animals instead of humans for information.

In "Lab", we are challenged to question what is morally right when it comes to such helpless being as chickens, who "wouldn't live to be old chickens" (*LI* 10) anyway:

you can see exactly depending on how dark and you can convert it into false colour  
which of course looks  
prettier

prettier yes and easier to read though the information is the same (*LI* 12)

They are doing all this to see "what the chick learnt about the bead." (*LI* 12) Churchill challenges the reader/spectator to question exactly how much information is worth, and whether it is humane to torture for information. More information is the solution to these scenes, it is the currency being used. "Sleep" is about a person who is not able to sleep decides to go on Facebook as a sleep remedy, instead of drinking hot milk or reading a book, (*LI* 12) and the value of "information" has then gone from being a currency to a medicine, showing the versatility of information.

In "Remote", (supposedly) two people are discussing what to do, somewhere without reception or a TV. One voice finds itself as loss being somewhere without digital information, and wonders how to know the weather forecast for instance. The reply is: "You'll find you can feel if it's raining" (*LI* 13), which highlights how dependent everything has become on information through electronics. Churchill seems to suggest here that by relying too much on electronics, we are separating ourselves from each other and nature.

Section two takes a different point of view when it comes to information, and rather than looking at the value of information as in section one, looks at how information can change how you define yourself, destabilise identity. The section starts with "irrational", which is a discussion about irrational numbers, and how information that is uncomfortable can become too uncomfortable, and thereby not worth knowing:

There was someone called Hippasus in Greek times who found out about the diagonal of a square and they drowned him because no one wanted to know about things like that.

Like what?

Numbers that make you uncomfortable and don't relate to oranges. (*LI* 16)

The scene also questions what makes something real, what makes information true and real, which was touched upon in “Torture”, but will gain more importance as the play progresses:

Is an irrational number real?

It’s real to me. (*LI 16*)

By destabilising what information is true and what is not true, Churchill destabilises the foundation of the play, because it can only be grounded in the information given. This creates a separation between the stories and the spectators, when the spectators spend more time questioning the narratives they automatically also engage less with the stories.

The next scene, “Affair”, is perhaps the first scene that deals with both love and information, at least the idea of love, as it is about the secret of someone having an affair, and whether or not one should/would like to know about it. (*LI 17*) The next scene, “Mother”, is also ridden with secrets that has to do with love. One person is revealing to another that she is really the other person’s mother, and not sister as he/she has thought their whole life. The person accepts this new information at once, perhaps too quickly, and accepts the new reality presented:

Don’t pay attention then, I’m just telling you, you might like to know Mum’s not your mother, I’m your mother, Mum’s your nan, ok? Did you listen to that?

Does Mum know you’re telling me? (*LI 18*)

In discussing how this changes their lives, they think of the implications:

I don’t care if she goes crazy.

So long as it’s you she goes crazy with.

I can tell her to leave you alone because I’m your mum.

I don’t think that works. (*LI 19*)

Charles Spencer argued in his review of the play that it is “almost insultingly glib in its refusal to explore the emotional consequences of such a revelation.” (Love and Information, Royal Court Theatre, review) Here Spencer is annoyed that Churchill is withholding information she as a playwright is promising to give to the spectator, the promise here being how they deal with this new reality. In conversation with Keith Johnstone, who worked at the Royal Court theatre as a playwright in residence at the same time as Churchill, he revealed that one of the ways playwrights work is that if something is promised on stage, it has to happen, meaning that by revealing such a big secret in this scene, the playwright is promising that this is going to be dealt with. By refusing to follow playwriting conventions and withholding information, Churchill is almost forcing her spectators to crave more

information, turning them into the characters in “torture”, wanting whatever information, be it true or not.

In the next scenes we go through information that makes you lose your job in “Fired” (LI 19), information that can kill in “Message” (LI 20), information that can put you in jail in “Grass” (LI 22), and information that can shorten your life in “Terminal” (LI 22). By showing the diversity of the functions of information, Churchill turns information in itself into an abject, a being that can traverse narratives and does not respect borders. And it is this abject that Churchill is warning its spectator about.

Section three is about information that can be true to someone but not everyone, and how this information can affect those affected by it. Never quite knowing how many people are in each scene, a reader of the play might have already questioned whether the play could be played with only one character in certain scenes. “Schizophrenic” highlights this for the reader, the unreliability of the whole play, and how one can never know who is actually speaking at any point. “Schizophrenic” is about someone feeling surveyed, and wanting information that is exclusive to this person’s truth, and not the collective one:

But you do know when you take your medication that doesn’t happen.

That’s why I stopped because it was making it hard to get the information.

You do know you’re ill.

I’ve been told that. (LI 24)

And this problem of knowing what information is truth and what is lies is what Churchill continues to press on in the next scenes. In “Spies” someone are discussing what the truth is about politics and “Bush and Blair” (LI 25), but their speculation is neither confirmed nor denied as the play moves on to “Dream”, and a world where people rely on what they want to be a truth to be true. The scene starts with a person discussing a dream he/she had, and reaches the conclusion that it is about cheating, either that his/her partner has cheated, or that he is going to cheat: “And I looked all those things up on a website about dreams, blackberry, butterfly, ballet, and every single one means infidelity. So now I know he’s cheating.” (LI 26) The characters in the scene end up using the dream as an excuse to cheat with each other: “either way” (LI 25). This scene shows how easily information can be manipulated to show a truth that is more fitting for each person, how easy it is to change information to be beneficial for a cause. This scene also reminds the spectator of “affair” from the last section, and it is easy to draw lines between the two. And this seems to be Churchill’s point exactly, with the lack of information given, the spectator automatically starts to draw its own conclusions, and

thereby creating one's own storyline and "truths" within the play, not unlike the "spies", which is exactly what a member of the audience is, spying on narratives and stories.

The next scene, "Recluse", is the first scene that gives stage directions about how many should be in this scene: "*Two inside, one outside the door who can be heard*" (LI 26). Interestingly, it does not state that "two" or "one" have to be people, so this is up to the director. "Recluse" is about someone living outside of society, who is famous but does not want to be. However, being a famous person, a reporter in this scene argues, leads to having your information be public knowledge: "I respect your desire for privacy and it would so much help your thousands of admirers to understand of you could say a few words to us about that privacy about how it feels to live here in a forest miles from" (LI 27). This is also the first scene that seems to have a strong or direct connection with previous scenes. Living in the forest alludes to "Remote", and the fact that this person is famous alludes to "Fan". When the word "remote" is used in the next sentence, this feeling of a connectedness to the scene "Remote" is strengthened.

In "God's voice" (seemingly) two people are having a discussion about God, and how one can hear God. (LI 29-30) This theme of religion and God comes up again later in the play with "God", but in this scene they are discussing omnipotence and omniscience. (LI 50) These two scenes seems to be a reflection of how even religion is just a collection of information that one can choose to interpret how one would like.

"The child who didn't know fear" is about not having enough information, and the direct dangers it leads to not knowing what everybody else knows. The moral is that if you do not know fear, you get eaten, and this shows just how important having enough information is. Churchill seems to be showing that even though she is warning about the dangers of having too much information and being too focused on information, she is in no way trying to tell the spectators that she solution is ignorance, refusing information. This is important because it shows Churchill's fright of inaction and ignorance that we have witnessed in other plays. However, Churchill soon shows how insignificant we are again, with the next scene, "Star". "Star" is about the insignificance of our existence shown by reducing us to a tiny speck of information in the universe, where we are only alive for a second. (LI 32) By doing this, Churchill seems to argue that even though inaction is the greatest fault, one should not think that one is significant and can change anything. This hopelessness is what I argue has gotten to Churchill in these most recent plays, and as we will see, I argue that with this hopelessness ingrained, Churchill has given up the fight for herself, handing the responsibility over to a younger, new generation.

Section four deals with having too much information, and what having a good or bad memory really means emotionally. “Wedding video” is about relying on technology for memory: “because I wouldn’t remember all this if without the video I wouldn’t remember hardly anything at all about it because I can’t remember anything about that day that’s not on the video not clearly.” (LI 35) A character in this scene is unable to remember something if it is not on a video, which is similar to “remote”, where one character is unable to tell the weather without technology. “Savant” is about remembering/knowing everything, and makes one question whether it is important to remember the weather and food one had at a specific date. And why does the person remember? Because something special happened that day? (LI 36) It is also not evident why this person remembers so much from a specific date. One possible solution could be that he/she is flipping through some kind of social media, which is exactly where one would share meals. Another solution is that something special happened on this day, which is usually why one remember insignificant details of a day. However, the next scene, “Ex”, also focuses on the food a couple have shared together, instead of everything else that supposedly should be more important in a relationship. (LI 37-38) This supports my earlier claim that they also might be going through some kind of social media, seeing as they are remembering the same meals. However, they do have different memories when it comes to these meals, which shows that no matter how something is documented, the feelings one might have towards these things vary. They also remember the good stuff more than the bad:

We were really happy.

Or sad, we used to cry.

Did we? (LI 38)

Whether or not they cried is something that would not be documented, and therefore also something they more easily forget.

Just to make it abundantly clear that we are discussing memories the scene is called “Memory house”. In this scene, someone wants to improve their memory, and goes through exercises to do so. It works, and something new is recalled by doing the exercise. The fact that “Muscles of the brain” (LI 40) is mentioned reminds us of the chicken scene “lab”, where someone was doing research on the brains of chickens.

In “Dinner”, a plan to go to dinner is forgotten, (LI 45), and in “Piano”, we meet someone with a short memory span, who is sat in front of a piano to play and plays perfectly, but forgets everything after having played. (LI 45) In “Flashback”, it is clear that someone would have liked to *unknow* something: “They say time, you may be able to forget, even if

it's a long time." (LI 46) This lets us question the previous scene, "Piano", and how we might have felt sorry for the person who can play so beautifully without knowing he/she can play, and now we understand that for some our unconscious memory can be a burden, while for others it is a blessing.

In all these scenes, information and memory is linked, and I want to argue that Churchill is again showing a feeling of helplessness about a generation that is so dependent on electronics that memory in a memory-stick becomes just as valuable, or perhaps even crucial, as memory stored in our brains.

Section five shifts the focus to what information one perceives as truth, and destabilises language and the meaning of the information one receives. The first scene is called "Linguist" and is about knowing a word in different languages, showing how different things can mean the same, how the same signifier can have different signified depending on where one is. (LI 48) In "Maths", seemingly two people discuss how mathematics can be perceived as the true language, seeing as it "is really true" (LI 49) and how we can only know things from our own stand stead.

"Sex", a very short scene, again attempts at comparing love and information, and the characters discuss how sex is really just two sets of genes coming together: "sex essentially is information" (LI 49). By mixing love and information in this scene, as with comparing memory in a computer-chip and memory in the brain, Churchill destabilises truth, and presents a chilling and depression dystopia which she seems to suggest that we live in, a time where everything can happen on a computer, where love is no more real than information, and information no more true than love.

"Rash" reminds of parents trying to do what is best for a child, and shows someone trying to get information from looking at a rash, but not really reaching any conclusions: "He's trying to tell us something" (LI 50). This sense of there being children in the scene is confirmed to a greater extent in the next scene, that is titled "Children" and is about having or not having children. In "Children" someone is telling, supposedly, someone else that they are unable to have children, and that person is analysing that information to have something to do with the fact that his former wife supposedly cheated on him. However, what the play is pointing out is how people draw conclusions based on few facts, exactly what the spectator are supposedly doing: "So it makes a difference does it?" (LI 51)

In "Shrink", information in the form of memories are painful, and as a character points out, could be meaningful: "That must be painful to you. You can take it to your analyst and have it turned into meaning." (LI 52) By angling this scene in this way, the playwright



again stresses how important one finds it to turn information into meaning, and like it was easy for one character to draw conclusions in the former scene “Children”, the characters in “Shrink” is looking for exactly this, for someone to make sense of information that is difficult to understand. However, Churchill stresses that not all information has meaning, as a character utters: “It doesn’t mean something.” (LI 52)

Section six deals with having information that can be harmful to oneself or other people, and discusses the problems that cannot go away just because one chooses to ignore the information. “The Child Who Didn’t Know Sorry” is about having to say you are sorry without feeling sorry:

I don’t feel sorry.

You have to say it. (LI 54)

By stating that the character has to say it even if he/she is not feeling it, Churchill questions the binary between emotions and information, and assesses feelings in a way a psychopath would, alluding to Churchill’s earlier plays about mental health issues, but not taking this any further.

“Climate” is about uncomfortable information that is hard to deal with, and that is easier to ignore:

Are you really not going to take it seriously?

I don’t know how to. (LI 54)

With the sentence: “I’m frightened” (LI 54), Churchill once again reminds us of Angie’s “prophecy” in *Top Girls*, and “frightening” is a theme that comes back again and again in Churchill’s plays, also reminding us of the connection between all these plays. What is “frightening” in this scene is the future, and how climate change can kill us. The difference between Angie’s fright and this character’s fright is that Angie’s fright is about the political landscape, and how she as a woman will fare in the world, whereas the fear of climate change is about the entire human kind. And this might be exactly what is important here, a shift in what Churchill finds “frightening”. Whereas it used to be about feminist politics, of the future of women, it now, with this statement can suggest that it has shifted to a more encompassing fright, that human kind is destroying the earth. This can suggest that feminist politics are not as pressing anymore, after all, a lot has happened since 1982. But it can also suggest that her focus has simply shifted.

“Censor” is about censorship, and who gets to decide what information to give and not give to the public. The characters seem to be writing some kind of official document, and wants to censor it: “The Ministry of Defence considers it a breach of security.” (LI 55) By

concluding that there are “[a]bout thirty” (*LI 55*) more to go through, we see how it never ends, and that the document will probably end up looking a lot different when they are done. Again, this shows an instability of truth.

In “Wife”, memory is used as a way of validating what information is real and not. Just like earlier in “Fan” where information was used by the fans when determining who knew the celebrity the best, and who cared the most, memory is used here for the same function. A woman is trying to convince her husband that she is real and there with him, and uses her memories to try and validate: “If we made love you’d know it was me because there are things we like to do and no one else would know that, if I was a stranger pretending to be her I wouldn’t know those things, you’d feel you were back with me, you would I know, please.” (*LI 56*) As spectators, it is impossible to know who is right of these two, is the man ill with a brain condition making him not remember certain things, or is he right and his wife is dead, and a robot or an imposter is trying to take his wives place? By not giving us any answers, only more questions, Churchill leaves the spectators wanting more information again, and questioning what is real and not real.

In “Decision”, someone is trying to decide whether to move somewhere, convinced that he/she needs to: “make a rational decision based on the facts.” (*LI 56*) In not being able to do that, the other character tries to help by saying that he/she wants he/she to stay. Whether or not that has anything to say is not determined as the scene ends before the other person gets to answer. Here Churchill again divides Love and Information, and contrasts the two, in the way that more information about the one of the person’s feelings might change whether or not the other person would leave, meaning that the information in this scene could lead to, or at least determine, the course of their love.

“The Child Who Didn’t Know Pain” alludes back to “The Child Who Didn’t Know Sorry”, and “The Child Who Didn’t Know Fear”, and is about explaining something to someone who has never felt it before, in this case, pain. Similarly to “The Child Who Didn’t Know Fear”, the other characters try to explain pain by describing the feelings: “Hurting is well it’s pain, it’s like uncomfortable but more, it’s something you’d want to move away from but you can’t, it’s an intense sensation, it’s hard to ignore” (*LI 58*) They are unable to get an explanation through so he/she can understand, the closest they get is: “It’s like being unhappy but in your leg” (*LI 57*) In other words, they are trying to use words/information to describe something that has to do with emotions. What Churchill seems to want to highlight with these scenes, and the ones dealing with using technology as “memory”, is that no matter how much “emotions” or “love” is replaced by, or explained with, information, there will

always be an aspect of something that can not be explained with simply information. I argue that this is Churchill's way of arguing that we need to remember to stay connected to each other on a human and emotional level, and or we might end up like the characters in these three scenes, not understanding basic human emotions.

In "Earthquake" the characters talk about seeing earthquakes. This highlights how one can not really see the specific earthquake, only feel it. One of the characters talk about feeling the earthquake because he/she is sad of the consequences, while the other person talks about seeing it, and thinking it looks cool: "That black wave with the cars in it was awesome." (*LI* 60) I argue that this scene highlights what the previous scene was trying to say, that some things we are supposed to just know and understand, because we are human beings, but the only way we can be sure that this happens is by staying connected.

In section seven, cultural differences when it comes to love and information is taken into account. The first scene, "Chinese Poetry" is about translation, and how meaning can change when something is being translated from one word to another:

What it literally says is 'mountain girl door'.

So maybe

A girl from the mountain is waiting outside my door. A girl climbs the mountain and comes to a door. (*LI* 62)

In "Manic", China is referenced, alluding to the previous scene, and is about cultural differences when it comes to colours: "red is blood and bullfights and seeing red in anger but red is joyful, red is celebration" (*LI* 62) This draws attention to the fragility of language, and how meaning is perhaps not as meaningful as one would think, in that things mean different things according to culture and language. By drawing attention to this fragility, I argue that Churchill argues how important it is to stay connected to each other on an emotional level, because everything else is unstable.

"Grief" is about someone who has lost someone, and another person trying to comfort him/her by being concerned whether or not he/she gets to eat and sleep enough. In other words, the comforter is trying to make sure the emotions of the other person are doing OK by making sure the other senses are satisfied:

He must have meant everything to you.

Maybe. We'll see. (*LI* 63)

In "Fate", seemingly two people are discussing what sounds like determinism, and whether or not one has free will. One person argues that if one could read all information in the world in one split second, one would: "know exactly what you were going to" (*LI* 64) do.

In other words, in this scene they use information as a way to predict the future, saying that the only thing keeping us from not knowing the future is not having enough information. This scene shows a thirst for knowledge that Churchill seems to be warning about.

“Virtual” alludes to previous scenes such as “Wife”, when talking about how: “she’s a thing she’s a thing” (LI 67) The only difference here is that no one is convinced of the realness. It seems to be about a virtual person, about someone falling in love with an animated character, much like in the popular film “Her” that came out one year after this play was first performed, that can seem to be totally based on this one scene. The scene again highlights the gap between “love” and “information”, and that there must be something more than only more information keeping one thing real and something else not.

The last scene is marked first with the title “Last Scene”, and on the next line “Facts”, both in bold. (LI 70) It is a quiz, where one person knows all answers, except about love, which is the only questions he/she finds difficult to answer. The question: “Do you love me?” (LI 71) is asked, and then answered a few lines down, along with another answer:

By what name do we usually refer to Oceanus Australensis Picardia?

I do yes I do. Sea anemone. (LI 71)

With this, Churchill seems to be concluding that there is a lot between “love” and “information”, and no matter how much information that is provided, the human aspect of emotions are what is most important to remember.

After “Facts”, there is a section in the play text titled “Random”: “*These things can happen in any section. DEPRESSION is an essential part of the play. The other random items are optional.*” (LI 74) All the scenes that are optional are very short, and can be used to create connections between scenes, or distract the spectator from making connections between scenes. By having this optional part of the play, Churchill hands over a lot of power to the director to create meaning. This could be a way for Churchill to mark how she is not quite sure of what exactly lies between “love” and “information”, and how they are connected, or it could mean that she wants the director to have the power to conclude differently than she herself would, stating that she perhaps is not too sure that her own conclusion is the right one.

“Depression” is split into several smaller parts and: “*Each is said by one person to another who doesn’t respond. The characters can be the same each time, or the depressed person can be the same and the others different, or they can all be different.*” (LI 74) This differs a lot from earlier in the play where there usually are not any directions, except that the characters should not be the same. This occurrence of the same actors that this scene enables

it to work as a red thread, something the spectators can hold on to, even though it works just as the rest of the play, too much and too little information. Just like the random scenes however, they could work in the opposite way, interrupting connections between scenes and make them more separate.

I am arguing that Churchill is searching for human connection, and that she is afraid of the separation between humans and nature, and the consequences this can have, just like Michael Billington stated in his review, that the play has: “a deep sense of political and personal unease about a society in which speed of communication replaces human connections.” (Love and Information – Review) What is different here from the earlier plays however is this uncertainty I have argued is present, that the critics do not mention. Churchill does not seem to be sure that her perspective is the right one anymore, and seems more searching for point of view than earlier.

The abject of the mother is not present in this play, as it seems that female and male perspectives have merged into a “human perspective”. However, even with “the abject” tolerated, it is clear that Churchill is not portraying this as an utopia, or a positive world at all.

I am arguing that from an ecofeminist perspective that the way the people are dependent on information in the form of electronics and created a gap between humans and nature, meaning that neither man nor woman is close to nature in this world. This is what Churchill is witnessing but not able to prevent. The world seems to be falling apart for Churchill, with no solution other than that people need to connect with each other. And this leads us to *Escaped Alone*, and perhaps the end of the world.

## ***Escaped Alone* (2016)**

*Escaped Alone* was first performed at the Royal Court Theatre in 2016, and is Caryl Churchill's most recent play. Just like the previous plays I have discussed, especially *Not Not Not Not Not Enough Oxygen*, *The Skriker*, *Far Away*, and *A Number*, *Escaped Alone* presents a clear dystopian world, a world that is on the verge of going under. I am arguing that this play is Churchill's way of saying that someone else has to take over finding an utopia. I argue that the massive destruction of the world that is evident in *Escaped Alone* and the characters watching the world fall apart is Churchill placing herself amongst the women in the garden, without a solution to how the world can become better, in other words, a retirement letter to her spectators.

The title is taken from the book of Job in the bible, which tells the story of Job and how he stayed true in his faith. What this does to the play is raise the question of whether the destruction happening upon the world is manmade or not. (Billington *Escaped Alone* Review) This is interesting because it hints at a hopelessness I argued started perhaps with *Love and Information*, in other words a transformation happening sometime between 2002 and 2012. In *Escaped Alone*, there is no fight left in any of the characters, they are only spectators to a world going under around them. They are old and cannot do everything anymore:

LENA: always wanted to go to Japan

SALLY: get to Tesco first (*EA* 41)

Just like I have argued that Marlene was Churchill at the time it was written, the cast can now be read to be another assortment of Churchill's, concluding that everything is going to hell. In many ways it can feel like Marlene has matured and become older, just like Churchill herself, and that the experience that matters now is no longer what they can do, only what they can observe. Whereas the characters in *Top Girls* wanted to change the world, to have jobs and take part in patriarchy, the women in *Escaped Alone* has given up, it is no longer their fight, all they can do is observe.

The title also alludes to the hopelessness in that it is about someone being "alone". Including alluding to the bible, it also alludes to *Moby Dick*, and how Ishmael survives to tell the tale of the sinking ship. Because that is exactly what the world in *Escaped Alone* is, a sinking ship, and with having an assortment of women only watching it happen, she can seem to suggest that perhaps she is the one surviving to tell us. However, it could also be that she is not the one surviving to tell us, but rather that she is stating that she is going down with the

ship with her friends, and someone else to be the once escaping to tell. In my reading, this is Churchill's way of asking someone else to take over the ship, to try and find the utopia she has been searching for but have not found.

From an ecofeminist perspective, the women have separated themselves from nature, from the destruction that is going on around them. And because they have separated themselves, the world is being destroyed. There is no evidence in *Escaped Alone* that the women are treated unjustly, but if the women have all become Marlenes, being like men in the patriarchy, that means that human kind is further removed from nature than it used to be. This separation from nature is what "The Skriker" warns about, that nature and technology can not understand each other, and if human kind has decided to gang up with technology and go against nature, then there is no stopping it.

The plays of Caryl Churchill have seemed to evolve in order to find the perfect world for women and femininity, to find a world that is not run by masculinity. However, in this search, the worlds around the people seem more and more devastating the more women are treated justly. What I believe is happening here is that as the women become more like men, and identify less with nature, nature starts acting up. And even though Churchill seems to argue that it has become better to be a woman in this world, seeing as the abject has been tolerated and disappeared, she also seems to argue that the world is still not ideal, and probably will not be for a while. Hopefully, she will continue to write plays so that we can learn what happens next in the chronicles of Churchill, will the world completely disappear under the characters' feet? Or will the characters be able to reconnect with nature in such a way that men and women can be equal in a world that is no longer a patriarchy, but something more, something better, something else?

# Conclusion

In *Not Not Not Not Not Enough Oxygen*, we saw a world lacking of both oxygen and femininity, a world that did not fare well without women. I argued that the dystopian landscape is a representation of the state of the problems of the characters, and that Churchill argues that inaction is the biggest problem in that world.

In *Top Girls*, the female is very present, and through analysis of the different female characters in the dinner scene, and of Marlene, I argued that the figure of Marlene is an expression of all the different women in the dinner-scene. I argued that it is this woman that Churchill wants to find a world for, the woman that does not have to sacrifice her femininity in order to have success.

Moving on to *The Skriker*, I argued that the figure of “The Skriker” is the personification of the wrath of nature, acting up because fertility is gone. By using ecofeminism, I was able to reveal the power structures by placing them in a hierarchy in the text of *The Skriker*, and determine how the disconnection between humans and nature is what has caused destruction, and that Churchill is suggesting an unity for humans closer to nature as a solution. By connecting my reading of dystopia with ecofeminism, I was able to bridge the reading of feminism and dystopia to reveal an even closer interconnectedness than I had already established. With this reading on place, I argued that the hierarchical structure of *Not Not Not Not Not Enough Oxygen* became clearer in that “money” and “masculinity” is on the top, and “nature” and “femininity” on the bottom, which is perhaps one of the main problems Churchill highlighted. I also argued that the hierarchical structure of *Top Girls* became more evident with an ecofeminist perspective, and that Marlene is better off because she is able to “be like a man” on top of the hierarchy. I also argue that by excluding her femininity to become superior, she is dislocating the female from the body and nature, and by that becoming as destructive to nature as man. Using this I concluded that by seeing the plays I had already discussed from an ecofeminist perspective, it became clear that one of the consequences of discarding femininity, and letting men and women become more masculine, is a widening gap between man and nature, which leads to more and more devastating dystopias in Churchill’s plays.

In my discussion of *Far Away*, I argued that the relationship between nature and humans is more complicated than in the earlier dystopias, because they are both on the same team and against each other at the same time. I argued that from an ecofeminist perspective, this development should have been positive, seeing as the humans in the play has united.



However, I argued that their merging is not a positive thing, seeing as they have merged in war, and by humanising nature, Churchill has separated nature from the natural, letting humans and nature destroy each other.

In *A Number*, I argued that the lack of a mother is again reflected in the dystopian landscape, as in *Not Not Not Not Not Enough Oxygen*. I argued that Churchill is arguing that inaction is the biggest problem, and that she warns of a world where human beings are not connected to each other, and this connection will end in doom. This connection, I argue, is part of the feminine, and an aspect of the feminine that has to be embraced to move on, meaning that humans must connect with each other closer to nature in order to survive. Using ecofeminism in combination with *A Number*, I argued that by completely removing femininity from the equation, science and the masculine is completely removed from nature, resulting in a world full of separations, again resulting in Salter, B1, and B2 not understanding emotions. With this reading I argued that Churchill is showing just how horrible a world without women and femininity would be.

After having established what “the abject” is, I aimed at uniting the plays I had already discussed in “the abject”. I argued that in *Not Not Not Not Not Enough Oxygen* the lack of a mother and oxygen was “the abject”. In *Top Girls*, I argued that the personification of the problems came in the form of “Marlene”, and that she was also the embodiment of “the abject”. In *The Skriker*, I argued that “The Skriker” was “the abject”, and in *Far Away* the lack of nurture can be seen as “the abject”, just like in *A Number*. By uniting all the abjects like this, I argued that in order to not have the abject as a problem, to make it disappear, it needs to be tolerated. I argued that if women would not have to sacrifice their femininity, the abject would be tolerated and disappear, and the solution to this is for humans to unite closer to nature, and separate from technology and the masculine.

In the third chapter, women do not have to sacrifice their femininity any longer, so I argue that the abject is resolved in this sense. However, the utopia is not reached, seeing as new problems are now evident, problems that have been underlying in the dystopian landscape of Churchill’s plays throughout her career. The dystopian landscape has taken over completely, and the world is going under, meaning that even though humans are more similar, they are still too far removed from nature and femininity, and not connected to each other. Humans have been able to unite, but are still too far away from nature.

In *Love and Information*, I argue that Churchill is searching for human connection, and is afraid of the separation technology is creating. What is different here in this chapter is that I argue there is a certain uncertainty to Churchill’s perspective, that she might not be so

sure of her own argument anymore. I argue that it is clear what she is saying, but that she is also suggesting there might be other, just as correct, answers. I argue that “the abject” is not present in this play, but that the disconnection between humans and the hierarchy between technology and nature is the big fright.

In *Escaped Alone*, I argue that Churchill has given up fighting for her utopia, and that even though feminist issues she has been working on has been resolved, the separation between humans and nature has become such a large problem with the evolving of technology that dystopia cannot be resolved. I argue that Churchill with *Escaped Alone* is asking someone else to take over finding an utopia, and let her be one of the ladies sitting in the garden, observing the end of the world from their comfortable chairs.

This thesis started with depressing worlds that were definitely sad but had a sense of something hopeful, with the runaways in *Not Not Not Not Not Enough Oxygen*, and the fact that some women could make it in *Top Girls*, even though the cost was high. In *The Skriker*, there was less hope, but still some, as the sisters stood stronger together against “The Skriker”. In *Far Away*, it became increasingly hopeless, where the world was going under, but at least the characters was still fighting, even if they did not know why was good and who was bad. In *A Number*, there was hope for those like Michael, who kept connected to others. And in *Love and Information*, there was love in amongst the information, even if the lines were blurred at times. In *Escaped Alone* however, the characters have given up, they are old and tired of fighting, and like Mick in *Not Not Not Not Not Enough Oxygen*, they are happy to have front row seats to a world going under as long as they are comfortable.

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