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The Drama of Daughterhood in Great Britain and Scandinavia: Caryl Churchill's and Margareta Garpe's Plays of the 1970s and 1980s

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ABSTRACT

This thesis aims at exploring the representation of daughterhood through a psychoanalytical and feminist critical approach in a selection of women playwrights from Great Britain and Scandinavia in the 1970s and 1980s. Motherhood and sisterhood have been pivotal topics of second-wave feminism; the purpose of this study is to change perspective and look at the daughter as both observer and active participant in the feminist battles. Starting from a presentation on the theoretical and methodological framework which centres on motherhood and daughterhood in psychoanalytical and feminist discourse, a historical overview of the different literary contexts will be provided. More specifically, the emergence of Thatcherism in Great Britain and its implications in feminist politics will be analysed in contrast to the consolidation of the social state in Scandinavia. The analysis will focus on two case studies, Caryl Churchill for Great Britain and Margareta Garpe for Sweden. These exemplary authors will be examined in two distinct sections, to allow an in-depth close-reading of the texts. Caryl Churchill is considered one of the most inventive and visionary living playwrights in the UK, with works that have already entered the literary canon. Her investigation on motherhood and daughterhood related themes will be tackled in three of her most celebrated plays: ownership and motherhood in *Owners* (1972), the performance of motherhood in *Cloud Nine* (1979), and the mother/daughter battle in *Top Girls* (1982). The experience of the feminist collective in the composition and production of a play is a key aspect that will be pointed out also in relation to the Swedish case study: Margareta Garpe. One of the most important voices of contemporary Swedish theatre, Garpe famously collaborated with fellow playwright Suzanne Osten in realising political plays that aimed at igniting the public debate on feminist topics. This study will take into consideration the most influential of these collaborative works, *Jösses Flickor! Befrielesen Är Nära* (1974), which will be followed by two more intimate plays written by Garpe: freedom and sacrifice in *Barnet* (1977) and the reversal of family roles in *Till Julia* (1987). The final part of the thesis will provide a contrastive analysis of the case studies, to look at the different themes in a broader perspective.

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INTRODUCTION

This cathexis between mother and daughter
– essential, distorted, misused –
is the great unwritten story.[1]

En mor och en dotter,
vilken fruktansvärd kombination
av känslor, förvirring och förstörelse.[2]

The interplay between mother and daughter is so intimate, peculiar, and difficult to unravel, as to become, in the words of Ingmar Bergman, "a terrible combination of emotions, confusion, and destruction." Over the past century, the unique nature of this bond has interested different theoretical frameworks, from sociology and anthropology, to literary criticism. One of the key topics of feminist debate, it has inspired feminist scholars and writers in many different forms. The aim of my thesis is to explore how mothers and daughters have been represented onstage in a selection of plays by women playwrights. Since I am interested in the most political and prolific phase of second-wave feminism, I have focused my attention on 1970s and 1980s theatre productions. As for the literary contexts, I have decided to look at Great Britain and Scandinavia, with the goal to compare two relatively different political and sociological scenarios. Throughout this thesis, I am mainly dealing with dramatic texts, and not with theatrical texts.[3] The former indicates the written text, or the actual script, while the latter defines the performance as a whole, including elements not necessarily present in the written text, such as paralinguistic features or other theatrical systems.[4] My aim is to look at the dramatic text as a starting point which allows different interpretations, both for audiences and theatre practitioners.

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[1] Rich, Adrienne. *Of Woman Born. Motherhood as Experience and Institution*. W.W. Norton, 1976, p. 225.
[2] "A mother and a daughter, what a terrible combination of emotions, confusion, and destruction". Ingmar Bergman, *Höstsonaten/Autumn Sonata* (1978), my translation. (Unless otherwise stated, all English translations are mine).
[3] Elam differentiates between "theatrical and performance texts" and "the written or dramatic text" as the "two potential focuses of semiotic attention" (3).
[4] Elam presents Tadeusz Kowzan's (1968) approximate typology of thirteen theatrical systems, which includes "language, tone, facial mime, gesture, movement, make-up, hairstyle, costume, props, décor, lighting, music and sound effects" (45).

The first chapter presents the methodological and theoretical frameworks of my study, which centres on motherhood and daughterhood in psychoanalytical and feminist discourse. An analysis of the contributions of traditional psychoanalysis to the motherhood debate is essential in order to appreciate the feminist reactions to Freudian and Lacanian assumptions. More specifically, the second section delineates radical feminists' rejection of the womanhood/motherhood binary, and the idea of "matrophobia" introduced by Adrienne Rich, which combines the fear to adapt to a patriarchal system with the abandonment of conventional gender roles. Rich's *Of Woman Born* is an inspirational cornerstone of feminist writing which is a useful tool to shed light on the mother/daughter bond, a "cathexis [which is] the great unwritten story" (225).

The chapter's central section examines Nancy Chodorow's ground-breaking social psychology study *The Reproduction of Mothering*, first published in 1978. This work is extremely important for the reassessment of traditional psychoanalytical thought, taking into account the ways in which socially constructed behavioural patterns have reinforced the general assumption that a woman's primary role is that of the mother, and that this role is passed on from mother to daughter (Chodorow 3).

Chodorow's ideas opened a debate in the American context, but found fertile ground in Europe, where they were elaborated even further by the members of the so-called French school. Each in her own way, Luce Irigaray, Hélène Cixous and Julia Kristeva were promoters of a feminist revolution, something which had to start from the very language women speak, read and write into. The new *parler femme* or *écriture feminine* - advocated by Irigaray and Cixous respectively, were to be found within the female body, an entity which had been completely neglected by patriarchal discourse. I am particularly interested in the way these scholars reinterpret their feminist practice as a way to find new forms to express individuality yet remaining faithful to the idea of a collective experience of womanhood that needs to be shared, woman to woman, mother to daughter. Irigaray's essay "When Our Lips Speak Together", for instance, celebrates the oneness between mother and daughter, a relationship that goes beyond the roles of nurturer and nurtured (72). Despite the good reception of Cixous's and Irigaray's theories, the feminist that best represents the new feminist approach to traditional psychoanalysis is Julia Kristeva. In this thesis I take under examination her important work *Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art*, where Kristeva defines the 'Semiotic', a pre-linguistic territory in which the child and the mother can express themselves freely, outside of the patriarchal norm (18). For the purposes of my textual analysis, I also give an account of other contributions

to the field by Kristeva, including her influential *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection,* in which she traces a parallel between the rejection of the mother and the discovery of the child's individuality (5).

The last section of the first chapter is dedicated to Judith Butler's reaction to Kristeva's theories. In *Gender Trouble*, the American scholar famously addressed some issues concerning Kristeva's interpretation of the Lacanian 'Symbolic', which is the place where the child finds its own identity outside of the maternal womb. Butler criticizes Kristeva's assumption that the maternal body, dominated by poetic language and residing in the 'Semiotic', is deemed as a place with no coherent and homogeneous identity, a place of chaos. Butler questions the binary opposition between 'Symbolic' and 'Semiotic', claiming that it is dangerous to consider femaleness as something uncontrollable, completely external to culture. Butler's considerations are helpful in the analysis of feminist theories of the 1980s, which I have selected as main theoretical reference for my study. As a matter of fact, I have decided to focus my attention on the feminist debate contemporary to the publication of my case studies.

The second chapter offers a historical overview of the two historical and literary contexts in which the selected plays are located. Firstly, I trace some relevant political changes in the UK throughout the 1970s and 1980s. Starting off as an unstable political period of great economic recession and social unrest, I go on giving some insights about the premiership of Margaret Thatcher, who held office from 1979 to 1991. More particularly, I investigate the achievements and contradictions of Great Britain's first woman prime minister, someone who would not consider herself as voicing the needs of women, but who was only interested in creating "one nation with everyone being a man of property" (McNeil 227) The section that follows deals with feminist practices in the UK during those decades, and their responses against Thatcher's antifeminist measures. For the purposes of this section, I have taken into consideration Germain Greer's *The Female Eunuch* (1970) and Eva Figes's *Patriarchal Attitudes* (1970), two cornerstones of feminist writing that engage with themes like the traditional family and the role attributed to women by the patriarchy.

Olof Palme, prime minister of Sweden from 1969 to 1976 and then from 1982 until his assassination in 1986, is presented as Thatcher's natural opponent. A social democrat at heart, he was able to develop and solidify the already existent Welfare State, with special policies to help people in need. In this section I explain how he was able to make Sweden the most radical example of a total Welfare state in which individuals are given full support

by the state, in the pursuit of equality. However, Sweden was a country of contradictions, where women had certainly more support from the state in comparison to the UK, but who were still fighting for their rights. In the last part of this historical presentation, I have a look at various feminist practices in Sweden, including the feminist *Grupp 8*, an influential female organisation that promoted free abortion and equal rights for female workers.

Chapter III is entirely dedicated to Caryl Churchill, a British playwright. Poignant commentator of contemporary politics and society, Churchill has always been able to adapt the newest content to the newest theatrical forms.[5] She is still active today and her plays are constantly staged all over the world, with themes that still resonate with us contemporaries. Churchill is always political and a militant feminist. In her work she has never hidden her criticism towards capitalism and the patriarchy, and she has offered irreverent commentaries on the current state of affairs, both in and outside her country.

The literature on Caryl Churchill is very vast, both in terms of academic articles and more accessible study guides to her plays.[6] In a 1991 monograph, Kritzer-Howe is one of the first critics to engage with Churchill's works in a feminist perspective. Focusing on what she defines as 'Theatre of Empowerment", she discusses the major plays, analysing the ways in which they have influenced contemporary feminist playwriting. In her 1997's *Caryl Churchill*, Aston gives a detailed account of Churchill's plays from the early years at the radio to more recent productions at the Royal Court Theatre, which have been added in the third edition of the monograph. Aston's criticism is illuminating in that she skilfully traces the dominant themes of Churchill's plays providing a "critically informed and accessible approach to Churchill's playwriting" (xv). In 2009, Aston and Diamond have edited a collection of essays in *The Cambridge Companion to Caryl Churchill.* The different sections explore the playwright's work in different thematic units, in a way adapting their contents to the "non-linear structuring which characterises Churchill's plays" (14). This collection is very different from Gobert's monograph published in 2014–an extremely accessible guide to Churchill's playwriting. The work regroups the single plays in thematic sections, yet it treats them independently from one other.

The case studies that I have selected represent different stages of Churchill's engagement with the matter. In *Owners* (1972) she is preoccupied with the intrusion of the

[5] When asked about her writing process, Churchill once stated: "I enjoy finding the form that seems to best fit what I'm thinking about" (qtd. in Lyall).
[6] Only to quote a few, Aston (1997, 2010) and Diamond (2010), who have extensively studied Churchill's production.

logic of capitalism into our private lives. Motherhood is here treated as both an impediment to female success and as a commodity, a simple transaction. Marion, the protagonist, foreshadows Thatcherian pragmatism and bourgeois feminism in that she believes that everything is possible if you put your mind to it, even purchasing a baby. In *Cloud Nine* (1979) Churchill addresses sexual politics in an unprecedented way, toying with theatrical form and reversing typical representation of gender. The performative aspects of motherhood and daughterhood take a prominent place both in the first act, set in an English colony in Victorian times and in the second act, set in the 1970s. The last play under examination is *Top Girls* (1982), Churchill's most celebrated achievement. Despite the rich literature that has been produced on the text,[7] my purpose is to look at one of the least studied aspects, that is the representation of the daughter and her relationship to the surrogate father figure.

Margareta Garpe is the Swedish author that I have selected for Chapter IV. A politically engaged journalist and feminist, she was one of the members of the feminist collective *Grupp 8*. During the 1970s, together with fellow playwright Suzanne Osten she produced a series of feminist plays that investigate on the central topics of the public debate, including the discussion on abortion. From the 1980s onwards she turned to a more intimate style, close to the psychoanalytical approach of Ingmar Bergman, with whom she collaborated in different projects. However, unlike Bergman and other few contemporary playwrights, very little has been published in English on her work. The only notable publication (in Swedish) is Birgitta Johannsson's book *Befrielsen är nära! Feminism och teaterpraktik i Margareta Garpes och Suzanne Ostens 1970-talsteater*, a survey of Garpe's and Osten's collective works. My aim is to reassess the legacy of this playwright, which is a voice worth discovering due to her unpaired ability to portray complex female characters that represent the contradictions of our time. I have specifically chosen her over other Swedish playwrights for her great dedication to the portrayal of mothers and daughters, from the beginning of her career until more recent productions.

The first selected play is *Jösses Flickor! Befrielsen är nära!* ("Gee, girls! Liberation is at hand", 1974), written with Suzanne Osten and considered the theatrical manifesto of the feminist *Grupp 8*. An English translation of the play has been written but never published nor performed. This is the reason why I have decided to give prominence to such

[7] Among others, Tycer (2008).

an iconic text in Swedish contemporary feminist theatre.[8] The second case study is *Barnet* (1977), a more intimate play in which Garpe resumes a more existential theatrical experience aimed at delving into the psyche of her protagonists. Lastly, I analyse *Till Julia* (1987) the portrait of a dysfunctional mother/daughter relationship which shows Garpe's interest for complicated family relationships.

The theatre of Caryl Churchill has had a tremendous impact on feminist theatre practices, hence all the publications specifically dedicated to the author and the fact that she has been cited in various works on feminist theatre in the last decades.[9] Her playwriting style has also been very well received in Sweden, especially among feminist writers. Many of Churchill's plays have been translated into Swedish and performed in important venues, more famously *Top Girls*, which was staged in 1983 at the Kungliga Dramatiska Teater in Stockholm.

The same cannot be said for Margareta Garpe, an author that has remained known only in Scandinavia. Only one of her plays, *Till* Julia, has been translated and published in a collection of contemporary Scandinavian theatre, but the text itself has never been performed in Great Britain. As a matter of fact, this is not something that has affected Garpe only, but is more generally a problem for a number of contemporary Scandinavian playwrights that are completely unknown to the British public. The main reason for this could be the language barrier and the lack of experts specialized in the translation of theatrical texts written in "marginal" languages. However, this is only partly true; while Scandinavian Studies is a niche field which very often lingers on what are deemed to be subjects of World Literature (such as the theatre of Ibsen and Strindberg, medieval sagas and more recently Children's Literature and detective fiction), some farsighted scholars have translated a selection of contemporary playwrights, including women, into English.[10] Despite their efforts, most of these texts have remained unstaged in the UK.

Support for the circulation of new Scandinavian dramaturgy outside of the Nordic countries comes from Scandinavian Arts Councils and other cultural institutions, with grants for translators and the organization of international readings and seminars to promote

[8] A Swedish revival of this play written by Malin Axelsson and called *Jösses Flickor - Återkomsten* has been staged at the Stockholms Stadsteater in 2006.
[9] Churchill is included in collections of essays on contemporary theatre, such as Angelaki (2017), Godiwala (2003), Goodman (1993) and relevant articles by Diamond (1988), Ammen (1996), Harding (1998), among others.
[10] Norvik Press published a series of anthologies of new Scandinavian plays translated into English: *New Danish Plays* (ed. Hans Christian Andersen, 1996), *New Swedish Plays* (ed. Gunilla Anderman, 1992), *New Norwegian Plays* (ed. Janet Garton & Henning Sehmsdorf, 1989).

new plays. The Network for the *Nordic Performing Arts*, for example, aims at spreading information about performing arts between the Nordic countries, with events such as the *Nordic Performing Art Days* and the *New Nordic Drama reading festival*, in which an international jury selects the best contemporary Scandinavian play of the year.[11] Scensverige is the Swedish member of the Nordic organization: the willingness to showcase Swedish performing arts for the international market resulted in the compilation of a "Catalogue of Contemporary Swedish Drama Translated to Foreign Languages".[12]

The aim of my thesis, then, is to look at feminist theatre from a different angle, exploring two literary traditions that have not been compared yet. Each in her own way, these playwrights are in dialogue with the respective historical, political, and social contexts in which their plays were produced. Furthermore, both authors were (and still are) politically engaged and their texts have certainly been impacted by one of the most fruitful phases of second-wave feminism.

[11] "Network for the Nordic Performing Arts". *Scensverige*. https://scensverige.se/en/about-us/network-for-the-nordic-performing-arts/. Accessed 15 Feb. 2019.
[12] "Translated Swedish Drama." *Scensverige*. https://scensverige.se/en/projects/translated-swedish-drama/. Accessed 15 Feb. 2019.

CHAPTER I

Representations of Motherhood and Daughterhood in Psychoanalytical Discourse

1. The contribution of traditional psychoanalysis to the motherhood debate

In this section I will focus my attention on the contributions of psychoanalysis to the motherhood debate, in the attempt to trace a genealogy of the representations of motherhood and daughterhood in contemporary western societies that can be useful in my analysis of the selected case studies. I have chosen to focus my attention on scholars with a psychoanalytical approach to the subject matter, in that I see it as the most relevant in the analysis of the plays that will follow. Psychoanalytical patterns, then, are useful indicators of specific social dynamics and power relations that the playwrights portray in their works.

The theories that I am taking into consideration come from heterogeneous sources, from clinical psychoanalysts of the Freudian school to post-Lacanian theorists, and are presented in chronological order, so as to allow a more comprehensive understanding of this intricate matter. Throughout this survey I will try to point out the main critical standpoints, delineating the problematic concept of biological motherhood as opposed to emotional motherhood. A deconstruction of what is generally linked to motherhood, seen as a mere patriarchal construct, will help open up the debate on new theories of representation of the paradigmatic mother/daughter relationship.

1.1 The discovery of a matriarchal pre-history

It is appropriate to start with an historical overview of the ways in which mothers have been perceived by and located into patriarchal narratives. Women are subjected and respond to the historical moment in which they act, within its linguistic and semiotic constraints. It is unfruitful to generalize their condition of subordination to patriarchy, and hence a cultural analysis and an arbitrary subdivision into different stages of motherhood is needed. One can start with a

> pre-modern mother; […] an early-modern mother (who emerges in Europe with Rousseau and the institutions needed by the first Industrial Revolution […]); a high-modernist mother constructed through social changes in post-Romanticism (leading up to the First World War) and evident in full-blown modernism (between the two World Wars); finally, a postmodern mother. This

> latter figure is currently being constructed in response to social developments, particularly those arising from various 1960s movements (including feminisms), the rapid rise of multinational corporate capitalisms (the international financial elite) and the electronic technological revolution. (Kaplan 8)

The emergence of the pre-modern mother is a consequence of the analysis of Jean-Jacques Rousseau's ideas on the division of social labour and his theorisation of the separate spheres that allow our societies to be functional. He insists that if all men should be restored to their primal duties, one ought to "begin with the mothers. […] When women become good mothers, men will be good husbands and fathers" (Rousseau 13-14). In order to become an "active" part in society, women are only granted the "passive" role of nurturer and housekeeper, as the outside world is dominated by the man, who needs to be able to reconnect with his moral self as soon as he gets back home to his wife.

Each in his own way, Charles Darwin and Karl Marx contributed to the debate on the subdivision of family roles. Even though their theories defined traditional family only as social and class constructs, they also expressed conservative biological theories which placed the mother in her home as a way to safeguard the species. Family is thus perceived as an institution to be protected, a still space where gender roles have been fossilized in order to maintain social and economic stability. However, Marx is one of the first thinkers to question the efficacy of this model, calling for the end of the bourgeois family, the only possible family, in his Eurocentric view. He links family bonds to private property, capital and oppression, thus providing a different, negative dimension to the very institution of family. This system, then, seems to be unstable and only the result of social constructs imposed by capitalism. As explained by Brown, in his writings Marx called for "new social relations" within the family, reaching "a point of development where an individual is valued for who they are, rather than any abstract category of man, woman, etc" (212-213). If Darwin and Marx looked at the foundations of motherhood from an extrinsic standpoint, Sigmund Freud's theories about the unconscious and especially his theorisation of the Oedipus Complex, on the other hand, uncover our inner sphere and project social structures onto our unconscious self.

Nevertheless, even though the discourse on motherhood as either a social or unconscious construct had been opened up, all the viewpoints that I have presented so far are irremediably male centred, or better phallocentric, in that women are always analysed

from a very generic and external point of view, without delving into the specificity of the different female experiences. Women's voices and desires, then, are absent from these narratives.[1] Only in the 1970s and 1980s, within a second-wave feminist discourse, will the question of motherhood play a central role, with new perspectives on the mother's (and more generally women's) development as an independent subject which helped ignite new debates on all related issues such as life-work balance and more profound analysis of the mother-child relationship.

The modern family, then, is a changing form in which the mother is not confined in the home forced to exclusively take care of the child, whereas the father is the only actor to have access to the external world. It is only within these socially constructed circumstances that the child develops the Oedipal neuroses theorized by Freud, which in this respect are not intrinsic to the child but are developed through social factors. In psychoanalytical terms, for both male and female children, language becomes a substitute after the loss of the mother, who in turn is left in their unconscious. The boy and the girl need to find a way to understand their selfhood in what Freud calls the Post-Oedipal phase, and they resort to language to access the adult world.

Freud stresses the importance of the pre-Oedipal bond between mother and child. In his influential essay "Female Sexuality", published in 1931, a parallel is traced between the discovery of the Minoan-Mycenean civilisation lying behind the civilisation of Greece, and the discovery of a matriarchal pre-history prior to patriarchal history.[2] This primitive matriarchal phase has in itself no narrative and no history, and can be accessed and understood only retrospectively. Lacan will define it as the pre-verbal "Imaginary" which precedes the verbal "Symbolic". The pre-Oedipal phase has to be overcome by the child in order for it to grow independent from the mother, and to do so, the child has to turn to the father. Following Freud's argument, the rejection of the mother is faced differently in boys than in girls. In the boys' case, the resolution seems to be easier, since "boys are able to deal with their ambivalent feelings towards [the mother] by transferring all their hostility to the father" (235), with whom they will eventually identify. Seeing how his father acts

[1] One notable exception is Virginia Woolf, near contemporary of Marx and Freud. In her famous essay *A Room of One's Own*, first published in 1929, she explores the lack of women's fiction, something which she ultimately considers as lack of opportunity, rather than lack of talent. Woolf encourages women to "write all kinds of books, hesitating at no subject however trivial or however vast" (117), thus rebelling against male narratives that have made women only passive objects of desire.

[2] Freud states that "our insight into this early, pre-Oedipus phase in the little girl's development comes to us as a surprise, comparable in another field with the effect of the discovery of the Minoan-Mycenaean civilization behind that of Greece (226).

with his mother will prompt the boy to replicate this behaviour in his adult life with another woman. In the girl's case the process is more complicated, as she does not possess a penis and thus cannot have the fear of castration as a motivation to reject the love for her mother. Instead, "she acknowledges the fact of her castration, the consequent superiority of the male and her own inferiority", at the same time rebelling "against these unpleasant facts" (229), which will prompt her to transfer her love to the father, who will become the symbol of the future adult relationship with another man. The girl, then, abandons her bisexuality in the pre-Oedipal phase, embracing heterosexuality with the rejection of her mother, as Freud states in his essay "Femininity", published in 1933. The repression of the mother implies also a shift from an active (and masculine) sexuality to passive (and feminine) sexuality. However, this rejection is not complete, since it is not due to fear of castration, which is the most powerful deterrent for the boy. For this reason, the mother will occupy an important place in the daughter's adult life, even though the daughter has opted for the abandonment of her mother and has embraced heterosexuality fully (Freud, "Femininity" 191).

The problem with Freud's postulations is that mother-daughter relationships are read in retrospect from the point of view of a heterosexual male and with the implication that the Oedipal phase remains a central factor in the girl's development and can be overcome only with the help of the father figure. Patriarchal culture invades mother-daughter relationships, and "prehistory is written from the vantage point of history," (Abel xviii). Freud is able to explain this bond only through the daughter's relationship to the father, discarding the role of the mother in the child's subject formation.

1.2 Killing the symbolic mother: the Kleinian school and beyond

The Freudian school formed a generation of women psychoanalysts who paid attention to the woman's and mother's condition from a different angle, taking into consideration the specificities of female experiences. Among them, Melanie Klein states that the relationship that the daughter establishes with her father is but a replication of the previous relationship she had with the mother, who remains a constant presence in her life motivating her life decisions. The mother is even associated with the production of art and culture, thus

indicating that she is the source of intellectual and artistic energy.[3] For Karen Horney, female sexuality is liberated from the exclusive reproductive function exactly thanks to the transfer of affection from the mother to the father, which prompts women to naturally have heterosexual tendencies in their adult life. The girl identifies with the father because he symbolises freedom and independence. Using Horney's words, she opts for a "flight from womanhood"[4], seeing in the androgynous male identification a way to escape the disadvantaged condition of women which she experiences in her social life. Helene Deutsch describes the bisexual nature of girls during the pre-Oedipal phase and their oscillation between mother and father claiming that "the task of adolescence is not only to master the Oedipus complex, but also to continue the work begun during prepuberty, that is, to give adult forms to the old, much deeper, and much more primitive ties with the mother (*Psychology* 116). In another essay on female homosexuality, Deutsch states that in her mature patients there was "no sign of a 'masculine-feminine' opposition of roles" and "one received the impression that what made the situation so happy was precisely the possibility of playing both parts" ("Homosexuality" 40). Even the mother/child roles are deemed as reversible, this confirms the theory that the ego formation is not simply the result of simplistic identification with one gender or the other, but a more fluid exchange.

[3] The works of Melanie Klein are collected in *Love, Guilt and Reparation and Other Works, 1921-1945.* Dell, 1975.

[4] Horney uses this expression in her essay "The Flight from Womanhood: The Masculinity Complex in Women as viewed by Men and by Women", written in 1926 and published in Jean Strouse's *Women And Analysis* (1974).

2. *Sisterhood is Powerful*: feminist reactions to traditional psychoanalysis

2.1 Radical feminists and *matrophobia*

The 1970s were a very political phase of the American and European feminist debate, a decade in which scholars and thinkers adopted a critical attitude against a patriarchal system that had to be rejected as a whole. Radical feminism had the merit of bringing to the table important political and social issues, like inequality in the working place and unbalanced family relationships, which had led women to be trapped in a world where they had no voice. On the negative side, when dealing with topics related to motherhood/daughterhood, the scholarship of the time adopted almost exclusively a critical standpoint against the mother figure. In this section it will be explained why mothers were generally perceived as being patriarchal institutions, cultural objects representing everything a woman has to reject in order to be independent and emancipated. Traditional psychoanalytic discourse reinforced these assumptions and hindered the reassessment of motherhood as a more complex phenomenon than a simple social construct.

The accounts of feminists in the famous anthology *Sisterhood Is Powerful* called for a communion for all women, united in a common struggle against patriarchy. However, this inclusivity only interested women of the same generation: it was a horizontal rather than vertical phenomenon.[5] The typical voice of the feminist in the 1970s was the daughter rejecting the mother and bonding with her "sisters", seen as equal members of the same group. Like the female lover invoked by Irigaray, which will be addressed later on, relationships between two women that treat each other as equals, can also be "motherly", without the intrusion of patriarchal mechanisms linked to biological motherhood that require the presence of men in this picture - sexual intercourse, pregnancy, birth, and lactation. In this sense sisterhood is freed from the need to consider also the physical body, something which cannot be dismissed in the mother/daughter relationship. This attitude brought feminists of the time to have a hard time dealing with motherhood related issues in a constructive and inclusive way.

[5] Just to make an example, in her chapter called "Marriage and Motherhood", after an analysis of the unspoken struggles that a married woman has to go through in her everyday life, Beverly Jones urges her sisters to "get together to decide in groups of women how to get out of this bind, to discover and fight the techniques of domination in and out of the home. To change [their] physical and social surroundings to free [their] time, [their] energy, and [their] minds" (Morgan 61).

This sense of discomfort was due to the fact that motherhood was inherently linked to patriarchal structures, and this had enhanced what Adrienne Rich defined as "matrophobia", the desire to be independent from the mother construct. Furthermore, feminists were concerned about the vulnerability and unpredictability of maternity, which left women trapped in a system where they have to irremediably depend on medical assistance and are somehow patronised by their male counterparts, who are not physiologically involved. What feminists aimed towards, especially with reference to poetic language (as we will see with Cixous, for example), was the image of female self-creation, a giving birth to themselves without any external influence. If this is accomplished at the literary level—with a new language that explores the female body but at the same time abandons its biological borders entering a metaphysical space—considering and accepting the actual maternal body was seen as a taboo by feminists. Pregnancy, birth, lactation, miscarriage or even infertility are extremely powerful conditions that put a woman's body at the centre, thus going against the feminist principle of self-determination regardless of biological and body limitations. Lastly, feminists felt discomfort towards the degree of authority that had always been placed on motherhood and the important role that a mother plays in the child's identity formation. A hierarchical structure in which the mother is feared, loved, and later on rejected could not fit into the language of sisterhood advocated by 1970s feminists.

Another aspect that makes motherhood problematic within this scenario is the traditional psychoanalytical claim that imposes the transcendence of the mother-child binary, and the new alignment with the father in order for the child to become independent. Freud and Lacan consider mothers only transients in the child's development, only as tools to be analysed from the child's perspective. This is why traditional psychoanalysis has always failed to voice the mother's desire, since she is part of a construct in which only the child's desires and development matter. For Freud and Lacan mothers are only the object of desire and are hence associated with the phallus. However, given that mothers experience the phallus as lack, they can never understand how to voice their desire since the language to describe such a desire is inherently male. Mothers are relegated to their nurturer roles, they produce the subject, but they themselves remain the matrix that gives origin to everything.

In order to understand radical feminists' rejection of Freudian psychoanalysis, we need to go back to Jacques Lacan, who has been considered the most influential mediator between the traditional Freudian school and the new theories which place language at the

core of subject formation, also in relation to gender. On a general level, Lacan differentiates between the "Imaginary", which represents the unconscious pre-Oedipal phase where the child sees itself as indistinct from the mother, and the "Symbolic", which is the acknowledgement of the outer world, regulated by the social Law and Language, which determines the beginning of the phallic phase. Even if Lacan sees the pre-Oedipal and the phallic phases as two distinct moments in the child's development, he retraces early realisations of subjectivity in the mirror phase, which is a transition moment in which it has the first encounter with the mother as an independent object detached from itself. In Lacan's words, "what demonstrates the phenomenon of recognition, which involves subjectivity, are the signs […] that characterise, from the sixth month, the child's encounter with his image in the mirror" (15). Lacan theorises that even as adults we keep desiring to be one with the mother, and hence we long to the "Imaginary". However, he makes an important distinction that highlights how the early realisation of self-hood is already influenced by the biological sex of the child. The boy is ready to accept the "Symbolic" power following his father's example, recreating at the same time the "Imaginary" order through marriage with the woman, which functions as surrogate of the initial state of oneness with the Mother. The girl, on the other hand, has to accept that she cannot have the same degree of freedom, as she sees herself in her mother, and hence shares with her the same desire of the phallus, which is the desire for something unattainable. This is the girl's dilemma: mother and daughter have to endure the same tragic fate, in which their desire is but a mirror of man's desire. The only instance where pleasure is not linked with the phallus resides in the *jouissance*, that is the primordial state of fulfilment, another Lacanian construct that is strictly linked to femininity and motherhood. It is what the child experiences in the pre-Oedipal phase when it is fused with the mother, and hence it is unspeakable, since it comes before language. Only after the child enters the Symbolic order will it discover how femininity and masculinity are constructed.

Marie-Christine Hamon further elaborates on the Lacanian model, explaining that the child experiences loss through its relationship with the mother, who becomes its first other, the first element from which it needs to distance itself in order to gain autonomy. The boy understands separation through the realisation of his mother's sexual life, from which he is excluded, whereas the girl never really abandons the mother, who is projected in her relationship with the father, the husband or the child (Hamon 32).

Lacanian revisions of (and additions to) the Freudian Oedipal construct animated second-wave feminists, who discarded most of these theories due to the male-centred point

of view adopted by Freud and Lacan. One of the most politically engaged works of radical feminism is the already mentioned *Of Woman Born* (1976) by Adrienne Rich, a thorough analysis of motherhood, which represents a milestone in feminist writing. Trapped in a world where the patriarchal rules still impose on them how to act with one another, daughters and mothers are urged to appreciate the incredible physical and emotional bond that connects them. In her view "there is nothing in human nature more resonant with charges than the flow of energy between two biologically alike bodies, one of whom has lain in amniotic bliss inside the other, one of which has laboured to give birth to the other" (Rich, *Of Woman Born* 225). Even though Rich speaks of biological motherhood, with a reference to the amniotic bliss and labour, her contribution to a re-evaluation of motherhood is undeniable. For the first time, mothers and daughters are considered independently from the male counterpart as members of an "unwritten story" which sees them as the true protagonists in "a new space on the boundaries of patriarchy" (256). Rich speaks of interchangeable roles, the end of all hierarchies and new possibilities of expression. She claims that "we are, none of us, 'either' mothers or daughters; to our amazement, confusion, and greater complexity, we are both" (253). There really is no definite boundary between mother and daughter, but a steady exchange of feelings and experiences, both positive and negative, yet more importantly, genuine and untouched by social constrictions. Rich draws on psychoanalytical theories concerning the pre-Oedipal phase, yet she elaborates them on the basis of her own feminist agenda. Whereas for Freud and his followers (including Lacan) a woman is always dependent on the presence of a man - the father and later the husband, paradoxically, in order to reach her independence - seen as heterosexual realisation), for Rich this is not necessary, as their self-definition as women should not be influenced by anything other than the deep mother-daughter bond.

However, as has already been mentioned, Rich speaks of "matrophobia" as the biggest obstacle that daughters have to face, in that they see their mothers as cumbersome role models to escape from. In her words:

> Thousands of daughters see their mothers as having taught a compromise and self-hatred they are struggling to win free of, the one through whom the restrictions and degradations of a female existence were perforce transmitted. Easier by far to hate and reject a mother outright than to see beyond her the forces acting upon her. But where a mother is hated to the point of matrophobia

there may also be a deep underlying pull toward her, a dread that if one relaxes one's guard one will identify with her completely. (235)

If on the one hand the mother is hated and rejected, this being the easiest way to detach from her, on the other a daughter cannot help but identify with and compare herself to her mother. Mothers are seen as evil because they are considered in allegiance with the father and the patriarchal system, the same system towards which daughters experience a terrible rejection, while at the same time they find themselves trapped in that very system, as the only way to form their identity.

2.2 Nancy Chodorow and the "reproduction of mothering"

Radical feminism and European theories of the body certainly helped revitalise and engage the international feminist debate on the theme of motherhood, yet the most influential (and in part controversial) contribution in the field comes from an American psychoanalyst and sociologist. Nancy Chodorow is the author of a ground-breaking socio-psychological study called *The Reproduction of Mothering*, first published in 1978.[6] Her work combines Freudian psychoanalysis and feminism, focusing on the ways in which socially constructed behavioural patterns have reinforced the general assumption that a woman's primary role is that of the mother and that this role is passed on from mother to daughter.[7]

Chodorow starts by claiming that "women's mothering is one of the few universal and enduring elements of the sexual division of labour", and describes pre-industrial societies, in which the separation between the "immoral" world of work dominated by men and the "moral" world of the home in which women nurtured the children was deemed to guarantee economic and social stability.[8] The mother has always been associated with the nurturer and this has been a "central and defining feature of the social organisation of

[6] I am here considering the first edition of the study, which has been republished in a revised version in 1999.
[7] Chodorow aims at integrating Freudian psychoanalytical theories (especially the ones concerning the Oedipus complex and subject formation) with the ones postulated by the founders of feminist psychology (Karen Horney and Melanie Klein). To this, she also analyses more recent contributions by contemporary feminist theorists Adrienne Rich (*Of Woman Born*, 1976) and Juliet Mitchell (*Psychoanalysis and Feminism*, 1974), among others.
[8] Chodorow refers to Ruth Bloch's definition of the "moral mother", an early capitalist ideology which established that women should function as nurturers and natural moral guides of both their children and their husbands, who instead were the only ones to have contact with the immoral world outside of domestic life (Bloch, Ruth. 'Sex and the Sexes in Eighteenth-Century Magazines'. Unpublished paper, 1972).

gender and is implicated in the construction and reproduction of male dominance itself." (Chodorow 9) Rejecting functional-cum-bio evolutionary accounts together with the impact of mothering instincts as an explanation to why women mother, she concludes that "the contemporary reproduction of mothering occurs through social structurally induced psychological processes" (7).[9] In an attempt to clarify some concerns deriving from the tendency to explain the reproduction of gender roles through consciously intended socialization, Chodorow also discredits behavioural role training.[10] These theories hypothesise that girls simply learn to be mothers and *want* to be mothers through imitation. However, Chodorow insists that being a parent implies a deeper awareness that goes beyond a set of behaviours, but participates "in an interpersonal, diffuse, affective relationship" (30).

Relational experiences during childhood are crucial in the construction of the child's social identity. Chodorow talks of a "history of object choices", which depends on "individual personalities and behaviour of those who happen to interact with a child" and is also "socially patterned according to the family structure and prevalent psychological modes of society" (49-50). Describing the first stages of psychological development, Chodorow stresses the importance of the relational aspect between mother and child, a connection that enables the insurgence of the "fundamental aspects of the person's sense of self" (59). During the initial narcissistic phase, the child has no idea of its external boundaries, and instinctively seeks to protect its oneness with the mother, developing a dependence towards her.[11] We can talk of naïve egoism in the child, an innate assumption that its relationship with the mother is complete. Nevertheless, Chodorow points at the fact that this relationship is asymmetrical and imbalanced: the child is completely dependent on the mother, who is instead already connected to the external world (to other people – like the father – and to other activities).

[9] This is the explanation given by anthropologists, "who combine a functionalist account of contemporary gathering and hunting societies (closest to the original human societies) and an evolutionary explanation of the 'origins of man'" (Chodorow 17).

[10] Chodorow is here criticising, among others, theories by Leonore J. Weitzman ("Sex-Role Socialization." *Women: A Feminist Perspective.* Mayfield Publishing, 1975) and Jo Freeman ("The Social Construction of the Second Sex." *Roles Women Play,* 1971).

[11] This is the phase in which the child is cognitively narcissistic, "an experience of self as an experience of everything else in the world" (Chodorow 61). This is when no clear boundaries are set and the child sees itself reflected in everything, including its mother, not yet perceived as an external object.

It is the very acknowledgment that the mother has other interests that do not include her child, which prompts it to develop a form of anxiety.[12] This is the beginning of a psychological process in which

> the infant achieves a differentiation of self only insofar as its expectations of primary love are frustrated. […] Anxiety spurs the development of ego capacities as well as the creation of ego boundaries. […] Much of this anxiety, conflict, and ambivalence is not generated endogenously through infantile development, but is an infantile reaction to disruptions and discomforts in its relation with its mother. (70)

Following this theory, the mother becomes the first object of the child's frustration and she is associated with everything the child has to detach itself from in order to become an independent individual. Hence, the rejection of the mother is crucial in the subject development process, where the child is required to "face the essential difference between love for the mother and mother-love: Its mother is unique and irreplaceable, whereas [the child] is replaceable – by another infant, by other people, and by other activities" (69) During this process, the child comes into contact with other family figures who also contribute to its subject formation. The father is a pivotal figure not only because he helps the child develop its own self, but because he also "enables more firm differentiation of objects" (70-71) and in this sense he becomes, after the mother, a second object from which the child has to differentiate itself.[13]

A problem arises when we look at the mother-child relationship as a pure "nonlinguistic" connection,[14] which leads us to think that it is natural and unquestionable, and makes us see the mother as the best (and exclusive) nurturer. However, Chodorow points out that the nonlinguistic nature of this relationship should not imply that mothers should be the only carers, and more generally that child-rearing is exclusively a feminine matter. Nevertheless, given the very strong bond between mother and child during the initial stages, this relationship in commonly perceived "as a less socially constructed relationship" (74), which makes it difficult to prove that, in fact, exclusive and intensive

[12] It is here a kind of psychological anxiety that is expressed externally in the child with its attempt to frantically separate from the mother.
[13] The father is seen as the real initiator of the child's formation of a sense of boundary. Him being the first idealised object, he instigates in the child its first ideas about the world (the mother is not idealised because she is perceived without language, without abstraction).
[14] As explained in the previous note, the relationship between mother and child is nonlinguistic, or, as put by Kristeva, "poetic", untouched by the social rules of language.

mothering in Western society is but the product of "achievement-oriented men and people with psychologically monogamic tendencies" (75). The mother-child bond, being an intimate reality unconditioned by outside society, is seen as the norm, as something unquestionable – and therefore, unchangeable. Only mothers are bound to mother.[15]

Indeed, if the mother-child initial relationship is purely nonlinguistic and relies on channels of communication outside of language and society, the relationship to the father then becomes idealised, ungraspable and "less tied to real object-relational experiences for the child" (80). The father is the first projection of the world outside the symbiotic relationship with the mother, and hence his presence determines the beginning of the child's acknowledgment that he is the one who represents culture and society whereas the mother stands for the "presocial" or "nonsocial" unidealized object-relational experience. Moreover, this enculturation is the product of patriarchal society, and has no other explanation than in the child's exposure to patriarchal structures (Mitchell 110).

The fact that mothers are seen outside of language and culture makes it also possible for them to symbolise "dependence, regression, passivity, and the lack of adaptation to reality", whereas the turning away from them "represents independence and individuation, progress, activity, and participation in the real world" (Chodorow 82). Of course, this condition is again a social construction, reinforced by the Freudian claim that women's passiveness is an unquestionable given, a consequence of the impossibility for them to solve the Oedipus complex.[16]

Chodorow also questions Freudian's assumption that the Oedipus complex is symmetrical in boys and girls. She claims that for girls it is not just about transferring affection from mother to father and seeing the mother as the model to escape from and the father the one to look up to. Chodorow's psychoanalytic research has demonstrated that the girl never really abandons the mother, but is in constant contact with her, and that the father constitutes but an external figure in this paradigm of feminine mutual dependency.[17]

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[15] However, from a linguistic point of view we can see the contradictory nature of this stance: "We can talk about a man 'mothering' a child. If he is the child's primary nurturing figure, or is acting in nurturant manner. But we would never talk about a woman 'fathering' a child" (Chodorow 11).

[16] Whereas "Freud stresses the absolute finality of the boy's resolution of his Oedipus complex" he then "uses this observation as the basis for unwarranted and incorrect conclusions about women's lesser moral character, lesser ability to be objective, and lesser capacities for sublimation" (Chodorow 130).

[17] Furthermore, Chodorow stresses that "empathy, the sense of the infant as an extension of the self, reciprocated primary love, primary identification and sense of oneness, orality, mutual mother-infant attachment, are part of both contemporary mother-infant relationships and […] relational states of the incipient infantile ego" (87). Nevertheless, boys and girls react to this phase differently, with "the development of mothering in girls – and not in boys – [which] results from differential object-relational experiences, and the ways thee are internalised and organised" (91).

What Chodorow's theory states is that the definition of the feminine personality and self follows a complex path. This process is highly relational and it involves the contact with the mother in several ways. It implies the rejection of the maternal bond and the longing for the father as symbol of the external world. Furthermore, the daughter will always relate to her mother also in her adult life, embracing the same role which has been "reproduced" in her during her childhood.

That the daughter sees the mother not only as a rival but also as a model alters Freud's original supposition of the girl as mere "victim to envy for the penis". Since the girl's primary carer is typically her mother, she will see her also as an object to emulate, a presence that she will always keep within herself (95). For this reason, Chodorow believes that the daughter has a different degree of attachment to the mother, and contrarily to the son, this is not Oedipal in the traditional sense, that is "sexualised, focused on possession, which means focused on someone clearly different and opposite" (97). It is instead an intense and exclusive relationship between mother and daughter that goes on even after the pre-Oedipal phase, with "boundary confusion of the child still preoccupied with issues of dependence and individuation" (97). The merging with the mother prompts the girl to identify with her fully, reproducing the same social role. Gender is acquired through repetition of socially defined behaviours, and for the girl this implies the perpetration of the idea of a "common feminine inferiority" which prepares her "for her future mothering role" (113).

Thus, a mother is not only perceived by the daughter as the enemy, the rival, the first cause of the penis envy complex, as suggested by traditional Freudian psychoanalysis. Chodorow insists on the continuation of the pre-Oedipal relationship between mother and daughter even later on in the girl's life, in that the daughter "actively attaches herself, and chooses her attachment, to her mother, and at the same time is passively, and not as a matter of choice, attached – an appendage or extension" (115)

The symbiotic mother-daughter relationship makes it very difficult for the daughter to see boundaries, with her feeling of being trapped in a self-identification with the omnipotent mother. This is why the daughter turns to the father, who then becomes the symbol of independence, "the most available person who can help her to get away from her mother" (121). Turning to the father does not exclusively imply the acknowledgment of objects outside of the mother-daughter bond, but also a realisation of a distinct and independent self. The girl does not want to be like the father nor does she wish to be a man; her desire for the phallus rather symbolises her desire for freedom and independence. As

put by Chasseguet-Smirgel, "penis envy is the symbolic expression of another desire. Women do not wish to become men, but want to detach themselves from the mother and become complete, autonomous women" (Chasseguet-Smirgel 118).

However, the mother will remain an internal object even when rejected by the daughter. Chodorow explains this behaviour as a power battle, in which the daughter turns to the father in order to gain her independence, at the same time trying to win her mother's love as a separate object from her. She wants to show her that she can make it, with the aim to react against "powerlessness vis-à-vis maternal omnipotence and to primary identification" (Chodorow 126). For this reason, rejection of the mother does not imply abandonment of the mother.

Defensive splitting is a very common strategy used by girls to escape from the mother-daughter continuum, as a way to reaffirm their identity. As explained by Chodorow

> In relation to their mothers [girls] experience themselves as overtly attached, unindividuated, and without boundaries. […] A girl often becomes very critical of her family, especially of her mother, and may idealise the mother or the family of a friend. As earlier, she tries to solve her ambivalent dependence and sense of oneness by projection and by splitting the good and the bad aspects of objects; her mother and home represent bad, the extrafamilial world, good. Alternatively, she may try in every way to be unlike her mother. […] Her solution again involves defensive splitting, along with projection, introjection, and the creation of arbitrary boundaries by negative identification (I am what she is not). (137)

Since there are allegedly no tangible identity boundaries between mother and daughter even after the pre-Oedipal phase, those are created arbitrarily by the daughter, who needs to feel that she is different and valuable. However, instead of creating a new image for herself, she focuses on the negative aspects of her relationship to her mother, while stressing only the good sides of other family contexts, seen by the daughter as better than her own. This sense of frustration is then seen by Chodorow as an important catalyst of the daughter's self-determination process.

3. Daughterhood and body politics: the influence of French feminism

Despite the success of Chodorow's theories on motherhood, in the 1970s a number of feminist authors adopted a stance against traditional psychoanalytical thought and Freudian assumptions which relegated women to a subjugated position.[18] Radical feminists like Mary Ellmann dismissed psychoanalysis, calling it "phallic criticism" (27), and it is only with the work of theorists like Juliet Mitchell that we can appreciate a rehabilitation of Freudian theories, in a new feminist perspective. Her influential work *Psychoanalysis and Feminism* (1975) reassesses theories about women by Freud and Lacan, placing them into a patriarchal culture. In addition to Mitchell, some French feminists in the 1970s rehabilitated psychoanalysis as a viable approach to be used in the feminist debate. Each one in her personal way, Luce Irigaray, Hélène Cixous, and Julia Kristeva, urged feminists to consider new analytical perspectives, putting the emphasis on the specificity of female experience, something that could not be studied with traditional Freudian theories, but needed to be reassessed using a renewed psychoanalytical language. Their general assumption stated that female desire cannot be linked to a state of lack, with a constant reference to the phallus. Adopting a new poetic language, they wished to liberate women from the dualistic Freudian model that saw Woman as the Other of Man, and defined femininity as opposed to masculinity. Stressing the importance of individual experience, these feminists celebrated the female body as the place to investigate the feminine *jouissance* postulated by Lacan.

3.1 Luce Irigaray and Hélène Cixous: *parler-femme* and *écriture feminine*

Poetic language is at the core of Luce Irigaray's thought. She advocates a *parler-femme*, which replaces the female silence and negativity that had characterised the representation of women in traditional psychoanalysis as opposed to male language and activity.[19] Women are encouraged to reflect on how "the feminine [has always found] itself defined as lack, deficiency or limitation and negative image of the subject", and are urged to embrace the

[18] Kate Millet, among others, who in her ground-breaking work of radical feminism *Sexual Politics* (1969) harshly criticised female oppression by a patriarchal culture in which only men have had the power to write about women.
[19] This concept is developed especially in Irigaray's *This Sex Which is Not One*.

"disruptive excess [which] is possible on the feminine side" (Irigaray, *This Sex* 78). Irigaray believes that such an excess has always remained invisible and hence inaccessible, due to the indifference it generated in a patriarchal setting where also our language is perceived as a by-product of patriarchy.[20]

Irigaray criticises Chodorow's approach, in that she believes that women cannot be defined only through the acceptance of social norms, with the iteration of the maternal model. Women need to transcend the cultural construction of a discourse that obliges her to feel they can exclusively relate to their own sexuality only in relationship with motherhood. She is encouraged to re-construct themselves, investigating a different language that goes beyond words and that resides in their very *body*.

The mother/daughter relationship is treated by Irigaray as the most intimate relationship between two women. She refers to it as a symbiotic bond, which creates unity in difference by transcending all hierarchies towards an ultimate fusion. However, she goes beyond the binary nature of this bond, implying that this would still be somehow linked to a patriarchal way to see the world as rigidly divided in pre-determined categories. When she rejects the mother, the daughter should find attachment to her female counterparts, her sisters, female lovers or women friends, thus enlarging female alliances. Irigaray believes that the "parler-femme" is the key to a more genuine female dialogue. The very evocative image of the female labia speaking together is disclosed in her famous essay "When Our Lips Speak Together", published in 1977. The female genital part is used to introduce the double subject that characterises female experience. It can be seen as a monologue by one single woman divided between I/You, or a dialogue between female lovers. It is a celebration of the plurality of the subject, no more monolithic unity, but unexplored territory, a place to construct a different non-hierarchised sexuality. That unexplored territory is situated outside of the family and especially outside of an institutional mother-daughter relationship, which is still product of patriarchal societies:

> I love you who are neither mother (forgive me mother, I prefer a woman) nor sister. Neither daughter nor son. I love you – and where I love you, what do I care about lineage of our fathers and their desire for reproduction of men? Or their genealogical institutions? What need have I for husband or wife, for family, persona, role, function? Let's have all those to men's reproductive laws.

[20] See Pierre Bourdieu, *La Domination Masculine* (1998).

> I love you: Your body, here and now. I/you touch you/me; that's quite enough for us to feel alive. (Irigaray, *When Our Lips* 72)

This is a celebration of the pure human contact between a mother and a daughter, a celebration of the "here" and "now", without any reference to the daughter's future maternal duties. It is an alliance achieved through the body and the new "parler-femme" which has no definite structure, but goes in circles and is always shared experience. The "mother" is called "sister" and "woman", in the attempt to liberate her from her institutional reproductive role.

In another famous essay, "And the One Doesn't Stir Without the Other", published in 1979, Irigaray is less optimistic when it comes to the inclusion of the "mother" in this genuine feminine dialogue:

> But we have never, never spoken to each other. And such an abyss now separates us that I never leave you whole, for I am always held back in your womb. Shrouded in shadow. Captives of our confinement. And the one doesn't stir without the other. But we do not move together. When the one comes into the world, the other goes underground. When one carries life, the other dies. And what I wanted from you, Mother, was this: that in giving me life, you still remain alive. (Irigaray, "And the One" 67)

Irigaray feels the mother is irrevocably trapped in her reproductive function, something which inhibits the deeper connection she is looking for. The paradox disclosed here is very effective: even though mother and daughter are dependent on each other, and thus move together, they will do so in separate ways, each following her own path. The mother is dismissed as only being the one that gives life, the nurturer, and in that act, the daughter realises that they will never have a real connection outside of that institutional relationship, as if the life of the mother would pass on to the daughter as soon as she gives life to her. For this reason, Irigaray concedes that the utopian mutuality among women should be pursued outside of the family. The pre-Oedipal bliss, in which mothers and daughters are fused into one entity is only the source, and not the main goal to achieve in adult life.

Monique Plaza (1981) elaborates on Irigaray's concept of fusion, wondering why this has characterised mothers and children in the first place. Following Irigaray's lead, she too believes that this merging is the result of less social opportunities for women, which led them to feel frustrated and hence more prone to project their hopes and desires on their

children, seen as the only domain upon which they have any form of control. Irigaray discourages this behaviour, which in her view reinforces the male system of a jealous possession perpetrating the same patterns of patriarchal society (Plaza 75).

In her introduction of the English translation of "And the One Doesn't Stir Without the Other, Hélène Wenzel insists on the rejection of all forms of phallus envy, explaining the daughter's predilection for the father in terms of her desire for freedom from the overprotective context in which she is brought up by the mother (56). The daughter feels compelled to reject the mother-role, yet she is victim of the very patriarchal culture which perpetrates the same cultural roles she is escaping from. She loves the father not because she is envious of his phallus, but because the context in which he lives tricks her into believing that she is free to live the life she wants. Eventually she adapts to patriarchal society, leaving the mother, but becoming a mother at the same time. Wenzel concludes by saying that, "as women become subjects, mothers and daughters may become women, subjects, and protagonists of their own reality rather than objects and antagonists in the Father's drama" (59).

Irigaray believes that the daughter realises that the mother is not really herself, but the product of patriarchal positioning, in that the mother has no agency of her own but can just mirror herself in the daughter, thus resulting in an utter sense of emptiness: "I received from you only your obliviousness of self, while my presence allowed you to forget this oblivion. So that with my tangible appearance I redoubled the lack of your presence" ("Ad the One" 65). The mother is considered as an oblivious entity living vicariously through her daughter, and even though nurturing the child gives the mother a sense of purpose, in the eyes of the daughter this reinforces the fact that she is not really there, that she has annihilated herself.

Irigaray rejects the child as *symbol* of oneness among women, since the female fusion she talks about goes beyond Language. She stresses how "our abundance is inexhaustible: it knows neither want nor plenty. Since we give each other (our) all, with nothing held back, nothing hoarded, our exchanges are without terms, without end. How can we say it? The language we know is so limited" (Irigaray, *This Sex* 213-214). However, following Irigaray's idea it seems impossible for a woman to genuinely desire the child, without falling back into the patriarchal narrative of possession. What she seeks to make everybody aware of is the possibility for a woman to feel free from any social constraint, including the symbolic child.

Hélène Cixous supports a reconsideration of the female body, where she believes female language resides. Using poetic images, she believes that body fluids like menstrual blood and the mother's milk represent truthful forms of female expression, in that they embody what is intrinsically female.[21] Women should go back to their material bodies in order to look for a more genuine, non-hierarchised relationship with the self. Nevertheless, the body is here seen as discursive rather than biological or literal entity.

The "Voice" occupies a unique place in Cixous's poetics. Once again, this has nothing to do with the woman's actual voice, but it is rather the turning to a kind of discourse (or writing) which is exclusively female. Cixous is the promoter of a new kind of female writing which is called *écriture feminine*, a type of language that transcends all preconceptions about what and how to write, a language that allows women to express themselves in an independent way, freed from the language that has been created and imposed by man. In her view, "the Voice sings from a time before law, before the Symbolic took one's breath away and reappropriated it into language under its authority of separation" (Cixous, "Sorties" 93). Cixous refers to a vital rhythm before Language that remains unspeakable today, a rhythm that makes the boundaries between mother and child much more blurred and less defined by cultural associations.

The Voice of the mother is the shadow of this state that could be linked to Lacanian *jouissance* and that somehow will always be part of them. Cixous is convinced that

> in women there is always, more or less, something of the 'mother' repairing and feeding, resisting separation, a force that does not let itself be cut off but that runs codes ragged. The relationship to childhood […] is no more cut off than is the relationship to the 'mother', as it consists of delights and violences. (Cixous, "Sorties" 93)

Cixous's Voice is not something to be created, but is part of every woman's experience. She explains in poetic terms the timelessness of the mother's voice with a reference to the most maternal image of nurturing: milk. "Voice: milk that could go on forever. Found again. The lost mother/bitter lost. Eternity: is voice mixed with milk" (78).

Overall, Irigaray and Cixous, urge us to construct a feminine pre-Oedipal mother that would enable us to see motherhood as one way for the girl to reconnect with her womanhood, without seeing it in opposition to the phallus. This is of course an ambitious

[21] See Hélène Cixous, *The Newly Born Woman*, trans. Betsy Wing. University of Minnesota Press, 1986.

endeavour that has nevertheless been accused of essentialism, in that these thinkers "rely on the biological structuring of the female body to arrive to a new female 'language', a new female way of relating to the world, to other women" (Kaplan 39).

3.2 Julia Kristeva's subversive bodies

Always striving to avoid essentialism, the French theorist that best embodies the new psychoanalytical approach of French feminism of the 1970s is Julia Kristeva. The most innovative and suggestive postulation is her definition of the 'Semiotic', a pre-linguistic territory which echoes the Lacanian pre-Symbolic, and that is more accessible to women, given their psychosocial positioning.[22]

Interested in poetic language, Kristeva realised very soon in her writings that this language was dominated by certain features which are also found in the echolalias of children, which are characterised by the same rhythm and the same musicality. Kristeva affirms that poetic language is intrinsically musical and that the music can often dominate the meaning. This dominance of music led her to recognise a resurgence of pre-language, of the music of infant echolalias in poetic language. In Freudian terms, infantile language can mean two things. First, it refers to what we call the pre-Oedipal phase, an important phase since it involves the whole issue of narcissism: the instability of the frontiers of the ego and depressive and psychotic possibilities. This is also a period when the child is dependent on its mother and carries traces of this dependency So, if poetic language displays pre-linguistic musicality it is because it also bears witness to our fragile narcissism and to the mother-child relationship.

Following these explanations, the 'Semiotic' is the place where the child expresses itself in complete freedom, before the realisation of selfhood. The mother experiences the 'Semiotic' through her body, when she gives birth to the child. This is the reason why in Kristeva's view man can access *jouissance* only through language with the recollection of that pre-Oedipal phase where his sounds were natural and not conditioned by the linguistic sign and by syntax, seen as an imposition of the paternal law, a way to structure and define the world in male terms. Whereas man has only language as a tool to strive to *jouissance*,

[22] See Julia Kristeva, *Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art,* ed. Léon Roudiez and trans. Thomas Gora, Alice Jardine, and Léon Roudiez, Columbia University Press, 1980.

women have it in their biology, and in their being able to connect with the child during this phase. Motherhood is not seen as an independent experience, but as an intimate relationship between mother and child in which all members of the relationship are defined by their connection to each other rather than by their single roles.

Kristeva uses motherhood as a metaphor to indicate subversive femininity. The mother is linked to the "abject", as we will see in the next section, and she comes to indicate the threatening presence at the boundary between the object and the subject. The mother is the one responsible for the child's successful or unsuccessful development, hence her central role as a liminal figure. In Kristeva's view, motherhood has always been analysed with patriarchal eyes. Its unspeakable nature has been mediated by Lacan with the symbolic:

> As long as there is language-symbolism-paternity, there will never be any other way to represent, to objectify, and to explain this unsettling of the symbolic stratum, this nature/culture threshold, this instilling the subjectless biological program into the very body of the symbolizing subject, this event called motherhood. (Kristeva, *Desire* 241-242)

Motherhood must remain unspeakable in traditional terms. Kristeva problematises these assumptions on motherhood, liberating women from their mother role, which cannot be the only proof of their existence. She believes the relationship between mother and child to be difficult to localise in symbolic terms, this being "an idealisation of primary narcissism" (Moi 99) and hence outside of the Symbolic order. Kristeva addresses the question as to whether it is possible to accept 'real experiences' of maternity, where the desire for the mother to nurture a child is the result of her own choices and not an attempt to conform to any traditional cultural image associated with motherhood, especially those linked with Christianity.

In her important essay "Motherhood according to Bellini" (1980), Kristeva further explains man's need to access *jouissance* through his use of a poetic language that allows him to express himself freely, in a pre-linguistic way. This is true for poets, who make use of peculiar rhythms and resort to personal associations which are not immediately recognisable to the reader, but also artists (like Bellini), who try to impress on the canvas this state of *jouissance*. Kaplan questions

> whether it is the mother's experience that Bellini reproduces or that of the child in the dyad that is always so inseparable from the maternal being. That is, isn't the maternal indeed a relationship, as Kristeva says, and as such not inheriting in either party alone? I am only a mother in relating to my child, not outside of that relation. It is precisely the patriarchal culture that has essentialized and fixed the concept 'Mother' to my being-in-the-world, instead of permitting it to be a mobile part of my being that comes and goes depending on whether I am in relation or not to the child. (Kaplan 41)

This consideration explains how patriarchal culture has fossilized the concept 'Mother' as a way to define what is essentially female, without taking into account that motherhood, exactly like daughterhood (or more generally childhood) is but a relationship that has meaning only if both parties (the mother and the child) are present. Kristeva speaks of a "symbolic paternal facet of motherhood" which has shaped the way women see themselves. She opposes to this social construct a "nonsymbolic, nonpaternal casualty" and states that when giving birth "the woman enters into contact with the mother; they are the same continuity differentiating itself" (Kristeva, *Desire* 239). This "casualty" is outside of culture and represents an intimate and unique experience for each and every woman, an experience which cannot be generalized and becomes the definition of what a woman's identity is. A woman is firstly an individual; she becomes a mother only in the moment when a new relationship with the child is initiated. The daughter experiences motherhood for the first time during this symbiotic time, in which she sees herself in continuity with the mother and will keep this memory forever. If we accept this model of motherhood, we can stop assuming that it is just linked to *jouissance* before the phallus, but rather we can appreciate how this is not linked to the sense of lack, but to a special relationship which is unique for every woman.

Another ground-breaking work by Kristeva which paved the way towards a new debate on motherhood is *Powers of Horror* (1980). The theme of abjection is treated as a central aspect in the theorization of the need to reject the mother in order to find our place in the world. The mother is seen as the first thing the child has to detach itself from and hence the starting point for its identity construction process, the acknowledgment of its presence in the world as an individual. Following Kristeva's theory, this realization is the result of an abjection process, where the child finds out that it cannot be one and only with the mother, but has to escape the womb in order to become an individual. The first abjection

is an aversion that the child has towards its mother, in the discovery of the incest taboo and masturbation.

Abjection is linked with the claim for one's own identity, desires (and fears), as "all abjection is in fact recognition of the want in which any being, meaning, language or desire is founded" (Kristeva, *Powers* 5). Kristeva describes two paths that can be taken. In the first case the child (and the adult) will keep the memory of the narcissistic phase in which it was a single unity with the mother and will therefore try to look for a connection to that phase through its desire for objects. In the second case, the child will live through non-objects, seeing the mother and the narcissistic phase only as a territory to escape from, since it is what constitutes its Other, what it is not, what threatens its identity as an individual. Kristeva calls this last case the deject, a subject that has fluid boundaries and therefore is always aiming at remarking territories (8).

If the deject finds abjection towards the mother, it also sees *jouissance* as something to be afraid of, as this pre-Oedipal condition denies all boundaries, as everything is in a continuum. The deject, though, creates its identity through those boundaries that it first experienced after the realization that it is someone detached from the mother. It is afraid of being possessed, of not recognizing its mother as an object and for this reason it considers her the ultimate abject, the repugnant, horrifying, and disgusting. Women are especially implicated in abjection, as they are the objects against whom the child needs to find its subjectivity. Since women are culturally described as being at the margin between patriarchal structures and the unspeakable and borderless chaos, they become the symbol of abjection. And since they are too close to that unspeakable and borderless chaos, they are seen as being outside culture, while at the same time embodying that idealised primordial wilderness that men strive towards. Hence, in order for us to understand the nature of motherhood liberated from social constraints we need to go back to that pre-Oedipal mother-child relationship where she no longer typifies abjection.

Nevertheless, Kristeva urges us to question some of the Freudian principles concerning his Oedipus Complex Theory and the pre-Oedipal phase, in that she sees the exclusive focus on the child position as problematic. In her view, the mother is treated by Freud as only having a practical function in relation to the child, that is becoming the first object from which the child can dissociate itself in its self-discovery process. Freud does not problematise the mother-child relationship as seen from the mother's perspective, thus perpetrating the idea that she only has an ancillary role within this scheme and to some degree validating that powerful ideology of the masochistic, angelic, all-sacrificing mother,

produced first through Western cultural constructs and then solidified through psychoanalytic theories that seek to represent the healthy 'feminine' woman.

In conclusion, as we have seen analysing these three French feminists, women's desire and identity is understood only through the phallus construct, since she has no agency and cannot be excluded from her maternal role. We can distinguish between those mothers who passively accepted their subjugated role as nurturers, projecting their desires on the child, at the same time satisfying the male longing for the *jouissance*, and those who still accept the child as phallus, but in this case incorporating it, defying man's authority and claiming their independence through their child, seen as their invaluable product.

This distinction between the "over-indulgent mother" and the "phallic mother", as defined by Monique Plaza (1981) is useful to the analysis of representations of motherhood. Referring to the "phallic mother", she wonders why a woman should not take advantage of her maternal function through her child, the only internal satisfaction she can experience outside of the patriarchal environment in which she is seen only as the child-bearer and primarily the man's object. If in the first case the "over-indulgent" mother tries to compensate the lack of agency with a complete immersion in her nurturer role, the "phallic mother" claims her power rejecting the mother role imposed to her by patriarchal society, by means of neglecting the child and projecting her frustrations and anger onto it. Plaza locates these behavioural patterns in the master-slave psychic phenomenon, in that the mother takes over the Law of the Father, becoming in turn the master in the relationship with her child, who becomes the slave (75).

The figure of the "evil mother" has also been studied by Melanie Klein and Lacan in a more general perspective, making her the representation of lack, and the first encounter with language and the Father Law. Nevertheless, the Lacanian paradigm shows no interest in exploring affect or emotions, claiming that everything we know and feel arrives through signifying systems. Other scholars have tried to add something to the debate on motherhood and psychoanalysis, by means of integrating it with the Affect Theory and the Theory of the Gaze. Daniel N. Stern opts for a re-evaluation of the mutual gazing between mother and child, in order to understand the intersubjectivity that connects the two members of a relationship which is non-hierarchical, horizontal. He sees in this reciprocal gaze a re-affirmation of an encounter that happens outside of the Symbolic world postulated by Lacan, and furthermore outside of a male gaze that has the presumption to understand and define that connection through its own experience and language. In this kind of

intersubjective affectivity, the mother and the child are seen in "partnership" (Stern's word) that is neither predictable, fixed nor monolithic, but unique and unspeakable.[23]

Even though Stern's model proves to be rather compelling, it nevertheless puts a lot of pressure on the mother, since all affective states are necessarily to be inscribed within the mother-child relationship. Once again, the mother is given an ancillary role that is indispensable for the child's growth. Furthermore, the claim that affect goes beyond language and is unspeakable does not imply that there can be no debate about it. Despite its limitations, Stern's theories are relevant in determining the child's agency and the acknowledgment that the subject is constituted also through affect.

What links Plaza, Stern, and the French feminists analysed so far is the focus on the pre-Oedipal phase, in which the connectedness between mother and daughter plays a crucial role, and yet it is so unexplored. A new language able to express a female plenitude is invoked, with the rejection of the "woman-lack" association typical of the traditional Freudian and Lacanian approaches. A representation of the maternal is not discouraged, as it was the case with most second-wave radical feminists. On the contrary, Irigaray, Cixous, and Kristeva, through the very process of metaphorization at the core of their poetics, allows us to represent the unrepresentable.

[23] See Stern, Daniel N. *The First Relationship: Infant and Mother.* Harvard University Press, 1976.

4. New directions of psychoanalytical feminism

4.1 Judith Butler's critique of Kristeva's body politics

Despite the success among critics and theorists of Kristeva's theories of the semiotic as an unexplored territory where to look for female subversion, outside of the Symbolic order governed by the patriarchal law, Judith Butler expressed some concerns on the actual validity of Kristeva's ideas. In the third section of *Gender Trouble*, Butler offers a compelling survey of the theories presented by Kristeva in *Desire in Language* (1980) and *Revolution in Poetic Language* (1985).

Kristeva believed poetic language to be the key to access the maternal body using the same tools of Symbolic language, and, in so doing, it was able to subvert the Law of the Father and patriarchy as a whole. However, since poetic language is subordinate to the Symbolic, which appears to be the hegemonic system in terms of intelligibility[24], Butler questions the subversive qualities of the semiotic, also given that "Kristeva argues that this libidinal source of subversion cannot be maintained within the terms of culture. […] Kristeva thus alternately posits and denies the semiotic as an emancipatory ideal" (109). Furthermore, the fact that the maternal body is associated by Kristeva only with a precultural reality, reaffirms that the same maternal body has no voice in the cultural reality we experience as adults, which remains an exclusive by-product and domain of patriarchy.

Butler elaborates on Kristeva's assumption that our drives emerge well before the Symbolic, and that "such drives are manifest only in those linguistic expressions which disobey, as it were, the univocal requirements of signification within the Symbolic domain" (110). This "irrepressible heterogeneity of multiple sounds and meanings" within poetic language goes against the Lacanian principle of the Symbolic order as the only bearer of linguistic meaning, which is never the case in his "Imaginary". On the contrary, Kristeva establishes that her pre-Symbolic semiotic is the territory where to look for our most heterogeneous drives with a more genuine language, unmediated by culture, which instead

[24] I use the philosophical term "intelligible" ("that can be understood with the intellect") to refer to the universal quality of the Symbolic language, which, since it is the result of social conventions, has virtually more chances to be accepted and understood. Poetic language is subordinate to Symbolic language in that it is more personal and less intelligible, and even if it shares the same linguistic system of the Symbolic (the same phonemes and morphemes, for example), it is not always understandable and always open to interpretations.

represses our primary drives. These primary drives are then connected with maternal drives, as explained by Butler:

> The primary drives that the Symbolic represses and the semiotic obliquely indicates are now understood as *maternal drives*, not only those drives belonging to the mother, but those which characterise the dependency of the infant's body (of either sex) on the mother. […] The maternal body […] designates that *jouissance* which precedes desire and the subject/object dichotomy that desire presupposes. While the Symbolic is predicated upon rejection of the mother, the semiotic, through rhythm, assonance, intonations, sound play, and repetition, re-presents or recovers the maternal body in poetic speech. […] Poetic language thus suggests a dissolution of the coherent, signifying subject into the primary continuity which is the maternal body. (111-113)

The semiotic, coming before meaning, erodes everything connected to the Symbolic. This is true for both the child, who uses echolalia and vocalising in an instinctual way, and the psychotic, who may use the language of the Symbolic, with no univocal signification. Kristeva stresses the fact that the semiotic is strictly linked with a subject recovering the maternal body to avoid psychosis. For this reason, "poetic language […] always indicates a return to the maternal terrain, where the maternal signifies both libidinal dependency and the heterogeneity of drives" (113). However, Butler questions Kristeva's use of the term "subject" when referring to poetic language, since, following her theory, the "subject" is understood as culturally placed in the Symbolic, and is eroded and destroyed by that very poetic language.

Another problematic point raised by Butler concerns Kristeva's suggestion that prediscursive homosexuality is linked with psychosis. In Kristeva's words:

> The homosexual-maternal facet is a whirl of words, a complete absence of meaning and seeing; it is feeling, displacement, rhythm, sound, flashes, and fantasied clinging to the maternal body as a screen against the plunge. […] Those afflicted or affected by psychosis have put up in its place the image of the Mother: for women, a paradise lost but seemingly close at hand, for men, a hidden god but constantly present through occult fantasy. (Kristeva, *Desire* 239-240)

In Butler's view, these considerations are controversial on two levels. First, the maternal body, which is dominated by poetic language, is deemed as a place with no coherent and homogeneous identity. Second, Kristeva places homosexuality within the maternal body, considering it as a psychotic condition. This is problematic, inasmuch Kristeva does not allow homosexuality to be part of the "cultural" Symbolic environment, outside of psychosis. Butler admonishes us against the "structuralist assumption that heterosexuality is coextensive with the founding of the Symbolic", whereas everything that happens before the Symbolic is led back to a prediscursive psychotic homosexuality (114). Butler adds: "For Kristeva, then, overt homosexuality cannot be a culturally sustainable activity, for it would constitute a breaking of the incest taboo in an unmediated way" (115).

Kristeva's strategy to access the semiotic and "avoid" psychosis is to resort to poetry as a practice against patriarchal culture which can produce an alternative "nonpsychotic experience of that heterogeneity and dependency characteristic of the maternal terrain" (116). However, the very poetic language advocated by Kristeva, emerges retrospectively from the point of view of people living under the ordered, univocal Symbolic law. Poetic language is studied from our perspective, and follows the syntactical requirement of the Symbolic language and is thus subject to its rules. This is the reason why Butler rejects a full-scale abandonment of the Symbolic as a way to access the semiotic. She also criticises the fact that Kristeva "does not seriously challenge the structuralist assumption that the prohibitive paternal law is foundational to culture itself" (116). As a matter of fact, the risk is to consider female homosexuality as the place where one can experience exclusively heterogeneous drives with culturally unintelligible practices, which are once again linked to psychotic activities. Furthermore, Kristeva sees in maternity, together with poetry, a shield against heterogeneous chaos, a melancholic tool "for women appropriately acculturated into heterosexuality" (117)

Butler calls poetic language and maternity "temporary subversions" or "local displacements" of the paternal law, limited strategies that can in no way challenge patriarchy as a whole, because they reject culture and are produced through personal experience, and thus cannot be undertaken as a common feminist endeavour. Butler fears that "by relegating the source of subversion to a site outside of culture itself, Kristeva appears to foreclose the possibility of subversion as an effective or realisable cultural practice" (119). Moreover, the fact that lesbian experience is perceived as the only way to fight patriarchy by means of adopting the same unintelligible poetic language of psychosis and maternity, makes the lesbian the unintelligible and irrational "Other" of culture.

Stressing how we can give univocal meaning only to that which can be interpreted through Symbolic language, Butler deems it impossible to give meaning to drives "prior to their emergence into language" (120). This is why it is very unproductive and potentially dangerous to consider femaleness as something external to culture, because in so doing, "the female body that is freed from the shackles of the paternal law may well prove to be yet another incarnation of that law, posing as subversive but operating in the service of that law's self-amplification and proliferation" (126). Butler concedes that subversion is possible, but only if constructed within the cultural Symbolic, using our univocal, Symbolic language. Only when placed in its cultural context will the culturally constructed body be liberated, yet "neither to its 'natural' past, nor to its original pleasures, but to an open future of cultural possibilities" (127).

The theories that have been presented so far are useful in the understanding of the cultural debate on motherhood and daughterhood, specifically in the 1970s and 1980s feminist discourse. In the next chapter I will provide some insights into the historical and social contexts of Great Britain and Sweden, so as to see how two very different political environments responded to these new sets of ideas.

CHAPTER II

The historical context: Great Britain and Sweden in the 1970s and 1980s

1. Great Britain in the 1970s and 1980s

1.1 From the unstable 1970s to Thatcher's rule

In the 1970 general elections, the conservative leader Edward Heath won against Harold Wilson. This was perceived as a great shock by the Labour party, which in the previous years had solidified its consensus to the point where it was seen as the natural party of government. This belief was confirmed by the great accomplishments of the previous Labour government, a period of artistic expansiveness and social reforms, with relative financial stability and peace with Northern Ireland. Furthermore, Wilson had become a vocal advocate of the abolition of capital punishment, which was also taken as a very positive sign of political modernisation and democratisation. The end of Wilson's premiership marked the beginning of a very difficult time in British contemporary history, as "Heath's Seventies was a period of continuing crisis marked by industrial chaos, social division and international instability" (Billington 206). Inflation and unemployment rose, widening the gap between rich and poor. This led to an increase in crime rate and collapse of public safety. In addition to that, relations with Northern Ireland rapidly deteriorated, with the infamous "Bloody Sunday" episode in 1972, where 13 pacific Northern Irish demonstrators were killed by British paratroopers. In response to this provocation, Britain was hit by a wave of terrorist attacks organised by the Irish National Army. Overall, even if "Thatcherites [had] endlessly blackened the period in order to make the achievements of the Eighties seem more dramatic", Heath's Seventies were undoubtedly the most unstable time in British post-war history. It is not unsurprising then, that Conservatives called for a radical internal re-organisation. Heath was replaced with Margaret Thatcher, who had already served as the controversial Heath's Minister of Education.

In 1976 Harold Wilson resigned as Prime Minister, leaving his successor James Callaghan with a catastrophic situation, which included an even higher unemployment rate and inflation, with subsequent financial crises. The apex of popular dissatisfaction was reached during what became known as the Winter of Discontent, between 1978 and 1979, dramatic months in which recurrent strikes by different categories of workers and several unpopular economic measures forced the Labour Prime Minister to take a step back and leave the way to a new Conservative government led by Margaret Thatcher, who became the first woman Prime Minister on 4th May 1979.

The term "Thatcherism", applied to a period between 1979 and 1991 but which has also had an aftermath in recent years, came to be associated both with a social ideology and a practical political system. Feminists were inclined "towards interpretations which present[ed] it as more than just a matter of statecraft, as guided by a broad ideology that has influenced important areas of policy making" (Lovenduski and Randall 40), whereas Thatcher supporters saw it as "a world in which small business could compete freely for the favours of the individual family consumer; in this world the state keeps law and order, including the elements of a moral order to protect family decency, and provides support to the genuinely unfortunate who cannot help themselves" (Minford 93). Whether people supported Thatcher or not, her impact on the restructuring of British society and politics is undeniable. Her conservative agenda included an attempt to restrain the rise of inflation, the influence of trade unions and more famously the privatisation of many public services. These controversial measures are very well summarised by Itzin, who criticised the alteration of the tax system in favour of "the wealthy rather than the workers", the denationalization of industries, the dismantlement of the National Health Service and the Welfare State, and the "public spending, particularly in the areas of health, education, welfare and the arts" (Itzin 337).

Thatcher combined a series of unpopular politics with the re-establishment of what she herself called "Victorian values", with the goal to "encourage personal responsibility, personal initiative, self-respect and respect for others and their property" (qtd. in Moser 58). Her conservative view of society helped validate patriarchal assumptions, especially regarding the place of women in the working world and their special needs as underpaid nurturers and caretakers.

Patrick Jenkin, Secretary of State for Social Services once said: "I don't think that mothers have the same right to work as fathers. If the good lord had intended us to have equal rights to go out to work, he wouldn't have created man and woman" (qtd. in Ashley 140). The fact that one of Thatcher's closest collaborators would state something incredibly controversial to the detriment of women's (and mother's) place in society is but the proof of Thatcher's complete disassociation from the feminist agenda. For this reason, there is "widespread agreement that Thatcherism has seriously damaged women's interests in Britain" (Jessop 48), with Caryl Churchill herself famously claiming:

> There was a talk about whether it was an advance to have a woman prime minister if it was someone with policies like hers: she may be a woman but she

> isn't a sister, she may be a sister but she isn't a comrade. And in fact things have got worse much for women under Thatcher. (qtd. in Betsko and Koenig 48)

Conservative women believed that the presence of a strong, decisive woman in a position of power would be proof that women could also be successful leaders. Women were four percent more likely to vote Conservative in the 1983 election than were men, though the party traditionally has more male support (Loach 25). However, even if "Thatcher never made any claim to 'represent' women or speak in any way on their behalf" (Brunt 23), feminists claimed that she had "not so much feminized politics as offered feminine endorsement to patriarchal power and principles" (Jessop 48). Instead of taking care of women, their "needs were subordinated to the ideological goal of improving work incentives for low-paid male workers" (Lister 12). Thus, through a combination of social tax and policies, the Tories pushed women even further towards the margins of British society.

Women, being poorer than men, were consequently more in need of support. However, their position in the 1980s was weakened still further through the elimination of many of those benefits which had long been part of this social system. Subsidies helping women with the expense of raising children were steadily reduced and eventually eliminated. The 1980 Employment Act "seriously weakened women's right to paid maternity leave and to protection from dismissal because of pregnancy" and included provisions taxing workplace nurseries, which "pushed up the cost of childcare for working women, making it even harder for them to continue in paid employment" (Ashley 140). In 1987, the universal maternity grant was abolished, and "while motherhood is still the role expected of most women, the responsibility for its costs now falls firmly on their shoulders" (Lister 10). Single women were not entitled to the same protection as those who had done their duty and married. Furthermore, budget cuts to the National Health Service hit women disproportionately. Also the severe educational cut-backs contributed to reduction in future job prospects for women, continuing the cycle of inequality. By the middle of the Thatcher years women were earning less, paying more taxes and receiving less governmental aid.

When it comes to welfare state measures, Scott notes that:

> The source of women's special susceptibility to poverty lies in the fact that much of what is defined as 'women's work' takes place outside the boundary

> of the world's economy as men see it, and therefore has no value in the economic sense. Since there is no yardstick other than price for measuring value, women's work remains invisible out there in the 'real world'. (Scott 129)

Indeed, women (and to some extent also men) had never been acknowledged for the work which contributes to the well-being of individuals, families, and communities, without necessarily producing saleable goods and services. Thatcher was not interested in dealing with what she believed were private matters. When she claimed that "What I am desperately trying to do is to create one nation with everyone being a man of property" (qtd. in McNeil 227), the fact that she intentionally uses the generic masculine is more than just irony: it is the ultimate demonstration that her policies almost exclusively favoured men.

In addition to policies that damaged women's already precarious position, Thatcher's glorification of individualistic achievement ultimately contributed to undermine the dynamics within British feminist movements. During the 1960s feminism in Britain had been based on a model which attributed importance to the collective experience of women. During the 1970s, the feminist movement became increasingly fragmented, striving to find a place in a society which had moved to the conservative right. Born as a strongly socialist model based on direct collective action, the movement could not survive within the narrative of the new bourgeois feminism of which Thatcher is the best example. Given the Tories' insistence on the primacy of the individual, any form of collective activity became increasingly suspect. An individual woman could seek to improve her own position and could fight any discrimination which she personally might have encountered. Ultimately, women as a group found it harder to act in unison for the benefit of all women. Thatcher's motto: "There is no such thing as a society; there are only individuals, and families" summarizes everything that feminists had previously fought against and that now had to surrender to (Dahrendorf 195). It now seems appropriate to delve into the feminist contexts and the different feminist practices which preceded the arrival of Margaret Thatcher and which developed during her years in power.

1.2 Feminist practices in Great Britain

The abolition of censorship in 1968, together with a number of world events like the Vietnam war, the Chinese cultural revolution in the 1960s and the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia, gave rise to new cultural practices, with the subsequent manifestation of new cultural and political promises at the end of the 1960s. However, it is in this very exciting context of cultural revolutions that many other social contradictions emerged in Great Britain, more prominently second wave feminist movements and later gay rights movements. Even if those were the years in which the slogan "the personal is political" gained momentum and allowed many women to gather together with the common goal of female solidarity, not many women were allowed to participate in political battles, even in the more liberal contexts. Sheila Rowbotham writes:

> Glance at any left theoretical journal or go to any large meeting, you won't find many articles either by or about women, and you won't see many women speaking. […] Revolutionary students are quite capable of wolf-whistling and cat-calling when a girl speaks; more common though is tolerant humour, patronising derision or that silence after which everyone continues as if nobody has spoken. (Rowbotham 22)

In 1970 the British Women's Liberation movement came up with four basic demands: equal pay, equal education and opportunities, twenty-four-hour nurseries and free contraception and abortion on demand. However, these requests had to be achieved through political engagement and public demonstrations. Germaine Greer, one of the prominent voices of second-wave feminism, in her manifesto *The Female Eunuch* once stated that "reaction is not revolution", and that the oppressed (women) should not "adopt the manner of the oppressor" (men), practicing "oppression on their own behalf" (315). She then added that "violence has become inhuman and asexual" and that "it is associated with wealth" (315), this being an extremely good reason for women to abstain from violent practices in order to be heard. Instead, she invites young women not to get married, not to conform to the institution of the traditional household, which she believes is not "a good breeding ground for children" (320). Or, if a woman is already married (preferably with no children), she urged her to keep fighting for her independence, not fearing the "threat of abandonment" by her husband, since she believes that marriage is constructed upon the

very fear of abandonment, on both sides. When it comes to married mothers and mothers in general, the situation gets more complicated. Greer reminds women that they do not possess their children, and neither do their husbands. For this reason, she tries to break the taboo of the woman leaving her husband and children because she is unhappy. Like Ibsen's Nora, a woman should be entitled to escape a situation in which she is trapped, at the same time not feeling guilty for abandoning her offspring, which, given that men usually have more means, could be better off staying with the father, instead of being doomed to a life of pauperdom with the single mother (322-323).

Very similarly to her fellow feminist Greer, in her influential sociological survey *Patriarchal Attitudes*, Eva Figes concedes that it is possible for a child to be brought up "within a marriage of genuine love and harmony". However, "people's expectations of marriage have risen just as much as their expectations of a high living standard, and already many children are being presented with a succession of father images at five-years intervals, which is surely worse than intrinsically male no father image at all" (Figes 173). The general assumption that a child is happier in a traditional household is discredited, in that the same parents have to act out a role: "Adults who are not true to themselves can teach their children nothing" (173). This is why both Greer and Figes encourage women to consider other options, supporting female contraception and abortion, to the mother's and child's own benefit. These positions were deemed extremely reactionary at the time, but were nevertheless extremely impactful on the activities of feminist movements across Europe and Northern America. Feminists from different cultural domains who shared these common goals were grouped in what became known as *radical feminism*.

Radical feminists, also called cultural feminists, believed that "sexism pre-dated all other kinds of social oppression (class and race), and therefore was *the* fundamental political struggle" Women were encouraged to unite on the basis of a shared sisterhood, regardless of their race and gender (Wandor, *Post-War* 118). The main criticism towards radical feminism was its polarising view of gender, seen as unquestionably either male or female. Thinkers like Greer and Figes denied race or class as elements in the battle against inequality, blaming only the patriarchy for all injustices in the world. Furthermore, they saw political power as intrinsically male, and as a consequence perceived our language and artistic forms as part of that patriarchal system. For this reason, women had to look for a feminist aesthetic and a female language, similarly to Cixous's *écriture feminine*. However, Wandor points at the problems that an absolute feminist aesthetic could pose, as "structure is a consequence of context, and can never have any abstract meaning in its own right"

(143). Wandor somehow accuses radical feminists of essentialism, in that they wish to abstract women from their cultural and social contest, discrediting other fundamental participants in the battle against inequality, that is race, class, age, religion, culture, and sexual orientation.

A controversial side of "feminism" is what became known in the British context as *bourgeois feminism*, a movement that asked for more power for women at the top. Contrarily to the radicals, bourgeois feminists were ready to accept compromise in order to succeed and have the same power have men, conforming to a patriarchal system without questioning. Instead of pleading for a common sisterhood, individual achievement and success are the goals, with the use of femininity as a weapon "for women to get around men in order to obtain what they want" (144). Seeing gender, class and race as something that cannot stop a woman from being the best version of herself, these ideas are also at the core of Thatcherism, in that no common battles for women are fought, but just an individual battle against a system which is difficult yet not impossible to dominate. There is no need for a different feminist aesthetic or a different language, as professed by radical feminists. If they want to win in the harsh world of capitalism, women have to merge into men's world, adopting their way to behave, dress, talk and act in social life. There is no room for a different experience of womanhood, but rather a passive subjugation to patriarchal institutions in order to find a spot at the top. In this respect, motherhood is seen as an obstacle to personal success. More generally, becoming a mother is something that should have no impact on a woman's future and should be treated only in biological terms, with no links whatsoever to nurturing as a defining social trait for women.

A third, more inclusive type of feminism that emerged in those years was called *socialist feminism*, in that the stress was on the social battle that women had to fight alongside all oppressed social categories. In the hope to become more independent both socially and individually, socialist feminists integrated "gender into an understanding of all the other complex factors which create our lives – class, race, culture, geography, work, family, sexuality", for a world in which "women and men have to struggle together to reach a new accommodation" (145). Motherhood is here perceived as something to be integrated into the feminist battle, not something to reject. It is not seen as a product of patriarchal societies, but as an intimate part of female experience that has undoubtedly social implications, but nevertheless is also something very personal to every woman, and hence has to be understood in its complexity.

Even though the panorama of the feminisms that emerged in the 1970s was extremely diverse, some common assumptions were shared by most of these women. Firstly (and more importantly) all collective or personal assumptions of an alleged male superiority needed to be challenged. Furthermore, following Simone De Beauvoir's principle that "one is not born, but rather becomes, a woman" (293), all sexual division of labour is but a social construct, thus leading to the possibility for this system to be changed and made more equal.

In the British context, these ideas were expressed on a number of publications which flourished at the beginning of the decade. Among them, *Spare Rib* is certainly the most iconic feminist magazine. It was published between 1972 and 1993, but gained momentum especially during the first half of the 1970s. This manifesto stated that the aim of the new publication was to "reach out to all women, cutting across material, economic and class barriers, to approach them as individuals in their own right".[1] The magazine can be praised for seeking to include also class and race issues into the feminist agenda, avoiding any previous generalisation on the basis of a shared womanhood. The *Red Rag,* published between 1972 and 1980, was more aligned with Communist ideas and "called for the expansion of feminist solidarity through strike support for women workers" (Smith 37). In addition to the proliferation of feminist magazines, publishing companies like *Virago* and *The Women's Press* helped promote new feminist literature and published books with the aim to uncover forgotten female names of the past.

Overall, a great part of the feminist debate of those years revolved around family-related themes. The imbalance of work and labour was treated as a direct consequence of an unbalanced treatment of women within the family. Men's exclusion from childcare was also felt like a pressing matter to be addressed, as the absence of the father from the household perpetrated in the child the mindset of the exclusive child-rearing duties of the mother.

[1] Excerpt from the *Spare Rib* Manifesto, 1972.

2. Sweden in the 1970s and 1980s

2.1. Olof Palme and the consolidation of the Swedish Welfare State

Olof Palme is the absolute protagonist of the Swedish political scene from the early 1970s until the mid-1980s. Prime minister of Sweden between 1969-1976 and 1982-1986, he was known as a great proponent of social equality, world peace and a strong welfare state. Despite his conservative background, he came to be influenced by social democratic values. As a politician, Palme was often described as a "revolutionary reformist". Thanks to massive financial policies, he was able to significantly expand Sweden's Welfare system, with special help for the disabled, immigrants, the poorly paid, single mothers and the elderly. Palme gave more power to trade unions and increased worker's rights, job security and pensions. An early proponent of gender equality, Palme made childcare free. He became also known for being a staunch critic both of US and USSR foreign interventionism, making enemies also outside of his country. He opposed both fascism and communism, and was very vocal against the Vietnam War and the apartheid regime in South Africa. His still unsolved murder in 1986 shocked Sweden and the world, leading to a torrent of conspiracy theories, which helped crystallise his status of Western political icon.

Palme's policies contributed to the establishment of Sweden as the most radical example of a total Welfare state in which individuals are given full support, from their education to their economic independence. The Swedish model proposed by Palme is diametrically opposed to the one implemented by Margaret Thatcher in Great Britain. Both political views see the individual at the centre. However, whereas Thatcher was a proponent of individual independence without any interference from the state in one's pursuit of economic and social achievements, Palme believed that, in order to be a successful individual, the state had to take care of all social and economic inequalities. In their rather compelling 2006 work *Är Svensken en Människa* ("Is the Swede a person?"), Henrik Berggren and Lars Trädgårdh call the alliance between state and the individual citizen "svenska statsindividualismen" ("Swedish state individualism"), a relationship which "bygger på en motsatt moralisk logik, en föreställning om att den sanna kärleken är byggd

inte på det ömsesidiga beroendet utan på autonomins fasta grund" (10).[2] Following this thesis, "vad som skulle kunna betraktas som alienation, ansvarslöshet och till och med ett asocialt och omoraliskt beteende, är i det svenska välfärdsystemet förenligt med överordnade värden som solidaritet, trygghet och jämlikhet" (10).[3] The fact that the state takes care of what Thatcher would consider "private matters" enables the liberation of the individual from an oppressive system of inequalities.

In 1972 Palme devoted an entire hour of his speech at the party congress to women's struggle for equality: "In the labour movement, the so-called women's issue has never been isolated. The women in our movement have perceived their struggle for equality as part of the entire labour movement's struggle for a just society."[4] Palme raised gender equality on the political agenda and showed that men too could engage in the feminist battles. His social democratic policies freed many women from their exclusive maternal duties and allowed them to become competitive players both in the country's economy and politics. One of his first measures was the abolition of joint taxation for the nuclear family, which signified that now both women and men were regarded as self-sufficient individuals. In addition to that, childcare and the care for the elderly, which was formerly almost exclusively women's responsibility, was expanded with the creation of efficient nursery schools and retirement homes. As a consequence of these policies, women improved their access to education and employment, something which helped them gain the insight and the tools to critically engage with their problems, also thanks to second-wave feminism's most radical and active phase.

Even though Palme's premiership coincided with the downturn of the Swedish economy in 1974-75, the worst since the Second World War, the Swedish Welfare state has become since then a model for Western democracies (Törnqvist 50). After his murder, Sweden continued to be affected by serious economic problems, with unemployment remaining high throughout the 1980s. Yet, his impact on Swedish politics has been undeniable, similarly to Thatcher's in Great Britain.

[2] "builds on a contrasting moral logic, an idea that real love is not built on mutual dependency, but on firm autonomy grounds".
[3] "That which could be seen as alienation, lack of responsibility and even asocial and immoral behaviour, in the Swedish welfare system is associated with more important values like solidarity, safety and equality".
[4] Taken from a public speech held by Palme at the *Socialdemokraterna* congress on October 2, 1972.

2.2 Feminist practices in Sweden

From the late 1960s onwards Sweden began to be dominated by a debate on gender roles that foreshadowed the radical phase of second-wave feminism. Eva Moberg was one of the first debaters to actually question women's place in Swedish society. With her essay "Kvinnans villkorliga frigivnings" ("The Woman's Conditional Liberation"), she argued that women had not yet been granted full freedom as individuals. The possibility for them to study and achieve any career goals was hindered by the assumption that their main duty was to nurture and bring up children. Moberg was very vocal against Alva Myrdal's and Viola Klein's book *Kvinnans Två Roller* ("The Woman's Two Roles"), which was published the year before. According to these two, women had two roles, one as a wife and mother, and one as a professional woman. Men, on the contrary, only had one. Eva Moberg opposed this binary conception: she believed that both men and women had a single role, that is the role of human beings, and it was part of a moral obligation to ensure that the offspring were well cared for by both parents. In her essay, Moberg described the balancing act that women were expected to handle. On the one hand, the view of women as professionals is positive, on the other hand, women continue to be driven to keep their so-called feminine qualities and are constantly expected to make themselves attractive to men. Ultimately, Moberg claimed that only a transformation of the role of men could change the situation for women. The notion of the dual roles of women was obsolete: what mattered was the role of women and men as human beings. Moberg believed that there were mainly three factors that prevented women from rejecting the old yet undermined system:

> 1. Deras funktion att föda barn gör dem periodvis beroende av andra för uppehälle och trygghet.
> 2. I konkurrensen om männen gäller det att inte försämra några chanser genom att riskera "kvinnligheten". […]
> 3. Alternativet äktenskap med hem och barn är förenat med social prestige och möjligheter till större socialt avancemang än vad kvinnan själv skulle kunna uppnå […]. (75-76)[5]

[5] "1. Their function of giving birth periodically makes them dependent on others for subsistence and security. 2. In the competition for men, it is important not to impair any chances by jeopardizing "femininity". 3. The alternative of marriage with home and children is associated with social prestige and opportunities for greater social advancement than the woman could achieve on her own".

Liberation, then, had to start not exclusively from women, who were still dependent on the oppressive system, but also from men, who had to accept that roles are only a social construction and therefore they should take on an equal share of childcare and housework (81).

Moberg's work certainly inspired Edmund Dahlström, editor of an important collection of essays called *Kvinnors liv och arbete* ("Women's Life and Work"). The authors analyzed the development of gender role thinking in young children and the impact of gender roles in adolescence and adulthood. The aim was to demolish the myth that only the mother could provide adequate care for the young child, highlighting the crucial role of the father, and thus supporting Moberg's stance. The main proposition and the most controversial aspect of this work was the suggestion to transform "women issues" into "gender role issues" in Sweden. (Dahlström 7).

As a consequence of these early debates, women's participation in the labour market and in politics increased, especially from the 1970s onwards. However, the patterns of women's employment and political representation owe much to the great efforts undertaken to bridge the gender gap during the 1970s and 1980s. Palme's government promoted a reform in 1974, which turned maternity leave into parental leave, thus encouraging men to take an active role in family matters and leaving women the option to pursue their career after pregnancy. More importantly, the Social Democratic Government formed an Equal Opportunities Advisory Committee (*Jämställdhetsdelegationen*) in 1972, which proclaimed the Equal Opportunity Act in 1980 (five years later than its British equivalent). This not only prohibited gender discrimination but also required all employers to actively take measure in the promotion of equality in the workplace.

From the point of view of feminist practices, one could note that second-wave feminism in Sweden seems to be rather weak, especially in comparison with the movements in Denmark and Norway. Dahlerup and Gulli explained this in terms of the impact of the government-led policy of equality, which somehow were able to voice women's requests (31). However, some inadequacies of official policies were pointed out by radical feminists also in Sweden, mainly on topics concerning free abortion and a more equal wages. The feminist *Grupp 8,* among other had been formed by eight women in Stockholm in 1968 and became a public organization in 1970. The members drew heavily from British feminism, especially in terms of collective participation and the creation of a journal called *Kvinnobullettinen*, which began to appear in 1975. The group was formed by intellectuals, journalist, and writers, among which there were Suzanne Osten and Margareta Garpe. The

early theatre works of these playwrights was heavily influenced by their political engagement. Together with the production of feminist plays which ignited the public debate even outside the theatre world, they promoted demonstration for free abortions and created women's bookstores and women's centre.[6]

Similarly to feminist groups in Great Britain, by the 1980s the radical phase of Swedish second-wave feminism came to an end, due to discrepancies within the different feminist groups and the unstable political climate which followed Palme's death. Nevertheless, the great engagement and enthusiasm of second-wave feminists inspired a younger generation of women to explore gender issues and to go on fighting for equality. The fact that today's Sweden ranks first in the EU on the Gender Equality index owes much to the feminist battles of the 1970s and 1980s.[7]

[6] More information about the feminist collective *Grupp 8* in: Elgán, Elisabeth. *Att Ge Sig Själv Makt. Grupp 8 Och 1970-Talets Feminism*. Makadam Förlag, 2015.
[7] https://eige.europa.eu/publications/gender-equality-index-2020-sweden

CHAPTER III

Caryl Churchill in the 1970s and 1980s

1. Caryl Churchill

Caryl Churchill was born in London in 1938 but moved to Canada at the age of ten due to the climate created by the Second World War. Back in England she enrolled at the University of Oxford where she graduated in English Literature in 1960. During her literary activity she freely experimented with different forms of storytelling and style. Her career can be divided into three phases. In the first one, which began in 1958, the writer was mainly involved in the production of radio plays. The second phase, between 1972 and 1979, includes a series of independent screenplays with the collaboration of the Joint Stock and Monstrous Regiment companies. The last period, from 1979 onwards, when she wrote her greatest works *Top Girls*, *Fen*, *Serious Money*, *Mad Forest*, and many others.

Like many other women writers, Churchill began her career writing part-time in exchange for minimal wages. Leaving out university productions, the first radio plays were written between 1961 and 1972. The scripts were generally very short, as Churchill could dedicate only few daily hours to writing. In the 1960s she was split between her children and the social role imposed on her by being the wife of a lawyer. It is only in the early 1970s that she began to work more actively in the theatre. During a research project that investigated the inadequate housing structures in the London borough of Islington, she was influenced for the creation of what would become her first real hit, *Owners*. Produced in 1972 by the Royal Court Theatre, this satire on capitalism introduces the central figure of Marion, a ruthless real estate agent and Thatcherite *ante litteram*.

The next production, staged in 1975 with the title *Objections To Sex and Violence* explored the relationship between political terrorism and psychological violence. Together with the Joint Stock Company, Churchill conceived *Light Shining in Buckinghamshire* in 1976, a survey on the revolutionary fervour generated by the economic and social upheavals of seventeenth-century England. The work used historical documents, including an adaptation of Putney's debates, in which freedom, democracy, the common good and religion were discussed. In the same year Churchill also wrote *Vinegar Tom*, an exploration of the witch hunts during the seventeenth century. Intended for a company of women only, it showed how women were persecuted and accused of witchcraft because of society's fear of female sexuality.

Over time, Churchill's works gradually became more overtly feminist and political. One of the best examples of Churchill's engagement with sexual politics is *Cloud Nine*, commissioned in 1978 by Max Stafford-Clark for the Joint Stock company. Divided into

two acts, the first was set in colonial Africa during the Victorian era and addressed the close relationship between the rigid code of British imperialism and the repressive values of a heteronormative society. The second act instead had as its background the London of the 1970s, with the main characters managing conflicts with themselves and their sexuality.

Churchill's masterpiece and most produced play *Top Girls (*1982) also dealt with sexual politics, becoming her most ferocious commentary against the policies of Margaret Thatcher in the 1980s. More recently, many of her works mainly reflect on politics and society, such as *Serious Money* and *Mad Forest* which address the issue of consumerism and the collapse of communism respectively. In the latter part of his career, Churchill's production alternates between large commissions for West End and Broadway theatres and small-scale productions for the educational sector.

2. Motherhood and ownership: *Owners* (1972)

The case study that I would like to take into consideration in this section is Churchill's first full length play to be professionally staged at the Royal Court Theatre Upstairs in 1972. In her 1984 introduction to the work, Churchill recollects her influences during the initial stages. Writing about the characters formation process, she states that "the active one had to be a woman, the passive one a man, for their attitudes to show up clearly as what they believed rather than as conventional male and female behaviour" (Churchill, *Plays:1* 4). This is part of the author's project to unsettle gender conventions while hinting at the ruthlessness of capitalism, which corrodes human relationships and reduces everything to a transaction. Churchill also refers to Eva Figes's *Patriarchal Attitudes* and the legacy of this feminist cornerstone in her work. As Kritzer-Howe puts it, "Churchill cross-cuts the issue of property ownership with that of gender, confounding a simplistic equation of capitalistic and patriarchal exploitation by reversing conventional sex roles" (65). The political involvement in socialist propaganda is undeniable: the play was written well before the wave of liberal conservatism which will have its heyday with Margaret Thatcher in the 1980s. However, in the portrayal of class abuse and violent economic manipulations, the playwright joins the socialist debate about the "ongoing struggle over whether and how the beast of capitalism would be contained and its violence blunted by regulations, continued nationalisation of key industries and the creation of social welfare programmes" (Howard 37).

Already from the character description we realise that the protagonist Marion is no ordinary woman. She is defined as "edgy", she "moves a lot" and she is "often eating", these being features typically associated with an active and relentless woman. The food theme, linked to the more general idea of consumption, is pivotal, as we will see how devouring Marion becomes throughout the play. She has a "strong face rather than pretty", with clothes that "are expensive but often badly matched, coming undone, slightly askew". These directions underline Marion's drive "to own and control" yet her not being "fully in control of her own actions" (Aston, *Caryl* 20).

Lisa, the other female character, is instead introduced as a "weak pretty face losing its prettiness with strain", thus indicating a more gentle and subdued character as opposed to Marion. From her first appearance we see that she is pregnant, and hence she incarnates biological motherhood or, in a more general sense, the idea of nature as opposed to Marion's materialistic credo.

Clegg is presented as the simple-minded and earthy butcher who is about to shut down his activity because of the new Sainsbury's that has just opened next door. This, together with the first harsh remarks he makes against his empowered wife Marion, already hints at the destructive power of capitalism, which is seen by Clegg as senseless and abnormal: " I don't know why people want meat in polythene" (9), he remarks.

Worsely, Marion's gloomy and suicidal co-worker, also feels subjugated by Marion, but seems to be more passive and resigned than the butcher. Throughout the play, both Clegg and Worsely represent different expressions of a masculinity in crisis, where old social conventions are shaken by the ruthlessness of contemporary capitalism and the unstoppable emancipation of women. Whereas Clegg reacts to his miserable condition with vitriolic and chauvinist comments towards Marion - "She is legally mine […] It's very like having a talking dog" (11), Worsely looks more self-defeated and sees in his suicide the only possible escape.

Marion and Clegg are insatiable consumers both literally and ideologically. While Marion is constantly seen eating (without sharing), Clegg is very much dependent on his activity as butcher. Together with constant references to meat cuts, his "meat cleaver and blood-spattered apron provide a visual reference point for their aggressive ruthlessness toward the weak" (Kritzer Howe 64), thus reinforcing the need to prevail in the power battle, both against his wife and the other characters. The director of the first production of the play fittingly called this dynamic a "system of emotional capitalism".

Even though in both cases husband and wife are presented as irreconcilable entities, on a larger scale the biggest contrast portrayed here is the one between Marion and her former lover Alec. A shrewd capitalistic ethic is opposed to a more reflective and passive way of life, something which "addresses the interrelatedness of the institution of private property and underlying cultural attitudes" (Kritzer Howe 62). Marion represents the Western need to expand and impose its rule, whereas Alec is the symbol of a tranquil resistance against this exploitative system. Marion and Alec are two unconventional characters who go beyond stereotypical gender representations: a hyperactive woman addicted to power and a passive man more interested in a contemplative life. Clegg and Lisa, on the other hand, are victims of social conventions and wish to follow what they consider to be 'the norm'. As has been noted, this pattern "indicates a concern about how the entrenched system of gender relations functions with property ownership to limit the power of choice" (Kritzer Howe 66).

Ultimately, Marion embarks on an “exploration of capitalist subjectivity”, in which the traditional narrative where “women’s maternal instincts provide protection from the penetration of market logic into domestic situations” is progressively dismantled. Mixing motherhood and ownership, we realise “how the drive to consume and acquire destabilises every kind of human connection”, even the ones prescribed by patriarchy (Howard 37). In an interview, Churchill stated that she “feels owning is stupid” and that “ from the ownership of property and things it is a short step to the idea of owning and controlling people.”[1]

In her mannerisms and in her perpetrations of actions, ways of speaking, and dynamics typically associated to men, through the character of Marion Churchill confirms Butler’s theory of performativity, according to which “the action of gender requires a performance that is repeated. This repetition is at once a re-enactment and reexperiencing of a set of meanings already socially established; and it is the mundane and ritualised form of their legitimation” (Butler 190). Gender is a matter of acts and gestures, “a set of corporeal styles” (191) which, being ‘put on’ time and again, end up being assimilated as natural facts. But the truth is that what is regarded as natural is rather a naturalised practice, the outcome of the force of habit. Marion, then, is "the powerful rich property developer" who appears to be bereft of any feminine traits, as opposed to Alec, who remains inactive and passive. Worsely’s tenderness and motherly attitude towards the baby recall traditional assumptions of femininity, and even Clegg’s masculinity is just verbalised but never actualised in typical terms. Applying Butler’s theory of performativity, The next section will explore the instability of gender representations and the reversal of gender roles.

2.1 Masculinity in crisis

The first act of the play sets the tone of what could be described as a progressive personal and existential crisis for the male characters. Clegg, who has the ambition to become a true incarnation of the traditional pater familias, lacks the practical skills to succeed in the capitalistic society he very much despises. The crisis of Clegg as the patriarchal husband is reflected also in his struggle to become a father: he looks up to his own father, yet he is unable to become like him. The crisis of fatherhood is evident in the way he desires a son,

[1] Excerpt from a 1972 interview with socialist playwright Steve Gooch.

not because he wants to take care of him, but because he wishes to use him as proof that he has accomplished something in life. Worsely, the other failing man, also experiences a gradual deterioration. He is presented as "role-less", neither a father nor a husband and is seen struggling throughout the play, in a quest to find his own identity. The third male character, Alec, is portrayed as another "failed man": jobless, apathic and passive. Nevertheless, at the end of the play he will be the only one promoting a positive version of fatherhood, untouched by capitalism and patriarchy but only inspired by genuine human connections.

The play opens with a scene that revolves around rotten meat, which represents both Clegg's need for sexual supremacy and his corrupt state as failing man. The smell is noticed by Worsely at the beginning - "Pongs a bit" (7), and Marion when she enters at the end of the scene - "It stinks in here, Clegg"(12), but it is promptly dismissed by the butcher - "You don't want to mind the smell" (7). In the first lines between Clegg and Worsely, different kinds of meat are listed: "Twelve ounces of mince", "Some nice rump steak", "Some kidneys", "I don't go for offal", "Nice rabbit", "A nice lamb" (7). These seem to be the only items that interest him and the only domain over which he still has some power. The sudden change when the butcher asks about his wife and then muses on the "one thousand five hundred and seventy-five people" dying daily in England and Wales, with his wish to make her "one of them" (8) is the transition point from the actual dead meat he is trying to sell to his bloodthirsty desires towards Marion. What unsettles him the most is the fact that he is not a provider and has to depend on his wife's money in order to survive. Clegg praises his father, who used to kill his own meat and was worshipped by his mother. The image he depicts is that of an archaic working class household, where his mother would be "on her knees" and his father "would raise her up, very gracious. She knew how to give a man the right support" (9). This is exactly what Clegg is lacking in his marriage and he knows that Marion will never be on her knees for him. He is victim of an old-fashioned system where the man can be the only provider and the wife has to simply play the role of the "moral mother", without interfering with the external world (Chodorow 9).

The reference to the mental hospital to which Marion was taken - where she was told that "she'd be happier and more sane as a good wife" (10) and she was uselessly encouraged to pursue a creative hobby at home - is seen by Clegg as the ultimate shift from the perfect wife to the careerist woman. The fact that this shift takes place in a mental institution gives the butcher reasons to believe that his wife is actually not normal. The outcome of her nervous breakdown is neither therapy nor a more contemplative life:

Marion opts for "acquisition pure and simple, capitalism's all-purpose panacea" (Howard 36). She indeed suffers from "pathological acquisitiveness", something which permeates all aspects of her working and personal life, including her relationship with Clegg. When the man feels his "patriarchal prerogative" is "threatened by their childlessness, she buys him not only a new butcher shop, Clegg and Son, but also a baby to inhabit the familial role" (Gobert 46).

In response to his wife's domineering behaviour, Clegg sees himself more as an Othello than a Hamlet, thus pointing at his violent and irrational nature when it comes to his "beloved". He brandishes his knife while stating this, adding that she is "legally" his property. However, contrarily to Othello, Clegg is weak and unresolved. Furthermore, the fact that he tricks himself into believing that his wife is infertile because they have no children, not acknowledging that she is on the pill, is yet another delusion.

Marion's first line is "one hundred thousand", which is the price at which her last property was sold. We are immediately shown what kind of woman she is: resolute and in charge, Clegg's exact opposite. Even the fact that she resorts to the semantic area of meat, referring to her client as a "lamb", reveals that she is indeed powerful, and can make use of those expressions more successfully than Clegg. Also her idea of becoming vegetarian can be seen as the last attempt to demolish her husband's supremacy. She wants to "commemorate. Make an occasion" (12). Marion is a perfect example of the self-made woman that seeks only her personal success, at the expense of other people.

Lisa and Alec are also presented as a problematic couple. Coming home from a night out and realising that their house has been burgled, they have different reactions to the loss of some of their property. Lisa, who is six months pregnant, is the only one worrying, especially about her engagement ring, symbolically the institution of marriage in which Lisa is determined to believe. She would seem stronger than Alec, who instead is apathic and unmoved by the event. Lisa complains that he never worries about anything, and she wonders what he is up to all day, while she is working as a hairdresser even though she is very pregnant. "I wish you'd see a different doctor who'd find something really wrong with you" (14), she reproaches him, implying that, similarly to what Clegg thinks of Marion, Alec's weakened condition could only be the result of mental illness. She refuses to find other reasons to explain her husband's unwillingness to react. He, similarly to Clegg and Worsely, at a first glance would seem to be living his own crisis of masculinity, a condition which has prompted him to opt for silence and apathy in order to avoid any confrontation. Lisa looks as if she would rather have a stereotypical patriarchal

husband, a man that at least would feel guilty if he left his wife. However, in her opinion nothing moves Alec at all, not even the baby they are expecting. On the contrary, he is seen lying on the bed by now and "stays there for the rest of the scene" (16). Lisa, who corresponds to stereotypical gender representations of the subjugated wife, sees Alec's untypical male passiveness as unnatural. In creating the character of Lisa, Churchill acknowledges the difficulty to accept alternative gender representations, in a way failing to understand "the specific cultural operations of gender oppression" (Butler 18). She herself is victim of gender oppression, and yet she is unable to step out of patriarchal constructs.

In the following part, Marion, Worsely, and Clegg are celebrating Marion's new deal in a strip-club. The woman seems extremely at ease in a typically patriarchal environment, she converses with Worsely, flirts with him and finally kisses him, while Clegg is distracted by the strippers. She treats her husband like her child: "Enjoying yourself Clegg? […] If you want a girl, Clegg, I'll buy you one" (20). Once again, everything, even human bodies, are a commodity in Marion's view. Clegg insists on protecting his pride, yet reveals what he sees as the reason for this celebration: "she's never bought me a drink until tonight. Pride, have my pride. Tonight's a special occasion. A fling. The end of Clegg and Son. The end of me" (21). In his eyes, Marion is not simply celebrating her most recent deal, but her victory over her husband, who was forced to close down his activity because of the same capitalist machine in which Marion plays a part. He talks about the end of Clegg and Son, referring both to his father's legacy which he was not able to live up to, and his own son, the one he has always wished to have but Marion never conceded. Consequently, he feels annihilated and declares the end of his existence. From this moment on, Clegg recedes to adolescence, he just concentrates on the strippers and emits guttural sounds, while the other two go on talking money. This culminates with the gun firing, evoking the moment of Clegg's ejaculation.

When Worsely spills his drink on Marion's dress, she reacts with her materialistic credo:

> MARION: I was throwing the dress away in any case. I hate old clothes. I love to throw them away. And get new ones.
> WORSELY: That doesn't look old.
> MARION: Old enough. (21)

The “old enough” reveals Marion’s attitude towards consumerism and appearances, added to her constant pursuit of newness. She even compares herself to those women being clever at working with their bodies, saying that she would never dare expose herself that much. While Clegg keeps pointing at the strippers like a teenager, inviting his wife to “look at the size of them” (21), Marion and Worsely kiss.

Overall, the strip-club scene is a very strong statement against a traditional representation through the male gaze. We never see the female stripper, the object of Clegg’s desire. Instead, we are only shown his reactions, which ridicule him and make him look vulnerable. This untypical characterisation of male desire “precludes stereotyping to reinforce multiple viewpoints, thus dislocating the play from its framework of traditional theatre convention” (Kritzer Howe 63-64). Clegg’s vulnerability is symptomatic of his crisis as the typical pater familias. Feeling like he can give orders only to his dog, he wishes that he could have the same respect also from his wife, whom he had continuously called “dog” in the first scene. In an exchange with Lisa, he ironically refers to his shop shutting down as “our tragedy”, to which Lisa replies:

> LISA: What an awful thing. Your very own shop all gone.
> CLEGG: That’s what I say. All gone. My very own.
> LISA: You are as badly off as me.
> CLEGG: It’s a man’s job to put a stiff upper lip on the face of it. To lend a supporting arm. Your chin can tremble. (26)

However, Clegg’s misfortune is only “his tragedy”, and it only reaffirms Marion’s victory over the husband. Lisa tries to be sympathetic to him, only to get another proof of Clegg’s desperate chauvinism. Instead of accepting her “supporting arm”, he reacts boldly as if to imply that he, being a man, has to “put a stiff upper lip” and make it on his own. Of course this strategy will prove to be catastrophic in the long run: Clegg, like all of us, needs human support. In contrast, he urges Lisa to cry, saying “There there. A real woman. A good cry. Best thing” (26), as if he wished his wife could do the same. Clegg reinforces the stereotype of the comforting patroniser because it is the only role he has been taught to play yet cannot perform with his own wife. When Lisa realises that Worsely works for Marion and that her former “friend” is trying to kick her out of the house she becomes enraged, to which Marion also (sarcastically) reacts as the comforting patroniser: “Have a cry. Have a good cry. Then we’ll see” (27).

Even though Clegg and Lisa can both be seen as victims of events, since they are still trapped in a patriarchal system, Lisa is the ultimate victim of the story, given "her position as a woman within the traditional setting of home, husband, children and family" (Aston, *Caryl* 22). Drawing on Cixous's definition, Lisa is the feminine "Other", which becomes the object of appropriation for Clegg and has to be colonised in order to reassess male privilege. She is only there "to be reappropriated, recaptured, and destroyed as other" (Cixous, "Sorties" 82). Her victimisation "is further, and perhaps most significantly, established in the loss of her baby to Marion and Clegg" (Aston, *Caryl* 22). Since Lisa is primarily associated with the traditional nurturer role, when she is deprived of her baby she is also denied the symbol of motherhood.

If Lisa is the victim, Marion is the insatiable oppressor. Constantly shown eating (alone), she tells Alec: "I'm always hungry. But thin. I don't put on. Nothing to show for it. Moving about all the time is what does it. I eat in bed. I work at the table and sleep at my desk" (28) Marion is voracious, both in her personal life, here symbolised by the bed where she oppresses her husband, and in her work life. There really is no boundary between personal life and work life, she has to "eat" all the time in order to feel alive. She is trying to negotiate with Alec, who is still apathetic and does not seem to care if he loses everything, including his wife Lisa. Marion applies economic principles also to human relationships, stating that "if you love someone you want to keep them" (28). She tries to motivate Alec, telling him his success story, where she always knew she "wasn't the butcher's life" (29). She goes on to proclaim what could be considered the self-made woman manifesto:

> But I want to hold on. Everything I was taught – be clean, be quick, be top, be best, you may not succeed, Marion, but what matters is to try your hardest. To push on. Onward Christian soldiers, marching as to war. […] Fight the good fight. Where's your fight? […] God gave him dominion over every beast of the field and fowl of the air. Gave the land to him and to his seed forever. Doesn't evolution say the same? Keep on, get better, be best. Onward. Fight. How did man get to the moon? Not by sitting and staring at an orange. Columbus, Leonardo da Vinci, Scott of the Antarctic. You would be content on a flat earth. But the animals are ours. The vegetables and minerals. For us to consume. We don't shrink from blood. Or guilt. Guilt is essential to progress. […] Guilt is knowing what to do. I see the children with no shoes and socks in the houses I

> buy. Should I buy them shoes? It would be ridiculous. But I feel it. […] And what would happen to work without guilt? I was never a lazy girl, Marion tries hard. I work like a dog. Most women are fleas but I'm the dog. (29)

In order to validate her status as extraordinary, successful woman, Marion draws on religious iconography, comparing herself to a soldier marching to war. She skilfully blends Christian creationism with Darwinian evolutionary theories, claiming that man owns all god's creations, which exist only to be consumed by humans. Man's only aim is to "get better, be best", implying that people who do not express their full potential are doomed to misery. The feeling of guilt is used in a distorted way, very far from the Christian idea of the original sin. Guilt is seen as the driving force to achieve progress, it is what we feel in a situation where we pursue success at the expense of someone else. However, instead of feeling remorse, Marion praises the guilt she feels, which in her view becomes a sign of humanity but ultimately an excuse to exploit the weak to her own benefit. Remorse and action to overcome the guilt are seen as "ridiculous" and counterproductive. In her final statement she calls herself "the dog", compared to most women, who remain the fleas, in her opinion.

The fact that Marion refers herself as a "dog", exactly as her husband had defined her earlier on, enhances the uniqueness of a play where a "realistic style and traditional structure" are "presented through a distorting lens that bends and disjoins the play's elements from their anticipated pattern. Action splits into multiple channels, diverges as some lines of action become progressively more farcical while others become more serious." In this case, "self-parodying dialogue creates comic – and critical – distance between a character and his or her speech" (Kritzer Howe 63).

At the end of the scene Marion seduces Alec, treating him yet again as an economic transaction: "You are what I want. […] I'm keeping you Alec", to which Alec replies: "I could now. Easily. If you want. But I don't keep" (31-32). Another deal has been successfully closed by Marion. The dynamic between the two is purely materialistic: "Marion declares her desire for Alec in terms of ownership, representing herself in imperialistic and masculinist discourse" (Aston, *Caryl* 20).

Lisa is visibly enraged by Marion's manipulations, and says that she is not willing to bring "a baby home to this" and that she would rather "kill it" (36). From this moment the baby is treated as yet another commodity Marion can dispose of. She accepts Lisa's offer and takes the baby. As has been noted by Aston, "'owning' or buying babies is a class

and gender issue" (*Caryl* 23). Motherhood (but also fatherhood) cannot be detached from capitalistic power relations. Lisa is the biological mother, but in her contemporary society she is not able to provide for the child and she is deprived of it by the voracious Marion, who instead can function as good mother in capitalistic terms because she can provide for the baby, yet she lacks empathy towards it. At the same time, Churchill criticises the association parenthood – ownership, insisting that our capitalistic society cannot apply the same materialistic principles to family relations. As has been noted by Komporaly in her analysis of motherhood in Churchill's early plays:

> Churchill posits Marion's (and later, Marlene's) stance as extreme, and carries out a firm socialist-inspired critique of egalitarian feminism by juxtaposing Marion's 'achievements' with the fate of her victims. [Churchill emphasises] the unequal power relations between Lisa and Marion. Some of the highly publicised surrogacy and adoption cases in the eighties equally revealed a lack of balance in the economic backgrounds of the participating parties, thus revealing the prophetic nature of Churchill's work. (48)

The true "revolutionary" in the play is Alec, who rejects capitalistic fatherhood seen as the simple desire for a heir, and promotes more genuine human connections outside the traditional patriarchal system. He is very different from Clegg, who instead considers the child only as the physical manifestation of his own ambitions, or Marion, who sees Alec's child as a token through which she can also possess her former lover.

Howard defines the characters' struggle to overcome one another in this power battle as the outcome of different "illnesses of acquisition" (Howard 36). In Marion's case, this is enhanced by her mother role, seen by Churchill as "a natural condition distorted by patriarchal society, but also by the drive for property ownership and worldly success" (Howard 49). The playwright presents the dangers that capitalistic progress is doing to family dynamics: Marion is the embodiment of the successful entrepreneur typical of post-war Britain, yet she is also a woman and is determined to combine her work success with her personal life, adopting the same capitalistic principles, including the acquisition of the baby, symbol of the traditional motherly duty *par excellence*. As Gobert puts it,

> The play also reveals the inescapability of property's logic – its subordination of human interest to acquisitive values. […] If human interactions in the play are transactional, their value market-driven, no social relationship can remain

> uncorrupted: not only landlords and tenants, but also neighbours, lovers, co-workers, and spouses betray the logic of property. (47-48)

Both Clegg and Marion have a distorted view of parenthood. Marion does not inhabit the home she buys, exactly as she does not inhabit the mother role. Clegg understands his father role only in patriarchal capitalistic terms: his goal in life is to see the "Clegg and Son" sign hanging on his shop. At the other side of the spectrum, Alec represents an "escape from market logic" and from patriarchal narratives. By giving up his own child, he also dismisses the "'natural' possessiveness that blood ties are typically taken to engender" (Howard 38). With him Churchill seems to espouse the idea of an organic family, where the relationships between biological parents and offspring are destabilised. In such a family structure, children belong primarily to themselves rather than being the extension of their parents and are encouraged to "merge with an adult society in conditions of love and personal interest" (Greer 263).

In conclusion, we can appreciate how the crisis of masculinity is addressed through different perspectives in *Owners* and it is the result not only of female emancipation, but also of capitalistic policies. Even if Marion is the protagonist of the play, for the most part we are shown the devastating effects of her behaviour on the other characters, especially Clegg and Worsely, who epitomise two sides of the same existential crisis. Clegg is lost, in that the role model he was taught to play does not function anymore, whereas Worsely has never understood his role and seems to be in desperate need to connect with his own body. As has been pointed out, Alec is the only exception and probably the only positive male character: his resistance to capitalistic oppression and his disregard for patriarchal conventions in terms of fatherhood make him a heroic, yet tragic figure.

2.2 Subverting family roles

As a result of the crisis of masculinity that has been described so far, typical family roles are subverted in the play. The second act opens with Clegg and Worsely, taking care of the baby instead of Marion, who is never seen holding it. In this last part of the play we see Worsely becoming more and more weak and damaged. This is the physical manifestation of his corrupt state and epitomises the crisis of traditional manhood. He is so weak he cannot even commit suicide properly, and quotes his supposedly made-up befriender, the

Samaritan, as an excuse for his hesitant behaviour towards death: "Life is leasehold. It belongs to God the almighty landlord. You mustn't take life because it's God's property, not yours" (35). Worsely cannot help using real estate vocabulary, at the same time criticising and adapting to Marion's materialistic credo.

The following part of the act revolves around the men's view of "killing", seen as what should be considered an intrinsically male prerogative. Violent manhood is deceitful: both men are unable to react using traditional patterns, yet they insist on conforming to the same schemes. Referring to his experience as a soldier, Clegg claims to be "a man who has killed a man" and someone who has "changed a human being into a carcass" (37) To him this experience marked the last time he felt like a real man ("I was a man"), implying that the National service gave his life purpose, since he had something to fight for. In a way he reminds us of Jimmy Porter in *Look Back in Anger*, another victim of social inertia.[2] In this 1956 play, John Osborne wished to give a voice to the great sense of dissatisfaction of a new generation of man without any point of reference. The rage in the words of Jimmy, especially against his wife Allison, betrays a much deeper identity crisis. Like Jimmy, Clegg is always angry at his wife because he feels he lacks purpose. He is verbally aggressive, yet unable to act. Jimmy and Clegg yearn for a past where men were the only providers for their families and were respected. When it comes to human relationships, Clegg knows only physical contact: "Tell me plainly do you fuck my wife? Or does she jerk you off? Or do you touch her up? Or snog? Fumble? Grope? Caress? Brush against?" (39) His language, like Jimmy's, is abrasive.

Clegg's rage is not only the result of jealousy: he would like to kill Marion also because he regards "her independence and business an injury to him" (Kritzer Howe 65). Since he cannot control her, he can only fantasise to punish her insubordination with death threats that are never uttered in front of her. If Clegg is incapable of gaining control over his wife's body, very ironically Worsely is incapable of gaining control over his own body. His constant suicide attempts, besides giving farcical undertones, contribute to the idea of total inertia. Every time we see him onstage, "his body is marked by further self-inflicted damage, but he never quite succeeds in 'owning', that is, deciding the destiny of his own body" (Aston, *Caryl* 21).

"An eye for an eye. A mouth for a mouth. A cunt for a cunt. Vengeance is mine. I will repay. In full" (52). With these words Clegg tries to go after Marion. He realises his

[2] See Osborne, John. *Look Back in Anger*. Faber, 1956.

only tools to overcome his impotence are physical, since intellectually (and economically), his wife is independent. Exactly like in the first scene, he is only able to express himself with words from his butcher vocabulary: “I always did look at your bottom in the old days. Nice bit of rump. Marion’s more like something for a stew. She’s all gristle. But you melt in the mouth” (54). Clegg opposes Lisa’s generous body to Marion’s bony figure, implying that those physical traits are also linked to their characters, the first one more traditionally feminine and motherly, the second one physically and mentally inaccessible. He keeps patronising Lisa, in the way he is harassing her but also referring to women and mothers in general: “A man can’t be expected to stay home and look after a baby. He can do it of course because it’s not difficult. Even a woman can do it easily. But it is a waste of real abilities” (54). The butcher is reiterating patriarchal ideals that clash with the reality of his own situation: He is forced to look after the baby because his wife is the only provider of the family and has the actual “real abilities” to make a fortune. Marion is a woman of action, whereas Clegg is a man of words (and consequently inaction). He concludes his rant with another misogynistic remark on “true femininity”, which is yet another confirmation of his delusion: “You won’t be suitable unless you lie flat, did you know that, very feminine and do just what you’re told. On your back and underneath is where I like to see a lady. A man on top. Right on top of the world” (55).

Clegg also tries to win a battle against Alec, once again showing his chauvinistic nature. He says “Woman’s like that. Deceit is second nature. Due to Eve” (55), overgeneralizing women. He then goes on talking about Alec’s relationship to Lisa following Marion’s capitalist beliefs: “I wouldn’t want to waste myself on something as second rate as your wife. She was quite useful. A handy receptacle. But quite disposable after” (56). Clegg calls Lisa a “handy receptacle”, thus emptying her and degrading her to a mere container that he can throw away when done with it.

Going on with his materialistic rant, he insists that Marion cannot be touched, as she is his flesh. He has “invested heavily” in her and doesn’t “intend to lose any part of [his] profit” (56) He reinforces the theme of “flesh” by reducing Alec to a “limb” that the butcher will “chop”: “You’ll come limb from limb for me one day. I’ll think of you when I’m at work. Chop. Chop. Chop.” The theme of mutilation is also highlighted by Worsely, who has just entered with his wrists, neck and arm bandaged and his leg in plaster.

Marion comes in and manipulates Lisa and calls her hysterical, only because she is trying to fight for her baby and her husband. Lisa reproaches Marion: “It’s just a game to you, Marion. You don’t want him really. You just want to win”, to which Marion coldly

replies: “He’s legally my child” (60). Clegg keeps referring to the baby as the “little butcher”, as if its destiny had already been written. Marion plays this game with him, telling him: “It was entirely for you I got the baby. I bought him a shop, for you” (61).

At this point, Worsely seems to be the only one who understands the nonsense that has been going on the whole time. He points out how Marion is not really interested in the child and that he should go back to his mother, to which she replies: “I adore him” (61). Worsely here reveals his truth: “I like him. More than Clegg does. Far more than you do, Marion. But I’m not saying that makes him mine” (61). It is not enough to state to love a child, when this is not counterbalanced with actual caring of the child. Worsely, like other “weak” male characters in Churchill plays, is more attentive and behaves more typically “motherly” than both the biological mother, who regrets her decision but nevertheless gave away her child, and the surrogate mother, who bought the child only as a commodity.

Worsely knows Marion’s true nature: she cannot be a good mother, especially given the circumstances in which she decides to become one. In his opinion not all women are necessarily (or naturally) good mothers. He invites her to “keep going, be a success, make a fortune” (61) and to use him for anything she likes, because this is what she is good at. She must not feel empty only because she has opted for career instead of family. Since she cannot become a biological mother, Marion believes she can apply the same principles of her trade also to human relationship, similarly to how she behaves with her husband, whom she treats like an employee. Marion insists that she cannot give up the baby, since she believes to be in love with Alec and the baby represents a piece of him, the lover (or maybe the commodity) she cannot possess. With her statement at the end of the scene we realise that there will be no redemption for Marion:

> I will keep what’s mine. The more you want it the more it’s worth keeping. […] Every one of you thinks I will give in. Because I’m a woman, is it? I’m meant to be kind. I’m meant to understand a woman’s feelings wanting her baby back. I don’t. I won’t. I can be as terrible as anyone. Soldiers have stuck swords through innocents. I can massacre too. Into the furnace. Why shouldn’t I be Genghis Khan? Empires only come by killing. I won’t shrink. Not one of you loves me. But he shall grow up to say he does. (63)

Marion opens applying the laws of economics to her relationship with the child: the more she wants it the more valuable he becomes. She then goes on about womanhood and sisterly

bond, which she cannot understand. She acknowledges no feeling of empathy towards other women (and in this case a mother wanting her child back) and instead considers herself a soldier, similarly to how she had depicted herself in the first act. Only because she has the body of a woman, she believes she can be ruthless and violent too. Like a true megalomaniac, she compares herself to Genghis Khan. Saying that "empires only come by killing", she implies that some sacrifices are necessary in order to succeed. In her view, being an owner "not only confers control, but also justifies taking life – the ultimate form of control" (Kritzer Howe 65). At the very end, she reveals the ultimate reason why she wants to keep the baby: afraid that no one will ever love her, she intends to raise him so as to have someone that will eventually tell her that he loves her. This last statement betrays how desperate for affection she is and how incapable she is of finding a balance between her shrewd working ethics and her need for closer human relationships. In this scene Marion puts into practice what she has finished preaching in the previous part: she, a woman, can also be violent and manipulative. After wondering how she can attack the couple, she follows Worsely's suggestion to set the house on fire. Throughout the play, this house has served as a metaphor for society. When it burns, it metaphorically hints "at the revolution and rendering moot the issue of its ownership" (Kritzer Howe 67): it does not exist anymore, thus making all the previous debate on ownership pointless.

In the last scene, we are back at the butcher's shop, a new one in this case. Clegg is serving a lady, always using his "fleshy" language and patronising attitude: "Wish I could get away myself and have the lazy day you housewives have" (64). He does not realise he can work only because his wife bought him a new shop and that before that moment he was indeed a "housewife", taking care of the child. Marion comes in, looking tired after a night spent in the office. The couple seems to have lost track of their baby. Worsely informs them that he has taken him to Lisa, scolding Marion and Clegg for not being careful enough. Clegg insists on calling the child "baby butcher", as if his role had already been established by the father.

At the end of the play Clegg tries to reconcile with Marion, a new union based only on the hatred towards Alec: "Now he's gone, and you wanted him gone, wanted the same thing I wanted, we are one again" (67). Marion is now aware of the atrocities she has committed, but nevertheless has no plan to stop: "I never knew I could do a thing like that. I might be capable of anything. I'm just beginning to find out what's possible" (67). Worsely's final action reveals how frightening the future can be. He points a gun at his temple, fires, yet says: "Missed" (67).

In conclusion, in portraying the ruthlessness of capitalism applied to gender politics, Churchill confirms Butler's remarks that "even feminism ought to be careful not to idealise certain expressions of gender that, in turn, produce new forms of hierarchy and exclusion" (viii). The dystopian universe created by Churchill works as admonition against certain practices of radical feminism that instead of promoting equality create new hierarchies among women.

3. The performance of motherhood: *Cloud Nine* (1979)

The second case study I am dealing with is a play that is still widely performed around the world.[3] The product of a collaborative efforts with The Joint Stock Company, *Cloud Nine* is one of Churchill's most successful works, mainly because of its structural innovations and main themes, which revolve around sexual politics, something that was at the centre of the feminist debate in the late 1970s but that also resonates with us today. If in *Owners* patriarchal structures are seen as the by-product of capitalistic societies, in *Cloud Nine* they are placed within the context of British colonialism, to make the link between patriarchy and gender oppression more effective.

Furthermore, the time shift between the two acts aims at disrupting the idea of a unified narrative and a linear development of the characters, thus encouraging audiences to adopt a more critical perspective. Churchill toys with the concept of "theatrical doubleness" (Kritzer Howe 129), that is, the representation of an event as a result of the character's personal development. Betty's discovery of female orgasm is certainly important to her character's story, but it acquires even more relevance if taken as something more universal. That discovery becomes the celebration of female desire, untouched by patriarchy, and more generally the realisation of one's true self outside of social norms, the instance where a woman becomes aware of the fact that she is not to be defined just as being a mother, as indicated by Irigaray. ("And the One" 67). Betty takes not only her agency back, but also her voice, withdrawing from the language imposed by the patriarchal law. She does not speak as she was told to by her husband, but finds new ways to express her desire (Cixous, "Sorties" 93).

The theme of "doubleness" is enhanced with the use of cross-casting, which destabilises what audiences are used to seeing as the norm on stage. If a female character is portrayed by a male actor, the suspension of disbelief of the audience is put into question and is challenged to accept a different narrative. *Cloud Nine* has "built-in representationally reflexive mechanisms for revealing the production of history as a patriarchal narrative, and for exposing the production of gender and the manufacture of mandated social appearances versus desire" (Luckhurst 76). This confirms Butler's assertion that "'woman' itself is a term in process, a becoming, a constructing that cannot rightfully be said to originate or

[3] Among recent productions we can include one of the very few Italian adaptations, staged by the Teatro di Roma in 2019.

end. As an ongoing discursive practice, it is open to intervention and resignification" (33). According to Butler gender is "performatively produced and compelled by regulatory practices of gender coherence" (25). Therefore, the performance of gender reflects precisely the identity it claims to express.

Churchill and her director Marx Stafford-Clark decided to organise a preliminary three-week workshop with the members of the theatre company, an experience which "involved sharing attitudes and experiences, exploring stereotypes and role reversals, and talking to individuals outside the group" (Luckhurst 70). The surveys included questions on sexual habits and the perception of one's gender. For this reason, the power of *Cloud Nine* lies in its "polyphonal intensity clearly derived from the workshop" which "incorporates the immediate experience, the multiple viewpoints, the sometimes conflicting voices, and the creative energy of the different people brought together for it" (Kritzer Howe 130). Elaine Aston praises the inclusiveness of a play which "manages to cover a broad spectrum of sexual politics, rather than focusing on one sexually oppressed group" (*Caryl* 37). Churchill is able to give voice to different experiences, allowing a multitude of views on gender and sexuality to emerge.

3.1 Agency and displacement

In the first act, set in an African colony in Victorian times, Churchill toys with ideas of agency and displacement, presenting an extremely traditional family which incarnates patriarchal values. The play opens with the group singing an anthem. Everyone seems to be shaped according to the will of Clive, the father, and more generally to the standards of patriarchy. Churchill decided to set the first act in a Victorian colony in order to stress the patriarchal mechanisms that are still functioning in her contemporary society, even though everything that happens in the play is farcical and grotesque.

Clive defines himself a true pater familias, both to the natives he has colonised and to his family. Before being a man, he considers himself a father. The same goes for Betty, whom he simply refers to as "my wife", without attributing any other quality to her. Betty herself declares that she lives for Clive:

> I live for Clive. The whole aim of my life
> Is to be what he looks for in a wife.

I am a man's creation as you see,
And what men want is what I want to be. (Churchill, *Plays: 1* 251)

Betty is played by a male actor and this accentuates how she really is the product of a man's distorted mind. Furthermore, the "cross-casting makes gender visible by separating feminine gender from the female body" (Kritzer Howe 113). Churchill encourages the audience to pay attention to every gesture and every word uttered by Betty, since this character is the embodiment of gender construction, with an ambiguity that makes us wonder about her actual voice and desires. The artificial interactions between Betty and the others, especially Clive, "accentuate the part played by power relations in constructing sexual identity and sexual relationships" (Kritzer Howe 120). This is typical of Victorian society, but can also apply it to our time: almost unconsciously we are all playing a role. Through "a stylized repetition of acts", gender identity is imposed on the individual and it is through these repetitions that gender identity is fabricated and passed as something real and genuine (Butler 179). Betty's character is also the product of "compulsory heterosexuality" (Butler xii) , through which women are dismissed as being "submissive", "tender", "squeamish", "irrational", "inconsistent", "treacherous", "lustful", "wicked", and "dark". These are all adjectives used by Clive, the representation of patriarchal stylization and regulation of gender identity.

A similar principle is likewise applied to race: Joshua, the black servant, is played by a white male actor, and this enhances how he too is a projection of the white coloniser. Race and gender intermingle in the way both Betty and Joshua are subjugated by their master, who has power over their identities. This is confirmed by Joshua's final line, "what white men want is what I want to be" (252), which underlines his complete lack of agency, and confirms Frantz Fanon's claim that in seeking to find his own identity, Joshua is "just the sort of n* that the white man wants [him] to be" (221).

Edward, Clive's son, seems to be the only character who has a hard time conforming to the establishment. He is played by a female actor, and this works against Clive's vision. If the father is trying to "teach him to grow up to be a man", Edward "find[s] it rather hard" (252), as the audience can see. This, besides being a very ironic *Verfremdung* moment, makes us see the dichotomy between a man's patriarchal perception and the actual struggle of the homosexual son who would like to please his father. As we will see throughout the act, Edward is the only character who rejects the law of the father and embraces his sexuality.

Clive dismisses the last three characters with a simple: "no need for any speeches by the rest / My daughter, mother-in-law, and governess" (252). Maud, the mother-in-law, and Ellen, the governess, are thus presented by Clive as secondary characters, probably because he has less power over them and because somehow they keep their identity throughout the act. This cannot be said for Victoria, who in the first act is played by a dummy, which perfectly enhances how Clive sees women, and especially young girls, in his contemporary society. There is incongruence between the linguistic and the visual representation of the characters "oppressed by the imperialist roles assigned to them by Clive." Trapped in their "given roles", their 'offside' bodies visually "disrupt the construction of sexual and, in the case of Joshua, racial identities" (Aston, *Caryl* 32).

When the anthem is over, the play finally begins. Clive and Betty are having a conversation, and from the very beginning we see how he treats her like a little girl, referring to her as "my little dove" and calling her "delicate and sensitive". Even if she tries very hard to conform to her role as the Victorian lady of the house, we perceive how Betty is decidedly bored. Since she has probably already expressed her dissatisfaction in the past, Clive asks her: "So today has been all right? No fainting? No hysteria?" (254), as to imply that his wife's unhappiness is but the product of what were considered to be inherently female problems. If a woman is not able to accept her place and begins questioning her dependence on the father and the husband, she must be irremediably ill.

Maud, regardless of her gender, supports Clive and belittles her daughter, stating that "she's not strong" (256). The mother-in-law protects a society where "the men have their duties and we have ours" (257), denying her daughter any escape from that system. In this exchange Maud reproaches Betty's relationship with the governess, thus opening a discussion on women's happiness:

> MAUD: You let that girl forget her place.
> BETTY: […] I know where her place is. I think my friendship does her good. She is not very happy.
> MAUD: Young women are never happy.
> BETTY: Mother, what a thing to say.
> MAUD: Then, when they're older they look back and see that comparatively speaking they were ecstatic.
> BETTY: I'm perfectly happy. (258)

Friendship between two women from different social backgrounds is considered inappropriate by Maud. She does not understand the need for the human contact that both Betty and Ellen are seeking, an equal relationship where they can be free to be themselves regardless of social conventions. The mother-in-law instead believes that dissatisfaction is typical among young girls unable to adapt and accept their condition: only when she reaches a certain age will a woman appreciate the happiness she was blessed with in her youth. Betty replies very clumsily with her "I'm perfectly happy."

Another female character is introduced by Clive: Caroline Saunders, an independent woman whom he always refers to as "amazing spirit". Finally, a last character joins the group, the explorer Harry Bagley, for whom Betty has a special interest. The two seem to have some history, and discuss their dreams. Harry considers Betty his "safety and light and peace and home", even if she wants to be "dangerous". Betty idealises her love for Harry, a man that does not like "dangerous women" (261), thus implying that he wants Betty to keep her traditional feminine role, locked up in the house.

Clive and Mrs Saunders also have an affair. Clive is deeply infatuated with her independent spirit and is turned on by the reluctance she feels towards him. He describes her as a *femme fatale,* "the sort of woman who would enjoy whipping somebody", "dark like this continent. Mysterious" (262-263). She is presented as the anti-Betty, an unpredictable woman that does not need a man to feel accomplished, a libidinous force that repudiates all Victorian sexual conventions. Even if she acts like an independent woman, Mrs Saunders is still the victim of Clive's "linguistic authority." He is the one who "controls the language of sexual desire" (Kritzer Howe 117), while she is only able to reply in monosyllables.

This consideration opens up the question on language and (sexual) power. Clive uses the same patriarchal language to impose his dominion over both women and colonised people. He compares Mrs Saunders's indomitable spirit to the darkness of Africa and when he suspects that his wife is cheating on him he immediately describes this as a form of betrayal very similar to the natives rebelling against the colonizer. Furthermore, he sees non-conforming sexual behaviour and alternative relationships as a threat against his male authority (Kritzer Howe 118). This is why he is horrified by Harry's coming-out and his son obvious homosexuality, which he constantly represses.

After a sexual intercourse between the two, the whole group is back onstage. They all decide to play catch, except for Betty and Ellen, who are just "spectators and clap" (265). Clive mocks Edward, which prompts Betty to defend him:

BETTY: You've hurt Edwards's feelings.

CLIVE: A boy has no business having feelings. (266)

Clive fosters a toxic masculinity which prevents Edward from expressing his feelings, since this is something that in his view is linked to the female sex only. In so doing he endorses the definition of the "unmasculine person", that is someone who is "peaceable rather than violent, conciliatory rather than dominating, hardly to kick a football, uninterested in sexual conquest" (Connell 67). Clive sees Edward as a threat that could destabilise the patriarchal order.

Harry and Betty are alone and go on flirting. Once again, we understand that Harry is not looking for an independent woman. He wants her to be Clive's wife, he needs to "go up rivers" and knows she is "sitting here thinking of [him]." However, Betty replies with "I want more than that. Is that wicked of me?" (268). She is sick of her passive role and also craves some adventure. When Edward comes in, Betty complains that the two lovers are never alone, to which Harry replies: "You're a mother. And a daughter. And a wife" (268), thus implying that she will never be able to get rid of those roles that keep her from having an independent life.

In the last part of the scene we are shown two different love exchanges. The first one is between Harry and Edward, who discuss their previous episodes of sexual intercourse, in which the explorer had initiated the young boy into his sexuality. The second one is between Ellen and Betty. The lady of the house states that she is tired of "playing" hide and seek, but maybe implying that she is also tired of playing her role of wife, which prompts the governess to get closer to her, inviting her to open up to her. Ellen eventually kisses her. Betty does not realise that the governess's love is pure, only based on the respect that she feels for her. In contrast, the lady scornfully claims. "You don't know what I suffer. You don't know what love is" (271). In her head, love is intrinsically combined with suffering.

The following scene opens with the family hiding during a rebellion of the local tribes. Betty is with the other women, and wonders what they should do, to which her mother drily replies: "I don't think it is up to us to wonder. The men don't tell us what is going on among the tribes, so how can we possibly make a judgement?" (273). With this statement Maud expresses her total acceptance of the passive role she has been assigned. Only men have access to the external world, and hence all information concerning that world is filtered through the male gaze. Churchill here plays with the idea of an external

setting unknown to women, with the enclosure functioning primarily "to segregate [them] under the guise of protection, excluding them from viewing or understanding the exercise of control" (Kritzer Howe 120). However, Mrs Saunders is quite the exception: "I know a little of what is going on" (273). She is an independent woman who wants to be alone, she carries weapons and is not afraid of speaking her mind. In contrast, Maud is still victim of a patriarchal system in which "Clive will know what to do". She is glad that the "household has a head", since she is "squeamish" herself "but luckily Clive is not" (273).

There is a very close link between agency and displacement. Only someone who can move without any social bond is free to have an opinion about the world. This is the case for Mrs Saunders, as she explains: "I would do what I did at my own home. I left. I can't see any way out except to leave. I will leave here. I will keep leaving everywhere I suppose" (273). Even if this speech sounds empowering, considering the time and place where the play is set, there is a sense of unfulfillment in Mrs Saunders's words, as if she will still never be happy, and will be constantly on the move.

As soon as Mrs Saunders leaves the room, Maud warns Betty about any plan the daughter might have concerning her independence, going back to their conversation on female happiness. She says: "Let Mrs Saunders be a warning to you, Betty. She is alone in the world. You are not, thank god. Since your father died, I know what it is to be unprotected" (274). Maud tries to convince her daughter that a man's protection is everything a woman should aspire to gain in her life.

Once again, Edward is seen playing with Victoria's doll, to his mother's discontent. She is worried that her son will not grow up to be a man like Clive. However, Edward states that he has no wish to become like his father and in fact he hates him. The kid is forced to apologise to his father, who explains how Victorian society works: "I respected and loved my own father. Through our father we love our Queen and our God. […] It is something men understand" (276). The authority of the father, then, is unquestionable. He also remarks that Edward is spending too much time with the women, which prompts the kid to say: "I don't like women. I don't like dolls. I love you, papa, and I love you, Uncle Harry" (276), a statement that both confirms and contradicts his true nature.

Joshua tells Clive about the affair between Betty and Harry Bagley, but instead of blaming his friend, he reproaches his wife:

> BETTY: I'm sorry, I'm sorry. Forgive me. […] It is my wickedness, I get bored, I get restless, I imagine things. There is something so wicked in me, Clive.
> CLIVE: I have never thought of you having the weakness of your sex, only the good qualities.
> BETTY: I am bad, bad, bad –
> Clive: You are thoughtless, Betty, that's all. Women can be treacherous and evil. They are darker and more dangerous than men. The family protects us from that, you protect me from that. You are not that sort of woman.[…] It was a moment of passion such as women are too weak to resist. But you must resist it, Betty, or it will destroy us. We must fight against it. We must resist this dark female lust. […] You are still my wife and we still have duties to the household. (276)

Betty implores Clive to forgive her. She thinks of herself as a wicked, self-indulgent and restless woman. Since Clive has shaped Betty into conforming to his every wish and desire, this being represented also by the fact that Betty is played by a male actor, he cannot believe that his "creature" could conjure against him. He does not consider her as a "normal woman", with all the "weaknesses" of that sex. Once again, he goes back to the dark lady motif. However, if in the previous scene with Mrs Saunders he used the term to describe how he is attracted to the independent woman's "amazing spirit", here the term is used in a negative sense. A wife and a mother cannot be "dark", or mysterious or driven by lust, since this would threaten the whole system upon which Victorian society is constructed. With his "we must resist this dark female lust", he includes himself in the fight, since he too feels threatened by his sexual desires that threaten the stability of the sacred household.

Joshua, like Betty, is Clive's creature. He tells Edward about the origin of men, specifying that "God made man white like him and gave him the bad woman who liked the snake and gave us all this trouble" (280). With this consideration the servant links whiteness and maleness as the standard, given that these terms also represent God. Man is white and hence also Joshua has to embrace whiteness. The same goes for women, deemed evil because they "liked the snake" and are hence inferior to men. Race and gender discrimination, then, follow the very same path.

Betty and Ellen discuss being mothers, seen by the lady of the house as a woman's prerogative. She tells her governess that "women have their duty as soldiers have" (281)

and that she must be a mother, if she can. However, Ellen is very clear about her love for Betty and her unwillingness to have children, which prompts the lady to dismiss her, stating: "You don't feel what you think you do. It's the loneliness here and the climate is very confusing" (281), as if she was trying to find reasons for her own unhappiness.

Harry and Clive are alone onstage and discuss manhood and friendship. In Clive's view, friendship between two men, like the relationship the two share, is invaluable, something that cannot "be spoiled by the weaker sex", since it is "the noblest form of relationship" (282). Clive goes on with this rant, adding some further details on how his ideal society works, a place where "there is the necessity of reproduction", "the family is all important" and then "there is the pleasure" (282), as if these three aspects could not be placed together but were separate from one another.

For the third time, Clive goes back to his obsession with the "dark lady" threatening the social order he is supposed to protect:

> CLIVE: There is something dark about women, that threatens what is best in us. Between men that light burns brightly.
> HARRY: I didn't know you felt that.
> CLIVE: Women are irrational, demanding, inconsistent, treacherous, lustful, and they smell different from us. (282)

Both men have a distorted view of sexuality. However, if on the one hand Clive perfectly conforms to his contemporaries' idea of manhood, Harry, on the other hand, misinterprets the male comradeship praised by his friend as homosexual desire. As soon as Clive finds out about Harry's "disease" he immediately tries to cure it by means of finding him a wife, so as to re-establish the social order. In the attempt to get rid of his personal obsession, he tries to match him with Mrs Saunders, who has no intention of settling down whatsoever. To the men's amazement, she simply replies that she has chosen "to be alone" and that she "could never be a wife again" (283-284). This confirms her determination to protect her independence in a world which sees female agency as virtually non-existent.

The solution to this dilemma is to match Harry with Ellen, the other "diseased" character. She is not really sure about what she is doing, but Betty comforts her telling her that a woman does not get married to enjoy herself. The initial order is restored with the combined marriage. In his final speech, Clive celebrates the "empire – the family – the married state" to which he has always aspired (287). This could be seen as the ultimate

victory of patriarchy, the victory of the white, heterosexual male over blacks, women, and homosexuals. As Kritzer-Howe has observed, "the climatic marriage scene fuses the related issues of colonialism, gender oppression, and sexual repression in its final moment" (117). Despite what would seem to be Clive's victory, the act ends in a very disturbing way. While they are all listening to him, Joshua points a gun at his master. He is noticed by Edward, who remains silent, however. The act ends with the servant who is about to shoot.

A possible interpretation of this closing scene of the first act could be the end of imperialism, if we analyse it in historical terms. However, if we link this ending with the second act, set in the sexually-liberating 1970s, this could also be seen as a sign of rebellion against all forms of social constraints and patriarchy in general, here represented by Clive. We know that Clive is not dead in the second act. At the same time, he never appears and he just lives in the past of the "new" Betty, who is now trying to find her independence from the old system where she was just a puppet in Clive's hands.

3.2 The new mother

The second act is set in the late 1970s. The juxtaposition of two very different time settings, from Victorian colonialism to Churchill's own time, enhances the shift in the power relations between men and women and complicates gender politics even further. Despite the positive effects of sexual liberation for women and for fairer family policies, "in a world devoid of the stable centre provided by Clive, and without the threatening nearness of a vast region of the unknown, freedom engenders uncertainty" (Kritzer Howe 123). The last part of the play is both an epiphanic moment for some characters, like Betty, who rediscovers her sexual independence beyond her role as traditional mother, and a journey of acceptance of the very different ways to be a parent, as in the case of Edward, Lin, and Victoria. The act is almost completely set in public spaces, thus symbolising not only freedom, but also the place where sexual taboos are broken.

In the first scene of the act, two mothers are looking after their children, playing in the park. In the lives of the characters only 25 years have passed, which means that Victoria, one of the two women, is now in her late 20s. The other woman is Lin, a single mother who claims to be grateful that her ex-husband "didn't hit [her] harder than he did" (291), when he found out she was a lesbian. The two are talking about war toys:

LIN: [watches the children playing outside] Don't hit him, Cathy, kill him. Point the gun, kiou, kiou, kiou. That's the way.

VICTORIA: They've just banned war toys in Sweden

LIN: […] War toys. I'll give her a rifle for Christmas and blast Tommy's pretty head off for a start.

[VICTORIA goes back to her book]

LIN: I hate men.

VICTORIA: You have to look at it in a historical perspective in terms of learnt behaviour since the industrial revolution.

LIN: I just hate the bastards.

VICTORIA: Well it's a point of view. (291-292)

Violence is here linked to power. Lin encourages her daughter Cathy to use the gun against Victoria's son Tommy, so as to prove that violence is the only effective tool to win power. The fact that Cathy is played by a male actor once again confirms that "gender is influenced by environment" (Luckhurst 78). Lin has raised Cathy depriving her of everything typically associated to femininity, thus resulting in Cathy becoming the image of the man Lin has always wished to be. Nevertheless, Lin reveals her hatred of men, regardless of the recent battles for women's emancipation. Interestingly enough, Victoria mentions an "historical perspective" and "learnt behaviour", so as to imply that men are not inherently evil, and that all male oppression against women is but the result of learnt social practices. This idea is scornfully dismissed by Lin, who has a very different point of view and believes that the only healthy relationship is the one between two women, since there is no hierarchy involved.

Betty comes onstage, this time played by a female actor. Even if we are in a different time and place, she still keeps some of her grandeur. She talks of child-rearing, and of how exhausting it all is, without any help. Victoria is recalled as a "pretty child just like a little doll" (293), which is appropriate, given that in the previous act Victoria was played by a dummy. When it comes to her adult daughter, she thinks "she doesn't make the most of herself" (293), hinting at the lack of interest Victoria has in external appearances. On the contrary, Betty still believes that "you have to suffer a little bit for beauty" (293).

Quite casually, Betty reveals she is leaving Clive and that she is looking for a flat and a job. Cathy is obsessed with all her jewels, including the necklace which was at the centre of attention in the first act. The little girl, now played by an adult male, is obsessed

with the elegant lady: she takes her hat, her earring and her beads. This kind of more traditional relationship between two women in this case Cathy and Betty, irritates Lin, who takes away all these items. Cathy is enraged and tells her: "I want my beads, you're horrid, I hate you mum, you smell.", which can be seen either as the mere tantrum of a little girl, or as betraying a discrepancy between three generations. The first generation is represented by Betty, the traditional mother who is only now reclaiming her independence. The second, here represented by Lin (and also Victoria) is a generation of emancipated women who see a threat in everything that is linked to a past where girls were treated like dolls. The last one is Cathy's generation, torn between tradition and progress, a new generation of women who has a hard time finding a uniform model to refer to. Victoria's question: "does everybody hate their mothers?" (291-292) draws back to Rich's assumptions on "matrophobia" analysed earlier on. Victoria desires to "become purged once and for all of [her] mother's bondage, to become individuated and free" (Rich, *Of Woman* 236). She sees her mother as the representation of the victim and the unfree woman and wishes to completely detach from her.

Betty is worried she will not be able to make it on her own: "I'll never be able to manage. If I can't even walk down the street by myself. Everything looks so fierce" (298). She does not want to take "the pills", maybe referring to some kind of tranquillisers, but she is nevertheless "frightened", an adjective which resonates throughout the play and is also the last word uttered in *Top Girls* by Angie, a girl who most certainly will not make it in society.

Cathy comes in "wearing a pink dress and carrying a rifle" (299) and complains that she was bullied at school because she was wearing jeans, to which Lin reacts telling her that she "should have shot them" (299), thus reinforcing what she had already said about violence and power in the previous scene.

Martin, Victoria's husband, could be seen at first as a positive male character, a progressive man that has embraced the feminist cause. Nevertheless, he is sometimes passive (aggressive) in the way he treats his wife and he likes to be victimised. After recalling to his wife how he "lost [his] erection last night", he mentions the Hite report,[4] claiming that he is "not like whatever percentage of American men have become impotent as a direct result of women's liberation" (299). Martin is an intellectual, and uses his words as a shield, stating that despite all his efforts his wife still feels dominated by him. He has

[4] Hite, Shere. *The Hite Report: A Nationwide Study of Female Sexuality*, 1976.

nothing to do but let her do whatever she likes, leaving her all the responsibility of her own actions. However, similarly to Clive he also tries to control Victoria by making her feel guilty about her independent lifestyle, "implying that her sexual unresponsiveness makes him unhappy and complaining that her indecisiveness over a proposed job change hurts his image of himself" (Kritzer Howe 125). He concludes saying that in his opinion "women have something to give each other" (301), picturing a kind of sisterhood that was also advocated by Lin.

Victoria is very different when compared to her mother, someone who finds it strange "not having a man in the house" (301). Lin suggests that a woman does not need a man to feel useful and she could do things just for herself. She also wonders whether Betty would like the company of women. However, Betty replies that women "don't have such interesting conversation as men" and that "they spoil things for themselves with their emotions" (302), thus revealing that old schemes and preconceptions are hard to abandon.

Victoria is struggling to understand Martin's behaviour. She wonders why he cannot "just be a wife" (302) and join her in Manchester. If Martin really supports the feminist cause (also given the fact that he is "writing a novel about women from the women's point of view") in Victoria's opinion he should be able to compromise. Similarly to when the traditional male provider takes his wife and family to a new city, her "emancipated" husband should also follow, so that Victoria does not need to decide between work and family. This shows how complicated Victoria's situation is: on the one hand she has a husband who is more than willing to let her loose, including her child-rearing duties. On the other hand she has the traditional, fossilised, family role models experienced with her parents. She confides to Lin that she feels "apologetic for not being quite so subordinate" (303) as she was, referring to the very strict and gender-specific education she received.

Lin asks her to simply come and live with her, not because she needs company, but only because she would enjoy, thus introducing the concept of a household free from family and economic duties. In some way Lin reminds us of Clive, in the way he gives her daughter guns, since her mum has never given her guns. She says: "I dress her in jeans, she wants to wear dresses" (303). This is probably one of the reasons why Cathy is played by an adult male actor: not only is she given "adult" toys, but she is also the projection of a childhood that Lin wished she could have had for herself, where she could play with war toys and dress like a boy.

In the following scene Victoria, Lin and Edward are drunk in the park and are ready for a bizarre orgy, which looks more like a celebration of the female sex, a claim for sexual freedom and agency. Playing the priestess of this temple of womanhood, Victoria tells the group: "before Jehovah, before Christ, before men drove you out and burnt your temples, hear us, Lady, give us back what we were, give us the history we haven't had, make us the women we can't be." The women call this "Lady" "Goddess of breast", "Goddess of cunts" and "Goddess of fat bellies and babies. And blood blood blood." The sisterhood that the three are seeking is very much characterised by a recovery of the female body, including the unspeakable sexual taboos, which is menstruation blood. Edward is included in this group because he himself has decided to "become a woman", embracing his womanhood, a place where he feels more like himself. The relationship between the three characters is "simultaneously homosexual, heterosexual, and incestuous" and "it takes its participants near the boundaries of contemporary tolerance" (Kritzer Howe 123).

In the primordial community described by Victoria there are no father figures and men are disposable objects, only used for sexual pleasure:

> VICTORIA: The priestess chose a lover for a year and he was king because she chose him and then he was killed at the end of the year.
> EDWARD: Hurray.
> VICTORIA: And the women had the children and nobody knew it was done by fucking so they didn't know about fathers and nobody cared who the father was and the property was passed down through the maternal line. (309)

The imposing father figure that has determined Victoria's childhood disappears completely. Men are excluded from reproduction, since child-rearing is not seen as something to share with a partner. Victoria is claiming women's independence from their role as mothers subjugated by their husbands.

In a rather dreamlike sequence, Maud reappears onstage. Betty is then confronting herself with her past:

> MAUD: Let Mrs Saunders be a warning to you, Betty. I know what it is to be unprotected.
> BETTY: But mother, I have a job. I earn money.
> MAUD: I know we have our little differences but I always want what is best for you. (317)

In her attempt to protect her, Maud is discouraging Betty from pursuing an independent life, following the example of Mrs Saunders. She thinks she knows what is best for her daughter; however, in this scene she looks like a ghost from a different era that has no more influence on Betty, who has now understood what it means to be a fulfilled women, also from a sexual point of view. In this respect, one of the most important revelations of a newly-found sexual independence is Betty's account of how she discovered sexual pleasure through masturbation:

> I used to think Clive was the one who liked sex. But then I found I missed it. I used to touch myself when I was very little, I thought I'd invented something wonderful. I used to do it to go to sleep with it or to cheer myself up, and one day it was raining and I was under the kitchen table, and my mother saw me with my hand under my dress rubbing away, and she dragged me out so quickly I hit my head and it bled and I was sick, and nothing was said, and I never did it again till this year. I thought if Clive wasn't looking at me there wasn't a person there. And one night in bed in my flat I was so frightened I started touching myself. I thought my hand might go through space. I touched my face, it was there, my arm, my breast, and my hand went down where I though it shouldn't, and I thought well there is somebody there. It felt very sweet, it was a feeling from very long ago. […] I felt angry with Clive and angry with my mother and I went down defying them. […] Afterwards I thought I'd betrayed Clive. My mother would kill me. But I felt triumphant because I was a separate person from them. And I cried because I didn't want to be. But I don't cry anymore. (316)

Betty feels completely liberated through the discovery of her own body and sexuality. Thinking that her only prerogative has always been that of a mother and that sexual pleasure was only Clive's domain, had paralysed her. She talks of masturbation like a recollection to a state of calm and enjoyment with herself, a form of reference to Kristevan *jouissance*, untouched by the male body, only one with herself. Through her body, she rediscovers her identity and independence: she does not live to serve Clive or to fulfil her mother's desire. She is free to live her life any way she likes.

In her final dialogue with her daughter Victoria, Betty suggests they all go and live together. When Victoria tells her that they "don't even like each other", Betty objects that

they “might begin to” (317), thus opening up to a possible resolution between mother and daughter, a more genuine relationship between them.

In the final moments, the ghost of Clive reappears onstage, criticising Betty’s evolution: “You are not that sort of woman, Betty” (320). However, Betty has taken a new direction. The old Betty (played by the male actor) comes onstage and hugs the new Betty, giving us the idea of an ultimate reconciliation. However, as observed by Howe Kritzer, “the embrace does not integrate past and present or the two characters. Rather, it shows that Betty of Act Two now feels herself, for the first time, to be separate from her Act One self, but acknowledges as well their continuing oneness” (Kritzer Howe 127). This representation recalls Irigaray’s celebration of the plurality of the female subject, seen as an unexplored territory (“When Our Lips” 72). Betty understands that she has not just one monolithic identity, that of the Victorian mother and wife, but a multitude of different selves that she is free to explore “here” and “now”.

4. Rebellious daughters: *Top Girls* (1982)

The last case study that I would like to take into consideration is Churchill's most celebrated play. *Top Girls* is dense with feminist issues, including an examination of the delicate mother/daughter relationship. A structuralist approach for this analysis would certainly bring out interesting insights. However, the iconicity of this play also resides in Churchill's willingness to deconstruct the typical timeframe, using a cyclical rhythm, frequent voice overlaps, dreamlike sequences, flashbacks and chaotic choral moments.

In a 1987 interview, when asked about the writing process Churchill stated that she "was writing it by [herself] and not for a company" (qtd. in Betsko and Koenig 82), thus abandoning the idea of collective writing which she used in *Cloud Nine*, for instance. For this reason *Top Girls* has been considered one of Churchill's most personal plays and the most outspoken reaction against Thatcher's rule in Britain. Always interested in being socially engaged, she makes use of dramatic strategies that "also evoke the experimental and radical feminist theatre of the late sixties and seventies, including a certain preoccupation with the didactic" (Komporaly 50). Especially in the first production, the character of the Thatcherite Marlene becomes the symbol of everything wrong about radical feminism. When asked about the character of Marlene and the kind of feminism she represented, Churchill replied:

> What I was intending to do was make it first look as though it was celebrating the achievements of women and then - by showing the main character, Marlene, being successful in a very competitive, destructive, capitalist way - ask, what kind of achievement is that? The idea was that it would start out looking like a feminist play and turn into a socialist one. Originally the idea was just that Marlene was 'writing off' her niece, Angie, because she'd never make it. I didn't yet have the plot idea that Angie was actually Marlene's own child. (Qtd. in Betsko and Koenig 82)

Even if Churchill decided that Marlene was Angie's mother only at a later stage, Marlene is still judged more by the way she treats her neglected daughter than by the way she interacts with her sister and other women at the work. It seems that absent fathers can be excused by a sociological category, but absent mothers are still inexcusable.

4.1 Dealing with guilt

Marlene's shrewd personality emerges already from the first line she addresses to the waitress: "One of them is going to be late but we won't wait" (Churchill, *Plays:2* 55). Ironically, Patient Griselda will be the last guest to join the dinner party, something that leaves the spectator wondering about her subjugated role in a group composed of much more subversive characters. From her very entrance, Marlene proves to be someone incapable of listening to other people's needs, a self-made woman who is exclusively interested in success stories, without any form of empathy towards those who could not make it.

The second character to step onstage is Isabella Bird, the famous Victorian explorer who defied all conventions, leaving her privileged life in Britain in order to travel the world. Even though Marlene and Isabella have much in common – they are two resourceful women who think outside of the box, leave their families and more specifically their sisters, who look much more traditional – from their first exchange a big difference between them can be appreciated. If Isabella has no other wish than settling down, after an adventurous life around the globe, Marlene is at the peak of her career, and "can't bear sitting still" (55).

The theme of sisterhood is brought up, and it is not a coincidence that Isabella is the first guest to arrive, and it is also not a coincidence that alraedy in her third line she mentions her sister Hennie, a presence that echoes Marlene's sister Joyce, whom she has also abandoned. Hennie is described as a pacific woman and Isabella calls her "my own pet", a product of Victorian society "suited to life in Tobermory" (55-56). Of course this last remark is also connected to Joyce and the suburban context in which she decided (or rather was forced) to stay. Interestingly enough Isabella asks Marlene "Do you have a sister?" (55), rather than the usual, more generic "Do you have any brothers or sisters?" (56), in a way stressing the importance of the sisterly bond.

Lady Nijo, the 13th century Japanese concubine, makes her first appearance. Ironically, after her entrance Nijo refers back to her geisha role, pointing at the fact that "It was always the men who used to get so drunk. I'd be one of the maidens, passing the sake" (56), yet accepting the wine glass offered to her by the waitress. In this way, a hierarchic structure is created in which the emancipated court lady elevates herself above the waitress, still victim of the system in which all the guests interact.

Even though the opening act, after the entrance of the first "historical" guests, appears to be presented through a series of elements that are contemporary to Marlene, a

certain distance among the characters can be appreciated: from historical-cultural differences to human differences, whereby listening to and understanding each other becomes impossible and the overlapping voices are increasingly more deafening. For instance, the literary reference made by Nijo - "Let the wild goose come to me this spring" - remains completely obscure to Marlene, who only reacts with a quick "Let the what?" (55). However, if incommunicability on the literary-cultural level is justified because of the time-space gap that separates the guests, the lines that follow highlight once more the utter isolation experienced by the characters, that cannot help but showing off their success by means of anecdotes, imposing their vision of the world. When Nijo refers to the emperor of Japan, Isabella responds with a disconnected "I once met the Emperor of Morocco" (56), stealing the scene from Nijo.

Nijo's account of the sexual violence she had to go through at the court of the Emperor startles Marlene, who acts and thinks like a woman in a context contemporary to Churchill's. After Marlene's question "Are you saying he raped you*?"*, Nijo replies with a disconcerting "I belonged to him, it was what I was brought up for from a baby" (57) Rape, then, is a term with which Nijo is not familiar. Isabella takes the floor again, and says that "I certainly never saw my father drunk" (57). As much as this statement could be disconnected from Nijo's rape story, the link between father and emperor is possible. Both women, though in different ways and contexts, have been victims of violence perpetrated by a male authority. The battle between Nijo and Isabella now moves to their education. Nijo affirms to "come of a line of eight generations of poets", to which Isabella replies with "My father taught me Latin although I was a girl" (57). Marlene almost looks like an external observer, excluded from this dialogue and adds hastily "They didn't have Latin at my school" (58).

Nevertheless, in the following section, Isabella and Nijo almost seem to reject their subversive nature, admitting their preference for activities typically associated with femininity, instead of the adventurous endeavours they have just finished describing. Isabella professes herself to be "more suited to manual work. Cooking, washing, mending, riding horses. / Better than reading books", while Nijo cannot claim to have appreciated the tough life she has had, adding that "what I enjoyed the most was being the Emperor's favourite / and wearing thin silk" (58).

Dull Gret, a subject from a Breughel painting, joins the group. Already from her first line the audience acknowledges the great distance that separates her from the other guests. When Isabella asks her whether she has any horses, she replies with an abrupt "Pig",

turning back to her corner, isolating herself and disengaging from the conversation. She is very different from the most intellectual of the characters who also enters the scene, Pope Joan, allegedly the first and only female pope who disguised herself as a man.

Marlene is represented as an extremely pragmatic woman, more interested in the smooth unfolding of the evening than in what the guests have to say. Her line "Thank God, we can order. […] We were just talking about Latin and being clever girls" (58) not only gives the scene a humorous touch, but also highlights the host's complete detachment from her guests. Also the contrast between the first line uttered by Pope Joan "Because angels are without matter they are not individuals. Every angel is a species" (58) and the amused reaction of the other guests signals a lack of depth in their dialogue. One of the act's most dreamlike moments, in which the use of different stylistic registers creates an irresistible comic effect, is when the orders are taken, in which the guests alternate deep religious considerations with the mundane dishes they would like to have. In addition to the hyperrealism of the scene, the fact that this bizarre congregation of women from different times and places performs such banal actions like ordering a salad, makes them less exceptional, less heroic, closer to the spectator, who cannot help but enjoy the farcical tone.

> ISABELLA: […] But my father was the mainspring of my life and when he died I was so grieved. I'll have the chicken, please, / and the soup.
> […]
> NIJO: His prayers he would have gone straight to heaven. / Waldorf salad.
> JOAN: Death is the return of all creatures to God. […] Damnation only means ignorance of the truth […] Canelloni, please, / and a salad. (58)

Marlene, unlike Isabella, Nijo and Joan, is more pragmatic and resolute when it comes to ordering, and seems to have not been moved by the religious arguments the other guests are discussing. In this, she is closer to Gret, who very laconically utters just "Potatoes". The distance from religious environments is highlighted by Marlene with her "I haven't been to church for years. / I like Christmas carols" (59), which trivialises the deep arguments debated by the other guests. Marlene also admits to profess the Thatcherian credo. When Isabella states that "Good works matter more than church attendance", referring to unselfish, voluntary work, Marlene replies with "I don't do good works either." Furthermore, Isabella goes back to her sister, claiming how "Hennie did good works" (59)

This clearly echoes Marlene's sister's charitable inclination, as a woman who takes care of the daughter repudiated by Marlene.

Nijo introduces the theme of repentance and succeeds in finally winning Marlene's attention:

> NIJO. The first half of my life was all sin and the second / all repentance.
> […]
> MARLENE. Were your travels just a penance? […] Didn't you / enjoy yourself?
> […]
> NIJO. Yes, but I was very unhappy. / It hurts to remember. […] the past. I think that was the repentance.
> MARLENE. Well, I wonder.
> NIJO. I might have just been homesick.
> MARLENE. Or angry.
> NIJO. Not angry, no, / why angry?
> […]
> MARLENE. Don't you get angry? I get angry.
> NIJO. But what about?
> MARLENE. Yes let's have two more Frascati. And some more bread, please. (59-60)

Marlene questions Nijo's repentance and is unable to understand how a life dedicated to the freedom to follow her own aspirations can lead to such a tormented condition of utter dismay. Not even homesickness is accepted as a reason motivating Nijo's frustrations. Marlene claims that everything could be attributed to anger. Even though Marlene gives no answer to Nijo, who wonders how anger could have something to do with sadness and loneliness, this dialogue hints at Marlene's internal turmoil, offering an anticipation of the conversation that she will have with her sister in the third act.

Marlene goes back to more mundane matters, choosing the wine and trying to cut short the religious debate which is visibly making her uncomfortable. She is not sure that "religious beliefs are something we have in common. Activity yes" (60), thus advocating her pragmatism and imposing a certain universalism. Since the guests seem to share no interest in this consideration, Marlene distances herself from all religious matters, saying

that “I’m not a Christian. / And I’m not a Buddhist”, and adding that “We don’t all have to believe the same” (60). Marlene believes solely in personal success as a result of one’s “activities” and leaves no room to other kinds of faith, seen as mere superstitions.

Nijo dwells on the great sacrifices she had to endure after leaving court and after becoming a nun, stating that she has “dedicated what was left of me to nothing” (61) and hence professing herself a true nihilist. Even though Isabella believes this is due to the allegedly inconsistent nature of the Buddhist faith, which in her way “doesn’t brace” (61). Nijo pushes her consideration to a more universal level that transcends religion: “Haven’t you ever felt like that? Nothing will ever happen again. I am dead already” (61).

For the first time all the guests agree, even Gret, who utters a feeble “Sad”. Only Marlene seems to discourage Nijo’s nihilist view, and downsizes the existential pain following the abandonment of her life of certainties to just a couple of hours. Nijo and Isabella go back to homesickness and meditate on the very concept of home, which seems so ungraspable: “I longed to go home, / but home to what?” (61).

Marlene is not able to understand the bitterness with which Nijo and Isabella talk about their travels, believing that those experiences were something that “cheered you both up” (62). Nijo drops her mask, admitting she is not “a cheerful person, Marlene. I just laugh a lot” (62). This statement is indicative of the extreme distress that Nijo is going through and of the fake happiness that she is ready to defend at all costs.

The guests move the conversation to clothes. Isabella is surprised when Joan states that she has never had female clothes and that “I dressed as a boy when I left home” (62). The explorer is keen on specifying that she “always travelled as a lady and I repudiated strongly any suggestion in the press that I was other than feminine” (62), not hiding how much she values external appearances, similarly to Nijo’s constant smiling. Marlene adds that she doesn’t “wear trousers in the office. / I could but I don’t” (62), aligning herself to Isabella and Nijo, careful not to differ too much from what it is deemed to be typically “feminine”.

At this point all the attention is focused on the character that went against every norm, becoming – or better performing – the role of a man. The “pretending to be someone else” motif is reiterated various times. After Joan’s account of her being a “clever boy” during her childhood, Marlene states that “I couldn’t have kept pretending for so long” (63), which prompts Joan to say that “I forgot I was pretending” (63) and that “I decided to stay a man” (65). This statement is extremely important, as it initiates the discourse on performativity and on the unstable nature of gender identity. Joan is a woman who finds

herself in the guise of a man and she is willing to appropriate that role through imitation, as in a performance.

Joan's story is interrupted by Isabella's and Nijo's accounts on their sentimental life and their lovers' deaths. Joan quickly asks: "Have we all got dead lovers?", which prompts Marlene to reply with a very dry "Not me, sorry" (64). The career woman is definitely less inclined to love affairs than her guests and once again she finds herself left out of the conversation, especially when Joan resorts to obscure anecdotes that she is not able to grasp.

Isabella's deepest love seems to be the one she had for Hennie and vicariously for her husband, who took care of her during her illness. Paradoxically, Hennie's presence is comforting only as a long-distance relationship: "I knew it would be terrible when Hennie died but I didn't know how terrible. I felt half of myself had gone. How could I go on with my travels without that sweet soul waiting at home for my letters" (65). Hennie is thus relegated to performing an extremely passive role, as though Isabella's adventures could find a meaning only with an audience at home to relive them through her letters. The same subjugated role is taken over by her husband, who becomes her sister's caretaker and later surrogate after her death. He shares Hennie's "sweet character", so different from Isabella's coldness. However, married life does not suit the former explorer, who "tried very hard to cope with the ordinary drudgery of life" (64), with no success.

It is interesting how Isabella, Nijo and Joan repeat the same line almost at the same time: "There was nothing in my life" (65-66). In Isabella's case this is stated as a reaction to the deaths of her sister and husband, the only spectators able to make sense of her itinerant nature, otherwise with no points of reference. As for Nijo, the line is part of her wandering thoughts about life at court and her longing for the emperor's favour, without which her life has no meaning. Joan seems to be the most independent one and her only weakness is the pursuit of knowledge.

Marlene is aware of the obstacles one has to face in order to reach success, even though she is the only one to actually use the word "success", whereas the historical guests use a modest "to go on". The word "success" is here seen in a materialistic sense and is used by Isabella to refer to Marlene: "To yourself surely, / we're here to celebrate your success" (66) The same Marlene acknowledges her materialistic success, and that "it's not Pope but it is managing director" (67). Nijo is more enthusiastic about the fact that Marlene succeeded against male colleagues than about Marlene's promotion itself. Success is thus perceived not as the achievement of one's personal working ambitions, but rather as a

revenge against men in the working environment. Again, this is another clear hint at the figure of Thatcher. Marlene then declares to be part of these "successful" women and gives a toast "to our courage and the way we changed our lives and our extraordinary achievements" (67), prompting the other guests to burst out laughing.

The tone of the evening changes abruptly as soon as Joan begins the account of the act's most disturbing episode, that is her unsuspected pregnancy and her subsequent stoning to death following her child's birth. Joan admits that she had found herself a lover, which prompts the guests to react in a very understanding way, including Gret, who is the more carnal of the group ("Keep you warm […] Big cock" (68)). In spite of the natural disasters during her pontificate, which Joan believes to be God's punishment for the fact the pope is a woman, her story is seen by Marlene as the most successful one, until the child comes.

Nijo vaguely admits to having had "some babies", whereas Marlene brutally asks Joan "Didn't you think to get rid of it?" (69), using the "it" pronoun and hence reducing the child to a mere material impediment to the achievement of personal success. Joan laconically states that "I shouldn't have been a woman. Women, children and lunatics can't be Pope" (69), putting her biological sex on the same level of children's asexuality and lunatic's mental instability, at the same time judging the female gender very critically.

Marlene has an answer to everything and her solution for success despite all obstacles is the usual "get rid of it, somehow" (69). Joan goes back to her internal dichotomy, which is the fact of feeling legitimised to be pope because of her call and her high level of education, but at the same time her being trapped in a body that she is no longer able to manage, something which makes her completely unaware of her pregnancy. Joan replies with an honest "I wasn't used to having a woman's body" (70) to the practical suggestion of Marlene and Nijo, two women who have been able to "get rid" of their material impediment (their children) due to force majeure. Joan describes her labour in detail, awakening the interest of the other guests, who burst out laughing at the thought of giving birth on the street, surrounded by cardinals. Only at Joan's "they stoned me to death" (71) does all the laughter suddenly stop.

Isabella is the only one in the group to have had no children, but she seems to have no regrets about it. On the contrary, she affirms that "I never had any children. I was very fond of horses" (72) Gret, who instead has had ten children, should be considered the expert mother; however, her whole story is not recounted. The audience has to wait until the act's ending in order to find out the terrible fate of some of her children. The other guests have no interest in her, and go on with their monologues, without listening to each other.

Isabella feels guilty for not being as "good" as her pious sister and her husband. She claims that "I did no good in my life. I spent years in self-gratification" (72). Marlene almost looks annoyed at the sombre mood of the room and asks: "why are we all so miserable" (70), maybe including herself in this category.

The last guest, Patient Griselda, a character from Boccaccio's *Decameron* and Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales,* finally joins the table, apologizing for the delay. Unlike everyone else she seems not to be prone to enjoy the party and she initially refuses food and wine. Alcohol begins to take effect on the other guests and Marlene is completely uninhibited. Her oxymoron: "I like profiteroles because they're disgusting" (74), besides being one of the most hilarious lines of the act, very well exemplifies Marlene's contradictory nature.

Marlene seems to know Griselda's story, described as a "fairy-story, except it starts with marrying the prince" (74). Griselda looks like a much flatter character in comparison to the others, also thanks to Marlene's ungenerous introduction. She introduces the theme of obedience, which is developed until the act's closing moments. "I must always obey him in everything. […] a wife must obey her husband" (75), she affirms firmly, as though this were the most banal of considerations. Her subjugated role, which in some way echoes Nijo's subjugation to the emperor and Isabella's to her father, is supported by Isabella who "wouldn't have wanted to go abroad while I was married" (75). Being a "good" married woman seems to be incompatible with being an adventurous, independent woman. The only guest to profess a limitless independence is Joan, who "never obeyed anyone. They all obeyed me" (75). She reverses the situation, yet reminding us that in order to gain power she had to abandon everything linked to her biological sex.

Marlene is a stranger to this archaic norm of obedience to the father and the husband and is subsequently deemed to be too critical of it by the same Griselda, who represents the ultimate subjugation to patriarchy. Her story makes us spectators all uncomfortable, but does not seem to upset the other guests, with the exception of Marlene, who has no choice but leave the room. Griselda tells how her husband would constantly ask her to prove her devotion and obedience to him, even forcing her to abandon the children she had with him. Before leaving the room and saying very graphically "I can't stand this. I'm going for a pee" (77), Marlene is the only one to attack Griselda's husband, calling him "bonkers" (77). Only Gret will join the insults, adding "Bastard" (77). On the contrary, Nijo sees herself in Griselda, having experienced the abandonment of her children herself, and says: "No, I understand. Of course you had to, he was your life" (77)

Griselda is clearly victim of a dysfunctional relationship with her husband, but she lives in the Middle Ages. Nevertheless, the spectator could wonder why she has been included in this group of extraordinary women who have given up her typically female role to pursue their independence, in one way or another. It looks like Griselda had to give up her role as mother, yet doing so she has annihilated herself, having her husband's satisfaction and protection as her only goal in her life. It is not a coincidence that Marlene is not present during Griselda's account: her story is the only one in which no achievement is pursued, but only self-denial and sacrifice. Griselda's line "It was always easy because I always knew I would do what he said" (77) confirms her role of passivity, a woman at the mercy of events and the will of her husband/master. The same husband/master relationship is reiterated by Nijo, who claims that it is "better to leave if your master doesn't want you" (78), going back to the theme of "favour" and her tormented relationship with the emperor. However, Griselda keeps professing her "I had to obey him", which prompts Marlene to interrupt her with a *"*Oh God, I can't bear it" (78) She is not able to bear the story of complete annihilation for a man, giving everything up for him. She suggests they move on to brandy, as a way to forget about Griselda's gruesome story. Once again, Marlene toys with the anger motif and asks Griselda: "Weren't you angry?", expecting a positive response. On the contrary, Griselda answers with "Well, I fainted" (79), stressing her passivity and, paradoxically, justifying her husband's deeds, since in her view he is of mild nature. Isabella seems to be on the same wavelength and compares her sister to Griselda's husband. "Hennie had the same sweet nature" (79), but maybe just to make her voice heard, showing that she has listened to none of the atrocities told by Griselda. Marlene concludes saying "you really are exceptional, Griselda", hence pointing at the exceptional character of her unsuccess story, which outdistances Griselda from the other characters.

The act comes towards a conclusion and the tone is very dark and sombre. Isabella is desperate and claims that "I can never be like Hennie […] I could not be like Hennie however I tried. I tried and was as ill as could be" (78-79). Her adventurous nature is completely overshadowed by the regret of not pursuing a "normal" life like her sister did. Also Nijo seems to have lost all the cheerfulness she has shown during the act. She tells about the shame of not being allowed at court after the emperor's death and asks herself "if I'd still been at court, would I have been allowed to wear full mourning" (80). Marlene naively replies with "I'm sure you would", to which Nijo answers with an almost annoyed "Why do you say that? You don't know anything about it" (80), implying that Marlene has nothing to do with the rest of the group and the relative (un)success stories of the characters.

Nijo goes on and graphically describes the way in which men would "beat their women across their loins so they'll have sons and not daughters" and reacts to Marlene's horrified reaction with a simple "Marlene, that's normal" (80), excluding her once again from that conversation, in which everyone else seems to be on the same page.

At this point, all voices begin to increasingly overlap, as a result of alcohol and utter desperation. While Nijo is giving an account of the time when she hit the emperor with a stick, commanding him not to mistreat pregnant women any longer, Joan begins to pray in Latin, joined by Isabella at a certain point. The general chaos is finally interrupted by Gret, who has her first monologue.

Dull Gret is the subject of the controversial painting by Bruegel dated 1561, in which the countrywoman is portrayed with a man's armour while she is guiding other women towards hell's mouth, in order to fight the devil. The subject of "Dull Gret" comes from the tradition of old Flemish proverbs, in which that character is the symbol of the quick-tempered woman and domineering wife, incredibly stubborn and determined to be able to go to hell and re-emerge without a scratch. As explained by art historian Walter Gibson, Pieter Bruegel loved to take proverbs literally in his paintings, using their hyperbolic character in order to create comic effects (124). The character of Gret has grotesque and parodic connotations, highlighted by the heavy armour she is wearing, deemed to be so inappropriate for a woman. Gibson suggests that the author has probably been inspired "by the unusual independence that Netherlandish women seem to have enjoyed during Bruegel's lifetime" (121).

Churchill is aware of the traditional image attributed to Dull Gret and decides to reshape it giving it a new meaning. In *Top Girls* this character is very different from the other guests, both on a visual and a linguistic level. She very seldom interacts with the rest of the group, she is reluctant and appears to be much more static in comparison to the other guests, reminding us that she comes from a painting. She is almost always silent throughout the act, and answers with monosyllabic lines like *"pig"* or *"cake"* only when she is asked something. Despite her being an outsider to the scene, Gret is the one to give one of the longest monologues at the end of the act. The overlapping noisy voices of the other characters, only interested in telling their own stories without listening to the others, are only interrupted when Gret awakes from her drowsy state and begins her account of the atrocities she had to go through, including the death of two of her children. Her raw and violent language leaves the other guests numb, and for the very first time they all seem to pay extreme attention to what the other woman is saying. Gret's speech could be interpreted

as Churchill's willingness to give a voice to a woman who has never had the chance to speak in history. As noted by Darren Gobert, this "vision of women fighting alongside one another in a collective endeavour […] looks like feminism" (15). At the opposite end of the spectrum, Joseph Marhol's believes that Gret's and the other women's assault "parodies radical and bourgeois forms of feminism, which either reverse or capitalise on existing inequalities rather than remove them" (316) However, Gobert adds that "Dull Gret" is a myth invented by the mind of a male, which does not take into consideration the subject's point of view (15). The observer of Bruegel's painting is not aware of the reasons for these women's actions and is unsettled by their grotesquely violent behaviour.

Churchill offers another version and reassesses Gret's role, promoting her as spokesperson for all those women in history that have been relegated to the margins, criticised and ridiculed because of their willingness to rebel against the patriarchal norm. Going beyond the painting itself, the final monologue is the ekphrastic translation of something that has never been completely made explicit. Certainly, Churchill makes a personal use of different expressive codes, rearranging them for the purposes of her work, but at the same time she is able to initiate a debate on mechanisms of oppression that have characterised women's history. As Komporaly puts it:

> Gret […] advocates a radical, non-compromising feminism, as opposed to Isabella and Joan - the closest to Marlene - who opt for equality-feminism, aspiring to achievements normally licensed to men. […] The least vocal character […] is Gret. She identifies with women from her class and time, unlike the other guests who are captured as individuals. […] An outsider to the party as silent witness and in terms of status - like the waitress - Gret's presence suggests that the sense of community envisaged by Marlene as a background to her success is an imaginary construct. Gret's silence, therefore, acts as a metaphoric protest against Marlene's attempts at legitimising her individual success in a male world. Gret is […] closer to the experiences of women excluded from the celebration. (51)

As it will be discussed in the next part, Gret is linked to Marlene's daughter Angie because they both rebel against the system. They are equally passionate in displaying their anger and dissatisfaction and speak more genuinely. If Gret is the one leading an army of women in battle, Angie protests against Joyce, whom she perceives as the suffocating mother.

4.2 Mothers vs daughters

The second act opens at the "Top Girls" employment agency, with Marlene interviewing Jeanine, who is currently employed as a secretary "to three of them" (87) and wishes to improve her working conditions. Marlene is patronising towards the new applicant and is brutally honest with her when it comes to tell her how the market works. Jeanine comes from a subjugated position, in which her male bosses "share" her. In the original production Jeanine's role was doubled with Patient Griselda, and even if Churchill herself stated that she did not wish to trace a link between one character and the other, the element of subjugation in the two women is undeniable. Furthermore, Jeanine wishes to maintain the typical wife role similarly to Patient Griselda, in that she is "saving to get married" (85), thus annoying Marlene, who wonders whether this means that she is not looking for a long-term job. Marlene suggests to avoid mentioning the fact that she wishes to get married, which is seen as an impediment to reach success. The profession of secretary is compared to a nursing job, in which the woman can only aspire to an ancillary position. Nevertheless, Marlene reassures Jeanine, telling her that she wouldn't have to "nurse him along" (86). When Jeanine reveals her desire to travel in her new occupation, Marlene quickly asks whether her fiancé agrees with that, implying that a married woman is not allowed to just leave the nest in order to fulfil her career around the globe. This is a clear reference to Isabella Bird from Act One, who stopped travelling when she got married, because of the incompatibility between the wife and the adventurer roles. Marlene is constantly planning ahead and urges Jeanine to think about the future, asking her where she expects to be in ten years. The applicant hesitates, as she is not as goal-oriented as Marlene and cannot plan out her life as thoroughly as she does. Her hesitation prompts Marlene to put her in the mother-category, someone that will never have working success. When Jeanine timidly asks her if Marlene believes in her, she only gets a really patronising answer that betrays a complete lack of empathy: "I think you could make me believe it if you put your mind to it" (87).

The following scene takes place in a suburban area, far from the hectic life of London. It has been relatively overlooked, as it is the only one in which Marlene does not appear. Nevertheless, it contains interesting insights into another kind of sisterly bond, the one between the 12-year-old Kit and the 16-year-old Angie, Marlene's secret daughter fostered by Marlene's sister Joyce. The relationship between the two is more genuine, and once again, it is not a coincidence that in the original production Kit's role was doubled with the silent waitress in Act 1 and Angie's role with Dull Gret, probably the only positive

character at the dinner party. Angie, like Gret, is naïve and pure. She is very attached to Kit and in a very instinctive way she understands the importance of the bond with her best friend, a bond that will be strengthened through the actual blood exchange between the two, an image that in some way reconnects them in a shared experience of womanhood.

Angie despises what she believes to be her biological mother, Joyce. She professes various times the desire to kill her, and in so doing to dissociate from the typical mother role Joyce stands for. "I'm going to kill my mother and you're going to watch" (90), she confides to Kit. Angie plans the performance of her matricide in front of Kit, who symbolically is asked to witness Angie's claim of independence from the womb. Since Kit is sceptical about the plan, Angie assumes she is scared of blood, thus implying Kit's unreadiness to be part of the adult world. However, Kit is more mature than Angie also from a biological point of view: she "puts her hand under her dress, brings it out with blood on her finger" (90), thus showing Angie that she has already entered adulthood, or better womanhood. With no hesitation, Angie "takes Kit's hand and licks her finger" (90) This extreme act represents the most intimate bond between the two girls, and Angie's willingness to share her womanhood experience with her friend. After she has licked Kit's finger, she says, "Now I'm a cannibal. I might turn into a vampire now" (90), thus assigning womanhood a perverse and destructive role. However, Angie herself, even if older than her friend, is still immature and has not got "her own blood". This is something that puts her in disadvantage, and that prompts her to feel envious about her friend, but at the same time connected with her. She insists that "You'll have to do that when I get mine" (90), implying that she is willing to exchange her womanhood with Kit when the time comes. Angie seems to be repulsed by all mothers as she considers them all part of the same world she wishes to escape from.

Angie and Dull Gret, then, are both rebellious character with very much in common. In an attempt to change their status quo, "they display the same intensity of outburst and speak intuitively. While Gret leads an army of women in battle, Angie's protest is only mapped out symbolically and is directed against Joyce, whom she perceives as the bad, denying and constraining mother. The exchange of menstrual blood recalls "feminist celebratory rites", making Angie "the only genuinely feminist character in the play, in the sense of having understood the importance of female community" (Komporaly 51).

As soon as Joyce appears onstage, we realise that she has been toughened up by a harsh life in which she had to raise a child on her own. When she receives no answer after calling Angie, she calls her a "fucking rotten little cunt" and wishes her to "stay there and

die" (91). Even if she is the woman who decided or maybe was forced to take care of her sister's unwanted daughter, she does not show any of the typical qualities of the understanding mother to be juxtaposed to Marlene's neglectful nature.

Kit and Angie express their wish to travel the world. "Shall we go to New Zealand?" (92), Kit keeps asking. Both Kit and Angie want to leave the gruesome reality they live in and we learn from this passage that Angie has no intention of getting married. Angie is constantly looking for contact. She twists Kit's arm, she keeps touching her and she asks "do you like me?" (94), thus looking for a validation from the only person she feels equal to. Only her "aunt" Marlene is taken as role model by Angie. When Kit asks her what is so special about her aunt, Angie can only reply that she simply is special and that Joyce hates her, this being a very good reason to love her. To some extent, Marlene is seen by Angie as the unreachable and idealised father figure she has never had. She hates her mother because she is too similar to her and she does not want to be like her, she repudiates the mother figure and is infatuated with the unattainable, that is the father figure, here personified in Marlene, who has rejected all traditional motherly ambitions in order to fulfil her career, far away from her family, like the man-father who leaves the house in order to provide for the family. Ironically, Angie thinks that she is actually Marlene's daughter, only "because she goes to America" (95).

Joyce appears again and speaks privately with Kit. She is extremely worried about Angie, and believes that "she's not going to get a job when jobs are hard to get", and she is "sorry for anyone in charge of her. She'd better get married" (97). There is no hope for Angie's future in Joyce's words. Like Marlene, she thinks that someone like Angie cannot find a place in this world. She calls her "simple" and she implies that she can only get along with little children. Angie comes out wearing "an old best dress, slightly small for her" (98), the only gift from her beloved "aunt" Marlene. She believes it is the dress of success and wants to wear it for the night out with her friend. What she tells Kit: "I put on this dress to kill my mother" (98), is her extreme attempt to liberate herself from the traditional mother figure she sees in Joyce and to access another reality, that of the successful woman (father) incarnated by Marlene. As we will notice in the following scene, where we see Angie still wearing it, "the dress signifies the 'misfit' or gap between Angie's desire to be like the (well-dressed) career woman Marlene, and Marlene's dismissal of her own daughter's career aspirations as a 'packer in Tesco more like'" (Aston, *Carly* 41). It is interesting how Angie replicates with Marlene the relationship she has with "her mother" Joyce, seeing her as the father she has never had. However, she sees Marlene also as a

woman, and thus associates her not only to freedom, but also to intellectual energy. Angie's escape from the nest mirrors her escape from traditional womanhood.[5]

The scene moves back to the "Top Girls" employment agency. Nell and Win, two other girls, are discussing their weekend and commenting on the fact that it was fair for Marlene to get the promotion instead of Howard, since "Marlene's got far more balls than Howard" (100). Nell deliberately uses the allusion to the male genitals to refer to Marlene's strengths - tenacity and rigour - as to imply that those qualities are typical of the male sex. The colleagues move the conversation to travels, stating that they "wouldn't mind a change of air" (100). This idea of mobility, as opposed to the "staying put lady", clearly echoes Isabella Bird's and Lady Nijo's adventurous spirits.

Moving their conversation back to work, they belittle one of their applicants, Mr Holden, who is not considered competitive and ambitious enough and they call him "a poor little tod who wants a better commission and a bit of sunshine" (100). They are ruthless when it comes to Mr Holden's wife, who "wouldn't care to relocate", thus implying that she cannot decide for herself and believe this to be "his funeral" (101). This exchange gives us an idea of these women's professional credo: only with ambition and sacrifice can someone reach personal and above all professional success, these two areas being blurred territories.

Very matter-of-factly, Nell tells Win that her fiancé asked her to marry him again, to which she replied that she is not "going to play house" (102), as if married life would only imply the subjugation to a social norm that forces the woman to behave like a housewife. Win suggests she could marry him and go on working, to which Nell coldly replies that she "could go on working and not marry him" (102), stressing how the two things are incompatible or maybe just claiming her independence from wedlock.

Win has a second interview with Louise, an experienced worker who wishes to change jobs in order to obtain the gratification that the company for which she has worked for many years has always denied her. When Louise tells her she is forty-six, Win admits that this is "not necessarily a handicap" (102), introducing the theme of ageism in the ruthless working environment. Also Louise has a rather distorted vision of what a woman can and cannot do in the working environment. She considers herself as "the only woman", the other colleagues being just "girls" because of their allegedly inferior position in the

[5] The fact that Angie sees Marlene as both a father figure and as the source of intellectual energy is also explained by Melanie Klein, in *Love. Guilt and Reparation and Other Works*.

hierarchy. Louise adopts the male point of view, considering herself above the "girls" and even states: "I don't care greatly for working with women, I think I pass as a man at work" (106). Louise almost looks scared of women and finds herself in a limbo, where on the other hand she is treated "like a woman" by her male superiors who would not give her the promotion she deserves, and on the other experiences of the complete abnegation of her personal life outside of a working environment where she is not appreciated. Win is aware of the strong competition that Louise has to deal with, and opts for a field that is "easier for a woman", a cosmetic company. As soon as Louise starts expressing her opinion on the matter, Win interrupts her, warning her that she "shouldn't talk too much at an interview" (107). Win is negotiating her desire to help another woman - or maybe her desire to prove that women can be as successful as men if they want to, and her awareness of the status quo, in which she has to deal with a reckless, male-dominated working environment. She is understanding but also patronising towards Louise. The last question she asks the applicant is whether she drinks, to which Louise promptly answers: "I don't drink" (107), this being the typical behaviour of what is expected from a woman, especially in the workplace. However, Win was probably expecting a different answer from her, as she says that she indeed drinks, this making her seem tougher and more similar to a man. In this dialogue we see how only exterior mannerisms matter in the workplace: competencies and personal qualities are not important. In order to succeed, a woman has to behave in a certain way, negotiating the silent and submissive nature a male superior would expect from her with the acquisition of typically male patterns in the way she deals with her colleagues.

The focus shifts back to the main office, where Angie has arrived, surprising her aunt. She escaped from home and is wearing the dress Marlene gave her a year before, the passport to the world of successful women, as she believes. She can barely contain her enthusiasm when she asks her aunt whether she is "going to be in charge" (110). Angie believes her aunt to be the most powerful woman in the world. "I knew you'd be in charge of everything" (110), she states with pride. However, when she reveals to Marlene that she intends to stay with her as long as possible, Marlene becomes stiff, prompting Angie to doubt whether her "aunt" is happy to see her. Angie has the opportunity to watch Marlene's empowerment performance when Mrs Kidd, Howard's wife, arrives. Mrs Kidd has come to overtly ask Marlene to give up her new managing position or at least consider Howard as a "natural second choice" (113). Mrs Kidd lives vicariously through her husband and seems to have a really clear idea of what a woman's place in society should be. She thinks that the fact that Howard will be working for a woman will destroy him, emasculate him,

ridicule him in the eyes of his colleagues. Mrs Kidd is very critical of women's advancement in the working world: "you women this, you women that" (112), she laments, not even considering herself to be part of the same "group". She thinks that the "natural order" of things should be restored. Marlene is extremely annoyed at Mrs Kidd's behaviour and cuts her short, which prompts Mrs Kidd to call her "one of those ballbreakers", prophesizing that she will inevitably "end up miserable and lonely", since she is "not natural" (113). Mrs Kidd thus believes that women should naturally step aside and let men be the leaders of the world. It is possible that, considering that she has allegedly never succeeded professionally, she wants to win the same empowerment through her husband, believing this to be her only weapon. After Marlene has dismissed Mrs Kidd, Angie compliments her and tells her that she was wonderful. Marlene suggests she goes sightseeing, but Angie replies that Top Girls Employment Agency is where she "most want[s] to be in the world" (114).

The last interview is between Nell and Shona, a young and ambitious woman who wants a job "on the road". Nell warns her that an employer "is going to have doubts […] whether [a lady has] got the guts to push through to a closing situation", since they think that women are "too nice" (115). Once again, being nice and understanding are seen as typically female qualities that Nell rejects, saying she is "not very nice" (115), which is iterated by Shona, who is trying to look as tough as her interviewer. After Shona gives a rather grotesque description of her alleged current working situation, Nell realises that she has been lying the whole time. She is actually only twenty-one and has virtually no working experience. However, she concludes with a provocative "I could though, I bet you" (117), this revealing how the younger generation of women is willing to have the same power gained by the "ballbreakers", as they are called by Mrs Kidd. In Shona's naïf view the time is ripe for women to get everything they want just by whishing it, since everything is possible.

Back to the main office, Angie talks to Win, who tells her that "there's not many top ladies about" and that her "auntie's a smashing bird" (118), which prompts Angie to ask her whether she could work there. When Win enquires about her qualifications, Angie confesses that she is not able to do anything in particular. Win tells her own success story, in which she "got married in a moment of weakness"(119). However, Angie falls asleep while Win is narrating. Marlene comes back and is informed by Win that her niece wishes to work at the agency. Marlene brutally answers that she should rather work as a "packer

at Tesco" and that "she's not going to make it", leaving her no option but a miserable life, since "she's a bit thick" and "a bit funny" (120).

4.3 A new-found sisterhood?

Act Three takes place a year before Act Two. Marlene has come to visit her sister Joyce and she has brought Angie the dress that we had already seen her wearing previously. Angie is excited about her present and about the perfume that Marlene has given Joyce and says she "can play wearing it like dressing up" (122). The dress is seen by Angie as the key to access Marlene's successful world and the perfume that she wants everybody to wear represents her attempt to find a bond between her and the two sisters: "let's all smell […] now we all smell the same" (122), she says. Marlene very soon realises that Angie was the one to invite her over, and not her sister. Marlene cannot find an explanation for Angie's behaviour and acknowledges that she does not know her at all: "how do I know / what she's like?" Joyce is bitter towards her sister, who has "never come and see her" (123). She stayed in her hometown to take care of Marlene's unwanted child and their mother and therefore is characterised by a sense of utter immobility, as opposed to her sister: "I'm right here where I was. And will be a few years yet I shouldn't wonder" (124). Marlene tries to be diplomatic, and pretends to be happy that they have an occasion to be all together, since they are "sisters after all" and "it's a pity to let that go" (125), as if the relationship between the two were regulated by their blood bond only.

Angie's friend Kit runs into the room and then disappears, so Joyce explains that that she is one of Angie's best friends, almost a little sister to her. She then adds that "Angie's good with little children" (126), to which Marlene replies asking Angie whether she would like to become a teacher or a nursery nurse, implying that given her inclinations she could not aspire to any other occupation. Both sisters are aware of Angie's limits, and belittle her: "she's not clever like you" (126), Joyce says, implying that Angie will never be a highflyer like Marlene.

Marlene then asks Joyce whether she has seen Mother. The conversation suddenly becomes more sombre, as soon as this topic is brought up. Even the fact that both sisters refer to her formally as "Mother" discloses a sense of detachment on both sides. Angie recalls the last time she met aunt Marlene, when she celebrated her ninth birthday. Impatiently, she asks Marlene whether she remembers that day and also adds "you

remember me?" (128), as if she had doubts about her aunt's actual interest in her. Marlene only replies "I remember the cake", which prompts Angie to ask again whether she remembers her too.

Angie is fascinated by her aunt's American endeavours and her only wish is to travel to America with her aunt and become American, this being associated in her head with the successful and independent life away from the woman she considers to be her real mother. This certainly echoes the adventurous Isabella Bird from Act I. While she is upstairs, the sisters move the conversation back to the big issue of moving and staying.

> MARLENE. You could have left.
> JOYCE. Who says I wanted to leave? […] How could I have left?
> MARLENE. Did you want to?
> JOYCE. I said how / how could I?
> MARLENE. If you'd wanted to you'd have done it. (130)

Marlene and Joyce discuss the theme of agency, of having a choice, of the possibility not to conform to any social norm and fulfil one's aspirations. If Joyce at first rejects the "moving" idea, implying she is not like Marlene, she then realises that she has no option, because in her mind someone had to stay and this is the reason why she sacrificed herself. On the other side of the spectrum, Marlene believes only in self-realisation and is furthermore convinced that one's will is one's power, without considering social circumstances. The sisters talk about their mother, the other social constraint. Marlene has not seen her for a very long time and Joyce, who visits her every week, wonders whether she still recognises Marlene, "Fucking awful life she had", Marlene states. "Fucking hell" (132), she iterates. Their mother has allegedly dedicated her entire life to the family and for this reason Marlene believes that she was forced to give up every opportunity, opting for the fulfilment of the traditional wife/mother role. Joyce feels Marlene is indirectly judging her own choices, and blames Marlene for leaving her with her child and their mother. "People do leave home / it is normal", replies Marlene, who refuses to accept that moving out of the house is only a male prerogative. In her view, everyone has the right to leave, where there is no happiness. Marlene reprehends Joyce for thinking that she cannot even consider Angie to be her child and her mother to be their mother. She believes in the biological bond, discrediting all other forms of emotional dependence in the family.

Joyce does nothing to change the situation, but only complains and stays still, she could be considered "a counter-figure to Gret, yet she also voices her socialist feminist-inspired reservation with regard to accomplishing change on an individual basis" (Komporaly 52). The contrast between the two sisters is the result of two big choices they made, which brought them to "the relative economic poverty of child-rearing, [and] the emotional alienation of success within the structures of capitalism" (Case, *Feminism* 87). If on the one hand Joyce "is motivated by a profound sense of duty […] Marlene has deliberately opted out from family responsibility. […] Marlene is a 'meritocrat', a believer in privileges not so much inherited but achieved through personal efforts" and does not believe in class (Komporaly 54). She shares Thatcher's political credo, that is the abnegation of society as a whole and the praise of the individual.

Joyce sacrificed herself, because "somebody had to", giving a moral judgement to Marlene who just replies "No they don't / Why do they." Marlene feels unease at the idea of what life could have been if she had decided to stay for family's sake. "Marry a dairyman who'd come home pissed / Don't you fucking this fucking that fucking bitch […] Fucking tell me what to fucking do fucking" (133). In Joyce's mind, the duties of motherhood go beyond an unhappy marriage: "I don't know how you could leave your own child", she tells Marlene, who promptly replies: "You were quick enough to take her […] you couldn't have one so you took mine" (133), treating her baby like a commodity to possess. Motherhood seen as transaction had already been explored by Churchill in *Owners.*

Marlene does not sound very convincing to Joyce when she states that she could have kept the child and still become the successful woman she is today. She recalls the story of a woman that was able to find a balance between personal and working life because she is a "high-powered lady earning a great deal of money" (134). Her only excuse for not having followed the same path is the young age at which she had Angie. Joyce suggests she has a child now, but Marlene replies that she has been on the pill for too long and now she is probably sterile. Marlene's sterility could be the mirror of her emotional unavailability.

Joyce blames Marlene for the loss of her own child. She was too busy taking care of Marlene's "fucking baby" (135). At this point, Marlene starts talking about her abortion experiences. She downsizes these episodes, telling her that "it's boring. It wasn't a problem", she then says that she does not "like messy talk about blood" (135). Marlene is not comfortable talking about the more natural and biological aspects of womanhood. Contrarily to Angie, who in Act Two is not afraid of blood and even sees in it the possibility

to bond with her friend, Marlene is repelled by it. To distance herself from the matter, she uses the scientific term "gynaecology" to refer to childbearing in a really impersonal and detached way.

However, Marlene bursts into tears after she finally opens up to her sister: "I was afraid of this. I only came because I thought you wanted…I just want… [Marlene cries] No, let me cry. I like it" (135). Marlene has been wearing a mask of superiority this all time and finally finds a way to liberate herself from the sense of oppression she feels. From this moment onwards, the conversation between the sisters becomes more intimate, as if a wall between them has fallen down. They agree that a woman does not need a man in order to be happy.

> JOYCE. Who needs them?
> MARLENE. Who needs them? (137)

Marlene admits she is only looking for adventures and claims that "the eighties are going to be stupendous" (137) Joyce is more sceptical, and asks "Who for?", to which Marlene replies: "For me / I think I'm going up up up" (137). There is no self-doubt in her words. She truly thinks of herself as a true "top girl" and compares herself to Margaret Thatcher, another woman who can only go "up up up", in her opinion: "she's a tough lady, Maggie. I'd give her a job" (138). Marlene thinks she has the gift to judge what makes a successful woman. Joyce disagrees: *"*What good's first woman if it's her? I suppose you'd have liked Hitler if he was a woman. Ms Hitler. Got a lot done, Hitlerina. / Great adventures" (138). Joyce believes that Marlene is unreasonable and blind towards Thatcher's conservative politics and the idea of a free market, with the absolute faith in the individual. She does not believe in class, "Anyone can do anything if they've got what it takes […] If they are stupid or lazy or frightened, I'm not going to help them get a job" (140). However, as soon as Joyce asks Marlene "what about Angie? […] She's stupid, lazy and frightened", Marlene lies and says that "she'll be alright", whereas the previous act ended with Marlene saying: "she's not going to make it." Joyce imagines the next generation of children criticising their mother Angie who could not make it, who had a wasted life, exactly like Marlene is doing with her mother an indirectly with Joyce.

> MARLENE. Them, them / Us and them.
> JOYCE. And you're one of them.

MARLENE. And you're us, wonderful us, and Angie's us / And mum and dad's us.

JOYCE. Yes, that's right, and you are them. (140)

Marlene does not believe in class and cannot accept that there is an "us" and a "them", but this is unavoidable, as not everyone can be as successful as she is, not everyone can just leave all responsibilities behind and start afresh. There is a moral judgement in Joyce's "and you're one of them", as this would imply that Marlene is not part of the family anymore, she is seen as the Other, as someone foreign to their environment, whereas Joyce, Angie and their parents are considered as "us", and thus separated from Marlene.

Joyce wishes Marlene goodnight and leaves the stage. Angie rushes down looking lost. For the first time she inadvertently calls Marlene "Mum", to Marlene's discomfort. Angie has had a dad dream, and repeats the adjective "frightening" (141) twice, thus reiterating the "frightened" used by Joyce to describe her minutes before. Life looks frightening for Angie, who has no choice but accept her wretched faith.

Throughout the play, the spectator lacks an insight into Angie's perspective, since the focus is always on Marlene's seductive success, "something Angie believes she too can have access to. […] Angie is forced to confront the fact that her aspiration towards Marlene's lifestyle is going to remain outside her reach" (Komporaly 54). "Frightening", the last word uttered by Angie, indicates the understanding of her unfortunate circumstances. The fact that the same word was used in Latin by Pope Joan at the end of Act One, "connects the most disadvantaged character with the one who has excelled through her intellect", indicating Churchill's aim to create a "parallel between the historical-surrealist opening and the realistic sections, but also offers solid support to Angie's call for help" (Komporaly 55).

With the final tableau, the author depicts the struggles of contemporary feminism. On the one hand the socially disadvantaged daughter who is desperately calling for help in a very direct and naïve way. On the other hand, the socially successful mother, who has renounced to her maternal duties and is deaf towards this call for help. Finally, in the middle we find Joyce, who represents that side of social feminism who is less active and trapped in self-pity and social immobility. Komporaly considers her, together with Gret, the herald "of the so-called next wave in the Women's Movement, intended to fight towards the elimination of oppression via direct struggle. [Churchill] acknowledged the need for a feminist and socialist intervention" (Komporaly 56). This is the reason why the ending of

this play is so powerful and encourages feminist spectators to react: if there is no active cooperation and help among the most disadvantaged in the feminist battle, the future can only be bleak and "frightening". Director Stafford-Clark explained that

> The moment when Angie says 'frightening' is [...] frighteningly prophetic, written on the threshold of Thatcher's eighties, as it posits the perspective that those who are less talented, those who are weaker will go to the wall. Of course that is what happened. (qtd. in Roberts 2017)

The confusion at the end of Act I, where all characters are left in a complete state of desperation and bewilderment is mirrored here by Angie's vulnerability. Ultimately Churchill leaves the audience wondering what will become of the neglected daughter. The fact that Act III chronologically precedes Act II confirms that a complete resolution is not possible. The last words uttered by Marlene in Act II "she's not going to make it" (120) – the last words also if considered chronologically, express the final judgment on Angie's hopeless condition.

CHAPTER IV

Margareta Garpe in the 1970s and 1980s

1. Margareta Garpe

Frihetens nödvändighet, frigörelsen pris.[1]

Margareta Garpe is an important voice of contemporary Swedish theatre. Born in Stockholm in 1944, she was raised in the theatre scene and would go on to become a journalist for the important newspaper *Aftonbladet*. Towards the end of the sixties she moved to East Berlin where she contracted tuberculosis. During the period of convalescence, she got closer to the theatre and, returning to Sweden, became a member of the *Grupp 8* feminist circles. Made up of journalists, intellectuals and artists from different backgrounds, the group aimed to fight for gender equality in the workplace and was one of the more influential promoter of abortion rights. During the Seventies Garpe collaborated with Suzanne Osten, feminist playwright with whom she produced and staged various political works. Among these, *Jösses flickor*! *Befrielesen är nära* ("Gee, girls! Liberation is at hand", 1974), which will be my first case study, is a passionate tale recounting the feminist struggles in Sweden from the 1920s to the 1970s. In this and in their other collaborative works, the two authors detached themselves from August Strindberg's traditional poetics and from the idea of the playwright as a single protagonist in the compositional process. Thanks to their experience within the social feminist movements, the authors preferred to collaborate with all members of the crew, through workshops and interviews. They also moved away from the theatre of the word, preferring avant-garde experiments that were reminiscent of the epic theatre of Bertolt Brecht.[2]

The thriving collaboration between the two ended in the early 1980s, when Osten started devoting herself almost exclusively to children's theatre. Garpe, on the other hand, continued to take an interest in the female condition, adopting a psychological realism very close to that of her master Ingmar Bergman, with whom she had collaborated on various television and film projects, among which a TV adaptation of Garpe's play *Barnet* ("The Child", 1979), which was produced by the Bergman. This play, which was followed by the TV drama *Prövningen* ("The Test", 1985) explores the complexities and problems of mothers who yearn for their freedom and yet feel responsible for their children. The

[1] Garpe, Margareta. *Tre Dramer*. Norstedts, 1989, p. 5.
[2] The shift from traditional theatre to more experimental forms of expression is reassessed in: Johansson, Birgitta. *Befrielsen är nära. Feminism och teaterpraktik i Margareta Garpes och Suzanne Ostens 1970-talsteater*. Symposion, 2006.

mother-daughter relationship becomes for Garpe the favourite place for the investigation of the deepest existential issues. The intimacy of the action and the centrality of the dialogues bring the author back into the tradition of Strindberg-inspired theatre, in which the psychology of the characters is presented in all its drama.[3]

Probably the work that most presents itself as a direct tribute to Strindberg is *Till Julia* ("To Julia", 1987), the last case study that I will take into consideration. The play's title is a clear reference to Strindberg's *Fröken Julie* (*Miss Julie*). The 1888 play that inspired Garpe sheds light on the psychological tendencies of the time, for which the "I" is not a coherent unit, but a "conglomeration" of contradictory impulses (Ciaravolo 329). Garpe reassesses this legacy, examining the difficult relationship between mother and daughter, in this case an actress over forty on her personal "sunset boulevard" and her nineteen year old daughter, who instead represents a new generation of women who dream of emotional and economic independence. In both plays the characters find themselves trapped in their social conventions. On the one hand, Julie, a prisoner of her wealthy class and, on the other, Gloria, victim of a patriarchal culture in which being a mother and a successful artist is irreconcilable. However, while in *Fröken Julie* Strindberg leaves no hope of salvation, in *Till Julia* Garpe sees in the new generation represented by the young daughter a possibility for positive change, as we will see in the final part of my analysis.

The protagonists of her later works are very often mature women struggling with their past. One of the most representative works of this phase is *Limbo* (2003), a play in which issues such as drug addiction and sexual abuse are treated with extreme delicacy. In the author's recent production one can appreciate a stylistic and formal experimentalism that once again questions her adherence to any literary canons.

[3] August Strindberg (1948-1912) has been a great anticipator of the psychoanalytical revolution in the theatre. In the context of European Expressionism, he progressively detached himself from dramatic Naturalism, following the urge to represent reality in all his aspects. Like many expressionist painters, he realized that there can be no fixed rules of representation and that every individual has a different perception of reality. This is what Peter Szondi has defined "I dramaturgy", something "which determined the image of dramatic literature for decades to come. In Strindberg's case it was a dramaturgy rooted in autobiography" (209).

2. A Swedish classic: *Jösses Flickor!* (1974)

Jösses flickor! Befrielsen är nära was part of a collective project aimed at finding an alternative space for women in the theatre, where a plurality of different voices could be expressed.[4] In one interview, Garpe and Osten stated that "vi vänder oss till den stora grupp kvinnor som varit i föreningslivet på något sätt, i kooperationen, i de partipolitiska obundna kvinnoförbunden" (Forsman),[5] thus making clear that their work was politically engaged, as it explicitly addressed women rebelling against the patriarchal norm. The authors consciously refer to an old Swedish tradition of popular political movements, which were the most active cells in the democratisation process of the country, including the fight for gender equality as both a social and cultural battle. It was in this kind of organisation that women were able to experience equality, active participation and subjectivity. *Jösses Flickor*, a historical, political, and collective play, collects the memory of that legacy –in addition to posing the problem of the relationship between that legacy and the new feminism of the younger generations. Furthermore, it is interesting the way in which the authors pay tribute to the Swedish democratic tradition of popular associations, transferring it into a theatrical and aesthetic practice of collective, plural, multiple and collaborative authorship.

The play was based on the accounts of various women, including interviews with elder feminist activists. Through workshop activities, Garpe and Osten also discussed the main themes with their group of thirteen actresses, thus supporting the feminist strategy which encourages women to learn from each other, in a culture where both analytical tools and existing images of women were constructed through the lens of patriarchy. Germaine Greer insisted that "women must learn their own history because they have a history to be proud of and a history which will give pride to their daughters" (343), and for this reason it was vital to share past experiences in order to fight together for their liberation.

The play is divided into two acts and it has an episodic structure, intertwining private and public spaces. There are clear echoes of Brechtian Epic theatre, as has been pointed out by Birgitta Johansson. The use of very short scenes, the many songs which interrupt the action, and the stylization of the characters all contribute to the alienation

[4] Garpe and Osten began their collaboration is 1971 with *Tjejsnack* ("Girl chat"), followed by *Kärleksföreställningen* ("Love Performance") in 1973.

[5] "We turn to the big group of women that has been active in the different associations, organizations and in the independent party-political women's unions".

effect, preventing any emotional involvement by the audience, which is instead invited to critically understand the political message and hopefully react accordingly. Furthermore, the use of projections and lighting instead of the traditional scenery, together with the very few props onstage discourage any mimesis, highlighting the universal qualities of the play (Johansson 164).

2.1 The empty womb

The first section, which includes scenes 1 to 5, is called "Befrielsen är nära" ("Liberation is at hand"), a reference to the play's subtitle. All the main characters are presented in their oppressed condition, which is followed by an epiphanic moment in which they metaphorically experience their awakening in the form of a personal anthem. The newly-formed political group "Jösses Flickor" ("Come on girls") ignites the personal revolution of these women from different social backgrounds.

The play opens during a political assembly with different women discussing pressing matters that concern their role in contemporary society; the scene is set in 1924 Stockholm. Some men are also present, making inconsiderate and sexist remarks on what is being said. For instance, they joke on the fact that now women have the right to vote[6], this leading a man to scornfully say: "nu när hon har rösträtt borde man gifta sig med dom. Så fick man två röster" (Garpe and Osten 115).[7] In contrast to the male group, Asta solemnly declares that now: "vi har blivit människor. Nu har vi rösträtt" (115).[8] The first words uttered by the leader of this women's liberation society are extremely powerful, in that she poses women on the same level as men, based on the universal right to vote. She is optimistic and believes that "vi är början till en MASSRÖRELSE" (116),[9] thus echoing the suffragettes battles of the previous years and the desire to go on fighting for women's rights.

Asta then goes on to present the other members of the society: we soon realise that each of them represents a different side of feminism, from the independent woman that needs no men nor children in her life, to more traditional women that instead wish to

[6] Women's suffrage in Sweden was granted in 1919.
[7] "now that she has the right to vote one should marry them. So that one gets two votes".
[8] "We have become people. Now we have the right to vote".
[9] "We are the beginning of a mass movement".

integrate their maternal roles with their working lives. Among them, Myran is the more naïf: she recalls her experience at the Fogelstad school, an institution founded by their women society and managed by Vera, with the aim to provide women with an education. However, Myran seems to have gained only the skill to talk to strangers, thus implying that for some women the way to emancipation is extremely long and has to start from very basic steps, like talking to a stranger. Asta is worried that the group might not be taken seriously by the men there, and interrupts both Myran and Vivan, another member who seems to be interested only in child rearing. Finally there is Sigrid, the senior of the group and the only character who does not age throughout the play. The meeting is interrupted by Vivan, who is in labour, thus taking the attention back to motherly duties.

After deciding to name their group "Jösses Flickor", they all sing their anthem, "Befrielsen är nära":

> Men kan vi? Vill vi? Törs vi?
> Ja, vi kan! Vi vill! Vi törs!
> Och en dag ska barnen säga
> Denna mänskliga värld vill vi ha. (119)[10]

These women have a very specific goal in mind: instead of creating their own space they want to lay the foundations for their kids to conquer what they call "a man's world."

During the first half of the play, all female characters experience their awakening. In scene 2 (Ironing shop, 1930), Ragnhild is the first one to wake up. Tired of being bullied by her shop owner, who criticizes the way she irons the collars of the very wealthy clients, she hands in her notice, followed by her colleague Elna. The scene ends with Ragnhild singing what soon becomes the symbol of women's liberation from their oppressed condition

> RAGNHILD VAKNAR
> Nej ingen kan hindra oss
> Och jag vet att en dag
> Är det vi som vi styr
> Till allas vårt bästa

[10] "Liberation is at hand / But can we? Do we want to? Do we dare? / Yes, we can! We want to! We dare! / And one day the kids will say / thank you mothers you did good / Yes one day the kids will say: / This human world is what we want".

Nej ingen kan hindra oss (122)[11]

It is not a by chance that Ragnhild is the first one to have a form of epiphany: also from the stage direction we learn that she is very politically engaged and sympathizes with the Communist party. Together with Elna, she decides to join "Jösses Flickor" in Stockholm.

With the exception of Karl Henrik, a very common Swedish name at the time, and Jerker, who will appear later on, we notice that all men in the play are referred to as "MANNEN" or as their profession, without a fuller characterization. This is part of the authors' aim to have a focus on female characters only, who re-appropriate their space and dominate every scene.

In scene 3 we encounter Ragnhild's sister Bojjan, who is far less reactionary. Nevertheless, she also experiences an awakening after she is exploited once again by "FRUN", the lady for whom she works as governess. The lady tries to persuade her to stay using the baby and playing with Bojjans sense of guilt for abandoning him, but the governess has made up her mind and starts singing her awakening anthem, just like her sister.

In scene 5 another character awakens, this time a seemingly more emancipated one. It is Harriet, who is referred to as "SKRIBENTEN" until she sings the awakening anthem, thus indicating that before that moment she was, or maybe she only wanted to be - associated with her profession as a writer. She is quarrelling with her husband, "MANNEN", who is reproaching her for not taking care of her child and for only thinking about her career. She reminds him that "du lovade mej, när vi gifte oss, att jag skulle få fortsätta" (130).[12] The husband replies that "det var innan barnet", which prompts Harriet to burst out and tell him that "jag ska skriva mina artiklar. Jag ska bli en känd skribent. Jag ska göra boken om barnens rätt i västerlandet. Och du ska inte få hindra mej" (131).[13] Harriet is convinced that she will make it on her own, yet she confesses that "pappa kommer att hjälpa mej. Jag klarar mej själv. Fast jag är kvinna" (131).[14] She professes to be an emancipated young woman, yet she is still dependent on the father figure. Nevertheless, she also sings the awakening anthem at the end of the scene and is then joined by Bojjan,

[11] "No nobody can stop us / And I know that one day / It will be us the ones to rule / For the good of all / No nobody can stop us".
[12] "You promised, when we got married, that I could keep on writing".
[13] "It was before the child" / "I will write my articles. I will be a famous writer. I will write a book on children rights in the West. And you won't stop me".
[14] "Daddy is going to help me. I will pull through. Even though I'm a woman".

who is looking for a new job and is invited to stay by Harriet. They both want to experience a new, more egalitarian form of sisterhood.

The second section of the first act, which comprises scenes 6 to 9, is called "Livmoder och arbete" ("Womb and work"). The group is gathered at the "Jösses flickor" headquarters and is watching the 1930 German film *Cyankali*, which famously addressed the theme of abortion in the very conservative environment of the Weimar Republic. A group of men is also participating and mocking the film, to which Agnes says: "Vad är ni för slags karlar, som håller till godo med preventivsmedelförbudet och fosterfördrivningsstraff? Är det för att ni inte vet bättre, eller är ni inga riktiga karlar?" (133).[15] Agnes, in ridiculing these men, is inviting everyone to become aware of the abortion issue, something of a taboo in 1934 Sweden. Vera also suggests to "lägg en slant till RFSU" (133),[16] encouraging the other members to support sexually assaulted women. The group then starts a discussion on the right to abortion, which is seen as the only choice in some cases. Agnes is convinced that "alla barn har rätt att vara kärleksbarn", whereas Vivan rejects the idea of abortion, since she is "uppfylld av glädje varje gång jag väntar" (134),[17] thus bringing the debate from the general to the personal level. This scene shows that the experiences around the body and female sexuality played a very central role in the feminist debate, with different views on the matter which complicated the discussion on sensible themes like abortion rights.

At this point all the characters physically battle around Vivan's pregnant belly. On one side Vivan and Myran, the objectors, and on the other side Vera, Agnes and Asta. Vivan's body, then, plays a very important role, in that it becomes the controversial symbol of the biological and physiological obligations of a pregnant woman. Myran wonders "hur kan du önska livet ur din egen dotter" (134),[18] referring to a daughter and not a generic child as to stress a form of sisterhood. She believes the mother role to be life-giving and thus gives it an importance which is not recognized for example by Vera, who is more outspoken and talks about pregnancy in a practical, almost gynaecological way. Myran also confesses that if people knew that Vera teaches children "hur man älskar utan att bli med barn" (135)[19] she would be fired, thus giving a hint at the question of contraceptives.

[15] "What kind of men are you, if you're happy with the condom ban and the abortion penalty? Is it because you don't know better, or because you are not real men?".
[16] "Give a coin to RFSU!". She refers to the "Riksförbundet för sexuell upplysning", the "Swedish organisation for Sexuality Education", founded in 1933 and promoter of the right to abortion.
[17] "All children have the right to be loved children" / "I'm filled with joy anytime I'm expecting".
[18] "How can you wish to take life away from your daughter".
[19] "How one loves without getting pregnant".

Agnes cannot understand why "preventivmedel är olagliga samtidigt som man blir straffad för att man överför könssjukdomar"(135).[20] In her opinion, this is the very paradox of a society who at the same time condemns abortion, contraceptives, and venereal diseases. To this thought out arguments, Myran is only able to reply with a reference to *Kvinnan från ägget till graven* (*Woman from the egg to the grave*), the controversial guide book for women written by Gustav Wiesel in 1922 and advertised on women's magazines of the time.[21] Asta dismisses the trivialities of that book that Myran is brandishing, slamming it on the floor. She believes a male doctor has no right to decide what is best for a woman. She also tells the group that she has been helping women to get an abortion.

A group of FLYGBLADSFLICKORNA (leaflet-women) appears onstage and starts opposing a group of men holding a sign with "ned med kvinnan" ("Down with women") written on it. The girls leave the stage singing another anthem, called "Tidsvers 1934" ("Verses about our time, 1934"), with the final lines:

> Vi måste möta den svåra reaktionen
> Hävda rätten till en lön
> Fast vi är av kvinnligt kön
> Hävda rätten till vår kropp
> Fast vi inte har nån snopp (137)[22]

Once again, the battle for economic independence is coupled with the emancipation of the female body. The tone is provocative, with the use of the very colloquial word "snopp".

The debate on abortion goes on throughout the whole play, yet in the next song, "Den tomma livmodern" ("The empty womb") the group seems to have decided to give up their motherhood in order to fight for their freedom:

> Fast valet är så svårt
> Så har jag inte vacklat
> Nej, jag ska hålla livmodern tom

[20] "Contraceptives are illegal and one can be at the same time condemned for transmitting a sexual disease".
[21] The most influential women's magazine of the 1930s was "IDUN: Illustrerad tidning för kvinnan och hemmet".
[22] "We must face the difficult reaction / claim the right to a salary / even if we are of the female sex / claim the right to our body / even if we don't have a willie".

Och slåss för redan födda barn (141)[23]

The pregnant body is here seen as impediment to the achievement of women's emancipation. The decision to abandon the nurturer role is a difficult yet necessary one.

The only character who is convinced she can combine work life and motherhood is Harriet. Scene 12, entitled "Skribentens nye man" ("The writer's new man") revolves around Harriet's struggle as a successful journalist and a new mother. Her "new man", as with many male characters, has no name, and is only referred to as "MANNEN 2" ("Man 2"). Harriet believes she has found "den fria kärleken" ("Free love"), as she sings in the opening song, where she addresses her dear sisters, who claim that love is only a delusion, a byproduct of patriarchy and an impediment in order to achieving complete emancipation:

DEN FRIA KÄRLEKEN
Å tack för att du fann mej
Å tack för att vi fann varann
Förr var han en annan kvinnas man
Ja, jag kan beklaga
Och hon kan nog anklaga
Men kärleken är fri
Och nu älskar vi
För ingen äger en ann
Allt är till låns minsann
Och nu älskar vi varann
I evighet
Ryck upp dej kära syster
Ta dej samman nu
Den fria kärleken
Har ofria offer
Och det är du
Som gråter nu (155)[24]

[23] "Even if the decision is so difficult / I'm not about to fall / No, I will keep my womb empty / and fight for the children that are already born".
[24] "Oh thank you for finding me / Oh thank you that we found each other / He used to be another woman's man / Yes, I do apologize / And she can accuse me / But love is free / And now we love / Because no one

Harriet apologizes to her man's ex-wife, stating that when it comes to "true love", everything is allowed, even hurting one of the "dear sisters", who is the necessary sacrifice in the path towards personal happiness. It would seem that Harriet has found the perfect man for her: he is apparently understanding and supportive of her career, and he is also a writer:

> MANNEN 2. Mellan oss finns det inga könsfrågor. Vi är jämnstarka. Du har ett eget liv och jag har ett eget.
> SKRIBENTEN. Du hindrar mej inte som min förre man.
> MANNEN 2. Vår kärlek är kravlös. […] Jag blir så stolt när jag ser din mage och ser dej arbeta. (156-157)[25]

Nevertheless, the tone used by the new husband is problematic in many ways. He over-simplifies their relationship, considering it only a juxtaposition of two independent "personal lives" joining in what he calls an "unpretentious love". However, as soon as the child is born, his attitude towards Harriet changes drastically. Interestingly, when she plays her mother role, Harriet is referred to in the stage directions with her birth name, but as soon as she goes back to her typewriter, she suddenly becomes "SKRIBENTEN" again. This would seem to enhance the contrast between the two activities, which apparently she is not really able to reconcile: she is not a nurturer and leaves the new-born to Bojjan. She thinks she is a pioneer in work-life balance, but cannot help but relying on the other women around her to take care of her personal life. She believes a powerful and successful woman like her has the right to put her career first. When Bojjan tries to tell her that she will not be able to take care of her children because she would like to attend a course where they teach "how to speak to adults", Harriet replies:

> SKRIBENTEN. (otåligt) "Prata" är väl inte så viktigt. Någon av flickorna kan väl hjälpa dej.
> BOJJAN. Jag vill göra något eget.
> SKRIBENTEN. (hotfullt) Vad ska du göra då?
> BOJJAN. Gör vad du vill. Jag åker ändå på den där talkursen.

owns anyone / Everything is on loan indeed / And now we love each other / Forever / Pull you up, dear sister / Get together now / Free love / Needs sacrifice / And that is you / Who is crying now".

[25] "HUSBAND 2. There are no gender issues between us. We are equally strong. You have your personal life and I have my own. / WRITER. You don't hinder me like my ex-husband. / HUSBAND 2. Our love is unpretentious […] I get so proud when I see your belly and I see you work".

(Kort musikövergång ”Bojjan vaknar”) (159)[26]

Harriet works with words and understands the power of language. She is a radical feminist who believes that not all women have the same opportunities and must accept their weaknesses. On the other hand, Bojjan has already gone through a first “awakening” and is determined to work on her skills in order to become an independent, emancipated woman. She goes through a “second awakening” at the end of the scene, deciding to attend the talk class and abandoning Harriet. Her revolutionary act is highlighted by a reprise of her awakening anthem.

2.2 Deliver us from love

Act two opens in 1946 during another meeting at the “Jösses Flickor” headquarters. The members are collecting clothes for the orphans of Leningrad with the support of the former USSR ambassador Alexandra Kollontaj.[27] Asta, who is still worried about her ongoing feminist battle which had to slip into background due to the war, believes that “handarbete kan också vara en politisk handling”, adding that “vår förening är på väg ätt växa. Kvinnorna vill slåss för freden” (177).[28]

Vivan’s daughter makes her entrance. As indicated in the stage directions, she is played by the same actress who played Vivan in the first act. This doubling is intended to maintain a continuity between the two acts, at the same time hinting at the interchangeable roles of mother and daughter. The fact that this new character is not even given a name, but is only referred to as VIVANS DOTTER also gives more importance to the family role she comes to enact. When she is asked by the other women how Vivan is doing, the daughter replies that “mamma vill att jag ska arbeta för freden. Och rättvisan” (179).[29] She is presented as more politically engaged compared to her mother, who instead was only interested in fostering her children.

[26] “ WRITER. (impatiently) ‘Talking’ is not that important. One of the girls will help you. / BOJJAN. I want to do something on my own / WRITER. (threatening) What are you going to do, then? / BOJJAN. Do whatever you want. I’m still taking that talk class. / (Short music transition “Bojjan wakes up”)”.
[27] Alexandra Michajlovna Kollontaj was a Marxist revolutionary, the first Soviet woman to become part of a governing cabinet. She was appointed Soviet ambassador to Sweden from 1943 to 1945 and was also extremely active also in the Swedish political debate. In 1979, the Swedish playwright Agneta Pleijel dedicates a play to her, *Kollontaj*.
[28] “Needlework can also be a political act. […] Our association is growing. Women want to fight for peace”.
[29] “Mummy wants me to work for peace. And justice”.

Contrarily to Vivan, who disappears into her mother role and is simply replaced by her daughter in the second act, Bojjan goes through another awakening. Her boyfriend Jerker, who at the beginning seemed to be more understanding towards her needs, is now eager to have a family and a child, and thinks he knows what is best for Bojjan, like a true patriarch:

> JERKER. Du måste skaffa ett eget liv nu, tillsammans med mej.
> BOJJAN. Ja, jag skulle vilja hinna…jobba med något eget…vilja hinna…jag känner mej inte färdig själv…Fattar du?
> JERKER. Strejken är över, kriget är slut. Jag har sett världen! Vad väntar vi då på? Vi kan bygga NU. Du kan ha egna barn nu. Visst vill du det…
> BOJJAN. O ja…jo det också…
> JERKER. Du är över trettio, du måste välja. Vill du inte ha mej Bojjan? (187)[30]

Jerker believes he can decide when the time is ripe for them to start a family and is convinced that Bojjan also wants the same things. Seeing that she is confused, he takes advantage of her with words, which are her weakness. Once again, language is power, and the speech classes Bojjan is taking are not enough to give her the confidence she needs to confront her partner. Jerker reminds her of her biological age, implying that a woman over thirty has little time to decide whether she wants to start a family or not. In despair, Bojjan leaves the stage with the song "Jag vill inte suddas ut", which sums up her difficult relationship with Jerker.

> JAG VILL INTE SUDDAS UT
> Nej, jag vill inte suddas ut
> För kärleks skull
> Även om han som suddar
> Är öm och kärleksfull
> Du ser mej som en tavla
> Som andra kluddat på
> Du vill sudda allting bort

[30] "JERKER. You have to get your own life, together with me. / BOJJAN. Yes, I would like to manage…work with something on my own…would like to manage…I don't feel ready myself…Do you understand? / JERKER. The strike is over, the war too. I have seen the world! What are we waiting for? We can start building NOW. We can have our own kids now. Surely you want that… / BOJJAN. Oh, yes…me too… / JERKER. You are over thirty, you must decide. Don't you want me Bojjan?".

Och fylla den med egna tecken
Och skriva dit ”Låt stå!” (188)[31]

Bojjan understands she cannot be annihilated because of what she thinks to be her true love. She compares herself to a painting which has already been daubed and that he thinks he can simply erase, just to add his own signs. This song works as a response to the previous anthem “Free love”, sung by the only apparently emancipated Harriet. There is a determination here to abandon the devouring force of romantic love. The battle against this kind of relationships was a key aspect of the feminist debate of the time, which insisted on sacrificing what we believe to be healthy connections.[32]

As stated by Sigrid in the next scene, “livet ställer ju krav, vardagen ställer krav. Och särskilt om man har barn. En sak har jag lärt mej. Det är alltid den starkare som dikterar krav. Sen kan det ju kläs i olika ord. Man kan kalla det fri kärlek. Men det blir sällan fri för kvinnan” (190).[33] It is impossible not to have any demands in a relationship, it is part of everyday life to try and compromise. Nevertheless, there is usually a more dominant part in the couple who imposes all the demands. Sometimes these demands are disguised and are seen as part of the deal, as the normality. Women are usually the weaker part that has to give up all work and personal ambitions to take care of typically female duties, like nurturing a child. This is why women will never be free if they keep choosing family and kids over their independence.

However, this is not an easy task. The political battle all the characters undertake seems to lead nowhere practical; after all we are only in 1948, a time where even in Sweden there was still a lot of sexual discrimination going on. Bojjan is the most frustrated of the group: tired of not accomplishing anything after all she has given up, she threatens to leave “Jösses Flickor” for good and joins the Social Democrats, since she believes that they should fight the same battles men are fighting. She also adds that she is willing to finally

[31] “No, I don’t want to be erased / for love’s sake / even if the one erasing / is tender and loving / You see me as a writing table / which other people have daubed / You want to erase everything away / and fill it with your own signs / and write your own ‘Leave it as it is’”.
[32] Among others in the Scandinavian context of the time, the reactionary refusal of bourgeois conventions, including romantic love, is recounted in the influential essay *Fri os fra kærligheden* (*Deliver Us from Love*), published in 1973 by Danish writer Suzanne Brøgger. Brøgger is more disenchanted and encourages women to withdraw from all traditional roles and from the concept of romantic love, whereas Garpe and Osten try to reconcile the desire for companionship (and motherhood) with gender equality in the couple and in social life.
[33] “of course life sets demands, everyday life sets demands. And in particular when you have kids. I’ve learnt one thing. It is always the stronger who sets demands. Then it can be disguised in different words. One can call that free love. But it rarely becomes free for women”.

have children, to which all the members react with indignation. Nevertheless, Bojjan is convinced that "allt är bara teorier här. Man måste ha dom här verkliga kvinnoerfarenheterna. Man måste vara mor för att begripa vad det handlar om" (196).[34] Contrarily to the other members, Bojjan objects that in order to be heard, a woman cannot give up her role as mother, which allows her to understand her situation in a less idealistic way. Bojjan aims at becoming politically engaged as a mother fighting for her rights and the rights of her children, and sees the feminist battle which she has fought so far as limiting in terms of effectiveness. She reproaches Harriet for having chosen both children and career, stating that "ska man leva karlliv ska man hålla livmodern tom", to which Harriet replies that "det måste väl gå att ha både barn och yrke" (197-198).[35] If Bojjan believes that it is not possible to be both a successful mother and a successful career woman, Harriet is desperately looking for a way to reverse the situation. However, as we see in scene 25, set in a mental institution just 3 years afterwards, Harriet has become mentally ill, and is visited by her daughter and some "Jösses Flickor" members. The scene ends yet with another song, entitled "HARRIETS FLYKT", "Harriet's escape":

> Så hård blev verkligheten
> Att hoppet brast
> Att golvet sjönk
> Att alla svek
> Så hård blev verkligheten
> Att hon tvingades till flykt […]
> Livet är så hårt för många
> Och ingen kan bevisa
> Att just hon blev sjuk av sitt liv
> Somliga går under
> Och andra överlever
> Att några gråter långa stunder
> Är nåt vi vant oss vid. (213)[36]

[34] "It is just theories here. We must have real women experiences. One has to be a mother to understand what it is all about".
[35] "BOJAN. If someone wishes to live a man's life, one shall leave the womb empty. / WRITER. There must be a way to keep both kids and career".
[36] "So hard became reality / that hope fell short / that the floor sank / that everyone betrayed / So harsh became reality / that she was forced to escape / Life is so harsh for many / And no one can prove / that she just got

Contrarily to the awakening song "HARRIET VAKNAR", which was sung by Harriet in the first person, "HARRIET FLYKT" is performed by two other patients of the mental institution, as to imply that Harriet has definitely lost her agency.

The section starting with scene 26 is called "Den pinsamma Kvinnofrågan", which could be translated as both the "awkward" and "painful" women's cause. We are in 1962, in a political climate ignited by social unrest not only in the context of feminist battles, but also in the wider framework of the working class. The few remaining women of "Jösses Flickor" are even discussing a name change, lamenting that their group has lost so many members throughout its 50 years of activity. Everyone is wondering what they have accomplished so far, when a guest speaker arrives and begins a rant against what is thought to be the "awkward women's cause", suggesting that they widen their perspective to include not just women-related issues. The guest states that "för många kvinnor känns det löjligt att vara med i en kvinnoförening", subsequently announcing that "vi avskaffar kvinnofrågan […] vi gör oss till människor", which prompts Myran to cry out "Jösses människor!" (216).[37] The feminist battle joins the social battle, as it is sung in the song ending the scene, which recollects the beginnings of the "Jösses Flickor" experience:

> Jösses flickor se tillbaka
> På allt det vi fått försaka
> Under alla femtio år som gått
> Kanske har just du lagt grunden
> Kämpat i den rätta stunden
> Tvivla inte, se på vad vi fått
> Vi har bara några frågor kvar
> När blir arbete en rättighet
> När blir barnen allas angelägenhet
> När får vi en ekonomisk jämlikhet? (217)[38]

sick of her life / some perish / and others survive / That some people cry for a long time / is something we got used to".

[37] "For many women it feels ridiculous to be part of a women's society" / "We abolish the women's cause […] we make people of us." / "Come on people!".

[38] "*Jösses flickor* looks back / on everything we had to give up to / in all the fifty years that have passed / maybe you have just laid the foundation / struggled at the right time / do not doubt, look at what we've got / we only have a few questions left / when will work become a right? / when will children become everyone's concern? / when will we get economic equality?".

The song is called "Tidsvers 1974" and it very well summarizes the demands of Swedish feminist groups of the early 1970s. Together with the request for equal work policies for women, there was also the wish that men would consider children as their responsibility and would share the nurturing role.

2.3 Liberation is at hand

The last section of the play, entitled "Döttrarna" ("The Daughters") seeks to find a connection between the older generation of politically engaged feminists and the generation contemporary to Garpe and Osten. Scene 27 opens in 1973, one year before the original production of the play. The senior Bojjan, Ragnhild and Elna are discussing the new "jämlikhetsexperiment" ("equality experiments"), maybe referring to a set of new welfare policies also concerning women.[39] Elna comments that it is "konstigt att det ska kallas experiment när det handlar om självklara rättigheter" (218).[40] Myran comes in saying that her daughter is starting a new women's group which will be called "Befrielsen är nära" ("Liberation is at hand"), just like the title of the play's first section, set in the 1920s. The older generation of feminists at "Jösses Flickor" is not enthusiastic at the thought of a new generation wishing to replace them. Elna wonders whether the new feminists are taking inspiration from the "American model", and all those feminists reactionaries who would set fire to their bras in public spaces.[41]

[39] At the end of the 1960s feminists ignited a debate on the need of more radical welfare policies concerning maternity leaves. Very provocatively, the radical feminist *Grupp 8* once claimed that "Försörjaridén kan aldrig accepteras i ett socialistiskt samhälle. Därför måste äktenskapet avskaffas som försörjningsinstitution, barnen försörjas av staten och uppfostras kollektivt, varje vuxen människa bli självförsörjande. Man kräver barnstugeplatser till alla barn mellan 6 månader och 12 år samt kräver 25% av nybyggande som kollektivhus". (Nordström, Brita. 'Familjepolitisk horisont'. *Rädda familijen: en bok om familjenpolitik.* Eds. Jon Peter Wieselgren and Brita Nordström, Pro Verirate, 1972, p. 2, English translation: "The idea of 'providing for' can never be accepted in a socialist society. Therefore, marriage must be abolished as a support institution, children must be supported by the state and brought up collectively, every adult must become self-sufficient. This requires nursery for all children between 6 months and 12 years and 25% of new constructions as a collective housing".) The social state had to provide for the children's nurturing, so that men and women alike could be freed from this "burden".

[40] "strange that it is called experiment when it comes to obvious rights".

[41] This is a reference to the Miss America Protests of 1969, an event in which more than two hundred feminists of the New York Radical Women Movement gathered and organized a series of provocative acts during what was believed to be a parade of patriarchal domination over the female body.

> Men dom säger att dom är de första kvinnorna, de nya kvinnorna. Och att vi inte gjort ett dugg. […] Varför kommer dom inte till oss? (219)[42]

The contrast between these two generation, mothers and daughters, takes place in the arena of feminist groups. Myran wonders why these young women discard all the battles fought by the previous generations, seeking no contact with their more experienced elders. However, some of the other "Jösses Flickor" members point out that the language "Jösses Flickor" uses and the actions that they take are too mild and old-fashioned. They all realize that times have changed and there is the need of a renewal. For this reason, Bojjan – who in the meanwhile is back in the group – suggests they try to "värva några egna unga. Så vi inte kommer bara tanter" (220).[43] The strategy to "beat" the new groups formed by some the members' own daughters is to include younger members, so that the senior ones are not just perceived as tired "aunts", as they call themselves.

Scene 28 is divided into 3 parts which play simultaneously. Garpe and Osten chose to show the final interactions between grandmothers, mothers and daughters in a single space, as to imply that even though the daughters live different stories, they experience the same degree of misunderstanding with their elders, when it comes to their political engagement in the feminist battle and their views on motherhood and career. Bojjan's daughter Erika is fed up with what she believes to be only an idealistic and unpractical feminist battle led by her mother, which has never concerned the harsh working conditions in the factories. Bojjan tries to convince her to join her to the "Liberation is at end" demonstration, which leaves Erika utterly skeptical about the whole event: "Hur nära då?" (223).[44] Bojjan and Erika are living in a paradoxical situation, in which the mother has taken care of her daughter and now invites her to rebel and go against the status quo, becoming politically engaged in the feminist cause, instead of occupying the traditional nurturing role. However, Erika has no intention of rebelling, because someone has to stand by the children. She asks Bojjan "Vem ska passa dom, ja, nu när även mormor är aktiv?" (229),[45] implying that she feels left out, abandoned even by her own mother. There is no resolution between the two. "Jösses Flickor"'s dream of fighting for the future of their children, of battling on the front line so that future generations of women could become

[42] "But they say that they are the first women, the new women. And that we haven't done anything. […] Why don't they come to us?".
[43] "recruit our own young people. So that not just old aunts are meeting".
[44] "[Referring to the liberation who is getting close] but how close?".
[45] "Who is going to take care of them, now that even grandma is active?".

more independent seems to have failed in this case. Bojjan is worried that the revolution will be postponed for another generation and that all their efforts will have been in vain.

Unlike to Erika, Harriet's daughter Eva is willing to be a successful independent woman, and she is convinced she needs an abortion in order to do that. In the first part of her scene she discusses with her husband, who has no intention of letting her have an abortion, and encourages her to take advantage of the maternity leave from her job at the newspaper, something that she cannot accept. She sees her mother as an example not to follow: instead of pursuing her dreams and her career, Harriet has opted for a combination of personal life and work, which has led her to a mental breakdown. Eva's traumatic experience makes her think that children are a burden and an obstacle in the pursuit of gender equality. She keeps on repeating "Titta på mammas liv, jag skulle aldrig ha fötts" (224),[46] as if to imply that she feels guilty for her mother's failure and mental instability. When she announces that she has decided to get an abortion, Ragnhild tries to make her reason:

> RAGNHILD. Du förändrar ju bara din egen situation genom ditt beslut, inte andra kvinnors.
> EVA. Jag gör större nytta utan barn, titta på dig Ragnhild. Du har alltid kunnat ställa upp på andra – på oss. Du skaffade aldrig egna barn.
> RAGNHILD. Jag hade aldrig ett sånt val. Jag hade inget välbetalt jobb som du. Ingen man som ville vara med mej heller. Sen blev det för sent. (227)[47]

Ragnhild believes that abortion in her case is not a political statement, but a personal choice that will have an impact only on her personal life, and not on the lives of other women. Having children is treated here as something that one should consider when in a privileged condition, as in Eva's case. Very practically, Ragnhild makes her understand that having children with a stable and well-paid job and a loving husband by your side does make a difference and should not be discredited. Unlike to her sister Bojjan, Ragnhild has never had children. However, this was not due to a political statement, but rather a well-reasoned and practical decision, since she would not have been able to provide for them.

[46] "Look at mum's life, I should have never been born".
[47] "RAGNHILD. You are only changing your situation with this decision, not that of other women. / EVA. I do more good without a child. Look at you, Ragnhild. You've always had the chance to stand by other people – by us. You have never had any children. RAGNHILD. I've never had such a choice. I didn't have a well-paid job like you. No man that wanted to be with me either. Then it was too late".

The final contrast is the one between grandmother and granddaughter. Karin, Vera's granddaughter, discusses her recent divorce, something which her mother, Vera's daughter, disapproves of.

> VERA. Hon borde ju själv ha skilt sig så bedragen som hon har blivit. Men hon har stannat för er skull förstås.
> KARIN. Det är ditt fel alltihop. Mamma kunde inte skilja sig av rädsla för att vi skulle få det som hon hade det när hon var liten … Och jag var tvungen att skilja mig för att inte få det som mamma … och sen får mina barn det ännu värre … Nej alltihop är ditt fel.
> VERA. Men varför bryter du inte den här onda kvinnocirkeln … och låter pappan ta hand om barnen? Han har ju ett fint arbete. (225)[48]

Karin is convinced that her grandmother Vera is responsible for both her and her mother's unhappiness. Karin's mother decided not to get a divorce, fearing that her children would suffer what she herself had suffered during her youth years, with a distant and neglectful mother more interested in the feminist cause than in the well-being of her own family. Nevertheless, by doing so Vera's daughter moved her own happiness into the background. In an attempt not to repeat the same mistakes, Karin wants to get what her mother has never had the courage to obtain: a divorce. This would once again allow the daughter to distance herself from her mother's path. Vera invites her granddaughter to "break the vicious women's circle" and ask Karin's husband to take care of the children, while she can put herself back on her feet, get a good education and a satisfying social life. However, Karin replies that all this is just plain idealistic and unfeasible: she has to play the mother's role, because there is nobody else out there who would look after the kids, not even their politically engaged great-grandmother. When Vera asks her to join her in the "Befrielsen är nära" demonstration celebrating the fifty years of "Jösses Flickor" she declines, stating that she would rather spend the night dancing than with a group of women fighting for a cause she does not understand.

In all three instances, there is no point of contact nor any resolution. Mothers, grandmothers, daughters, and granddaughters remain isolated women. They lack a

[48] "VERA. She should have gotten a divorce since she had become so disappointed. But she stayed for your own good. / KARIN. All this is your fault. Mum couldn't get a divorce because she was afraid that we would experience what she experiences when she was little … And I was forced to divorce to not get what mum got … and then let my children get it even worse …no, all this is your fault. / VERA. But why don't you break this vicious women's circle … and let the father take care of the kids? After all he's got a nice job".

common goal and a common language to overcome their oppressed condition. Instead of fighting against the same enemy, the patriarchal system, they fight with each other, daughters and granddaughters reproaching their elders for their mistakes, mothers and grandmothers reproaching their offspring for their inertia and ingratitude.

Nevertheless, in the last scene some younger feminists join the demonstration, placing great emphasis on what they believe to be the most pressing matter: a more liberal legislation concerning abortion, something which they have finally accomplished. The elder members of "Jösses Flickor "are proud of this enthusiasm, with Sigrid claiming that "Det här har jag arbetat på i hela mitt liv" (231).[49] At the men's provocation "Men kan ni? Vill ni? Törs ni?" (231),[50] which recalls the sceptical remarks at the beginning of the play, all the women reply with a joyous "Ja vi kan! Vi vill! Vi törs!" (231).[51]

[49] "All my life I've been working for this".
[50] "But can you? Do you want to? Do you dare?".
[51] "Yes we can! Yes we will! Yes we dare!".

3. The need for freedom, the price of liberation: *Barnet* (1979)

Barnet ("The Baby") is the first play of a trilogy collected in 1989 in Garpe's *Tre Dramer.* After the fruitful collaborative years with Suzanne Osten and the political engagement with *Grupp 8*, Garpe decided to go back to a more traditional way of playwriting in the attempt to investigate feminist issues in an intimate space, that of the Strindberg-inspired, psychologically driven, chamber play. At the core of *Barnet*, *Prövningen* ("The Test", 1985) and *Till Julia* ("To Julia", 1987, analysed in the next chapter) is the desire to give an answer to these pressing questions, as Garpe explains in the introduction to the collection:

> Varför föds barn? Vilken plats får de i världen? – Varför föds barn inte? Det kan man använda olika spelplatser för att skildra. På samma sätt som andra författare ständigt beskriver världen utifrån en geografisk plats så återvänder jag genom Sally, Rebecka, Gloria och Julia till min inre spelplats. Den är kvinnlig och frågorna är existentiella. Vad gjorde vi av våra liv, hur valde vi? (Garpe 5)[52]

Apparently, the questions raised by Garpe are quite plain, yet a univocal answer is not easy to find. The author withdraws from the political play in the fashion of Brecht's epic theatre to resume a more existential theatrical experience which aims at delving into the psyche of her protagonists. If *Jösses Flickor* is a choral play, where the political takes a much bigger space in comparison to the personal, the plays that Garpe conceives as single playwright are much more reliant on the single experience of very few characters, with their dreams, their hopes, and their fears. If *Jösses Flickor* favours the public space of demonstration and assemblies, these plays are always set in interior and domestic spaces. If *Jösses Flickor* is more centred on sisterhood in the bigger feminist community, granting only few scenes to the more intimate relationship between family members, these plays deal almost exclusively with family relations, especially those between mother and daughter. Garpe makes a very personal statement, claiming that the stories of these characters stem from her own experience as mother and daughter.

[52] "Why are children born? What place to they take in the world? – why are children not born? One can use different ways to portray this. If other authors describe the world from an external geographical perspective, through Sally, Rebecka, Gloria and Julia I go back to my personal arena.". It is a feminine place and the questions are existential. What have we done with our lives? How have we chosen?".

3.1 The other Nora

Barnet opens with the protagonist Sally addressing the audience directly, as if we were her teenage-daughter. The first words she utters: "barn, kärlek, jämlikhet, frihet" (11)[53] become the key terms of the play. She promises her daughter that one day she will have it all, and no sacrifices will be needed. In a way, this recalls *Jösses Flickor*'s refrain dedicated to all the children who one day will thank their mothers for everything they have done for them. In this case though, this is specifically intended for her only daughter: combining family, love, equality and freedom will be finally possible thanks to all the battles of the previous generations, of which Sally is a member. She repeats "för dej kommer att bli så enkelt" (11)[54] twice, suggesting that her daughter will not have to fight as hard as her mother had to. The other members of Sally's family join her in wishing the daughter a very happy future, whereas they will remain a "parentes i historien" and a "stycke historie" (11-12),[55] as reiterated by the grandmother, implying that the previous generations of women that have fought for equality are seen as being part of a limbo, a transition space between the old patriarchal values and a new emancipated world. The daughter, Mia, is the absent presence of the play. She is always referred to but she is never seen onstage. This accentuates the symbolic role that she plays, a representation of the idea of daughterhood, more than an actual daughter as just one of the characters.

Children, then, are never represented onstage, but only noted though their absence, as in the case of Sally's friend Inger, who is beaten up by her partner and is encouraged by Sally to get an abortion, since she seems utterly unhappy. Sally, a social-worker who is very practical and resolute, reminds the fragile Inger that abortion is now possible and is not a taboo anymore and wonders why her friend would be content with so little. She instead invites her to consider what she believes to be the most important values for an independent woman: "arbete, stå på egna ben, älska utan att äga" (11).[56] Nevertheless, even if Sally professes free love, she is also trapped in a marriage where her husband Jon, a lawyer who used to be very supportive of her political engagement in the battle for free abortion, is now more worried about his future career and wants a second child from her.

[53] "children, love, equality, freedom".
[54] "it will be so easy for you".
[55] "a parenthesis in history / a piece of history".
[56] "working, standing on your own feet, loving without owning".

Jon is planning to lead a traditional, bourgeois life, complete with a new house with a backyard.

Sally is not ready to sacrifice herself again for Jon's sake and discusses her problems with her mother, who is taking care of Sally's grandmother, affected by dementia. Sally does not understand why her mother should look after her grandmother:

> SALLY. Sätt in henne på ålderdomshem då…
> MODERN. Aldrig. Det kan jag inte, som hon har uppoffrat sej för mig.
> SALLY. Uppoffrat! Hon har väl inte gjort mer än andra kvinnor.
> MODERN. Hon har fött mej.
> SALLY. Det är väl ganska normalt…(19-20)[57]

Mother and daughter have different views on what a sacrifice looks like. In Sally's opinion, her grandmother was no exceptional woman: she was just a mother who gave birth to a child, like many other women. On the contrary, Sally's mother believes that she owes her own mother all the care she needs, since the elder lady is regressing to a childish state and needs a motherly figure. She also reproaches Sally for being ungrateful, telling her that she has the freedom to have as many kids as she pleases, to work as an independent woman and to have a free social life, something which she could have never dreamt of. Once again, intergenerational miscommunication leads to false assumptions: Sally's mother does not understand that her daughter is also trapped. Nevertheless, Sally wishes to find a way out: she does not want to give birth to the second child she is expecting just because Jon wants a baby and for this reason she opts for abortion, seen as her only escape route.

Just like her mother, Sally's father seems to be on Jon's side. When his daughter confesses that she is not in love with her husband anymore, the father belittles her emotions and downsizes her expectations of what a marriage should look like. He states that "man ska inte känna efter för mycket. Då kommer ena krämpan efter den andra", to which Sally replies: "Jag vill leva på ett annat sätt" (11).[58] She cannot accept this kind of compromise, after everything she has promised to her daughter. The father, then, tries to emotionally blackmail her, reminding her that she has to take care of Jon, Mia and her parents.

[57] "SALLY. Put her in a retirement home then… / MOTHER. Never. I can't, as she has sacrificed herself for me. / SALLY. Sacrificed! She hasn't done more than other women. / MOTHER. She gave birth to me. / SALLY. It was rather normal".
[58] "One must not feel too much. Then an ailment comes after the other", "I want to live in another way".

The confrontation between Sally and Jon takes place on a psychological level. When Sally tries to look at how the couple has changed throughout the years, telling him "Vi har utvecklats åt olika hall" (23)[59] twice, Jon replies that "man kan väl inte byta familj bara för att man utvecklats åt något jävla håll" (23),[60] implying that a family (and more specifically a marriage) has to endure even big changes. What he is not able or probably refuses to realize is Sally's willingness to step out of the relationship because she is not in love anymore. He is even more enraged when he sees how independent Sally has become and how miserable and meaningless his life would be without her and his daughter. Jon speaks of a moral duty when it comes to marriage and children, as if he, being a lawyer, could apply the law to the moral sphere, psychologically blackmailing her. However, she is determined to do what she pleases with her body and with her life, and leaves him with a statement of her own new-found agency: "Jag tar mig rätten. Jag har rätt att leva mitt eget liv…och hur det ser ut det bestämmer jag själv" (26).[61] As she confides to Inger in the next passage, Sally is tired of being appreciated by Jon only when he is the only one to decide for everyone.

The two women also discuss Sally's decision to take her daughter with her. For Inger, who stands for the submissive, traditional wife and mother, it is perfectly normal that a mother should take care of the children, saying that their bond is somewhat stronger, this having "med navelsträngen att göra" (28).[62] However, Sally does not believe "den där biologiska förklaringen" (28),[63] and states that it was only the most practical thing to do. Even if Sally dismisses the biological explanation, it is interesting to see how the newly-emancipated, independent woman does not abandon her daughter. Sally may have internalized some of the concepts described by Chodorow, including the social role attributed to mothers, rooted in her (and our) culture.

Sally starts a new relationship with her friend Simon, who at first seems to understand her much better than Jon did. However, there is already a contrast in the way he sees children as a blessing, whereas Sally says that "det är bara dårar som skaffar barn. Som samhället är organiserat idag är barn det mest opraktiska som finns" (30).[64] It looks like Sally is now embracing the radical feminist cause of "leaving the womb empty."

[59] "We have taken different turns".
[60] "One does not change family only because one has taken another damn turn".
[61] "I hold this right for myself. I have the right to live my own life…and the way it looks like it's my decision".
[62] "to do with the umbilical cord".
[63] "that biological explanation".
[64] "Only fools have children. The way society is organised today, having kids is the most unpractical thing there is".

Nevertheless, compared to the women of *Jösses Flickor*, who had decided to remain childless as a political statement, Sally is here much more idealistic and detached from reality. In saying "ska man leva i ett jämlikt förhållande ska man inte ha barn tillsamman" (30),[65] she projects her failed marriage on a universal level, believing that no happy, and equal relationship would endure the arrival of a new-born child, an event which would force the couple to reconfigure their private dynamics, conforming to precise social roles. Again, Sally is victim of a system where a mother is attributed all the nurturing duties and is deprived of the freedom to achieve her own goals and be a provider just like the male counterpart. Sally wants to avoid what her father, in a very business-like manner calls a "life-long contract": when you have a child with someone, you must stay with that person, regardless of your feelings.

Despite Sally's efforts to combine her new independent life as a mother with her relationship with Simon, she collapses at the end of the first act. Believing her freedom is at stake with Mia living with her and interfering with her new boyfriend, she finally agrees to let her daughter live with Jon, saying that this is the most practical thing to do, and thus reversing what she has instead told Inger just a couple of scenes before. When Simon asked what made her change her mind she replies: "Jag kan inte se mej själv i spegeln annars" (42).[66] Even if she promises Mia (always addressing the audience) that she will be able to visit her anytime she likes, Sally is also aware of the fact that she does not feel like a mother anymore and hence she has to let her daughter go. She asks herself "varför är der just kvinnan som ska ha barnet" (42),[67] trying to find other reasons for her ultimate decision.

As becomes apparent throughout the first act, Sally has to follow Nora's path in order to be freed from her past. Ibsen's Nora from *Et dukkehjem* (*A Doll's House*, 1879), a play where a mother decides to abandon her children in order to escape from her own doll's house, has become not only the symbol of women's subversion, but also the representation of the sacrifices a woman has to go through in order to achieve emancipation. If Sally was initially planning to keep both her daughter and her new independent life, she soon realizes that a conciliation is extremely hard to find. One could say that Nora's choice to leave her motherly duties was far more radical, seen that the play was staged at the end of 19th century. However, even in Sally's case the abandonment of a child is seen as a subversive act by the other characters, who start questioning her moral and integrity.

[65] "If one wants to live in an equal relationship one should not have kids together".
[66] "I can't watch myself in the mirror otherwise".
[67] "Why is it just the woman the one who should keep the child".

3.2 The new child

The second act takes place three years later, in Sally's now very untidy flat. She has apparently fallen back to the same housewife model with Simon. The house and its furniture play a key role here. Simon wants to repaint the walls, in an attempt to "utplåna alla spar efter Jon" (47),[68] thus marking his territory. He also wishes to finally unpack his books, placing them on Sally's shelves. This is also seen by Sally as a threat to her freedom and an act of invasion.

In the unfolding of the act, all the characters have a change of heart. Sally starts wondering whether happy families with kids exist. Simon, who initially wanted to have a child with Sally, is now worried that she might be pregnant and he is not really ready for it. Also Sally's father reversed what he had told her in the first act. When she reveals that she indeed is pregnant, he tells her that "ingen vettig människa skaffar barn idag…det är för dyrt helt enkelt" (52).[69] Whereas a child within the sacred vow of marriage is seen by the father as a blessing, the new pregnancy outside of wedlock is treated by the old patriarch as something that should have been avoided at all costs.

In the following scene Sally receives a visit from Inger, visibly distressed because the social services have taken her daughter away from her, due to the domestic violence the baby was exposed to. Sally tries to make her understand that even if she misses her, this is for the benefit of both mother and daughter and that right now her daughter does not really need her biological mother. Instead, she invites Inger to take this chance to invest in her own happiness, leaving her violent husband and starting a new life, just like Sally did. Inger rages against her, asking "varför ska jag som redan haft det taskigt behöva förlora mitt barn dessutom?" (55).[70] She believes Sally cannot really understand her, since she has abandoned her daughter Mia for no apparent reason. Sally dismisses all objections and claims that Inger's daughter "lever för sin egen skull, inte för din. Och ni är inte bra för varanda" (52),[71] failing to understand that the relationship between a parent and a child is unique and cannot follow the same guidelines. As a social worker she surely tries to think about the best solution for the child. Nevertheless, she is not able to listen to what the

[68] "erase all Jon's traces".
[69] "No sensible person would have a baby nowadays…it is just too expensive".
[70] "Why should I, after all I've suffered, also lose my child?".
[71] "She lives for her own sake, not yours. And you are not good for each other".

mother needs, dismissing all her objections as a selfish way to find a meaning in her life. In the next passage, Sally and Simon discuss what it means to be a parent:

> SIMON. Vet du varför samhället aldrig förändras? Jo, därför att alla som skulle kunna förändra det sugs in i föräldraskapet och blir fega. […] Femtio kronor mer i månaden i barnbidrag och alla föräldrar blir tysta…man blir feg. Man börjar se om sitt.
> SALLY. Det är du som gör det enkelt för dej. Du smiter. Alla dina ideologiska piruetter kan inte dölja att du faktiskt är feg.
> SIMON. Du har förändrat dej. Förr tyckte du att det var viktigt att ha en ideologi.
> SALLY. En ideologi som utesluter barn kan du ta och stoppa upp i häcken!
> SIMON. [*ironiskt*] Jag börjar faktiskt tro att Freud har rätt. Mannen är kultur, kvinnan bara natur. Hela sin kraft föder hon ut genom barn och förlorar möjligheten till att påverka och förändra samhället. (58-59)[72]

It is clear that the couple has very different views on parenthood. On the one hand Sally is trying to protect her baby, claiming that just because she wants to keep it this does not necessarily mean that she is abandoning all her beliefs. Simon is instead convinced that she has changed, once again. He over-generalizes the impact that parenthood can have on a couple and talks about the acceptance of the traditional nurturing roles as a failure to change society for the better. He also hints at the state's interest to keep parents quiet and happy with a monthly child allowance check, which in his view is another way to fossilize social structures. He then ironically concludes quoting Freud's idea that man is culture and woman is nature, going back to the old assumption that a woman's role and that of the mother must coincide, after all. In a way he is trying to provoke Sally, hinting at her past beliefs as a free woman who does not need to be a mother to feel accomplished.

[72] "SIMON. You see why society never changes? Yeah, because all those who should change it are sucked into parenthood and become cowards. […] Fifty crowns more of child allowance each month and all the parents become quiet…they become cowards. They start to mind their own business. / SALLY. It is you the one making things easy for yourself. You run away. Your ideological U-turns cannot hide the fact that you are actually a coward. / SIMON. You have changed. Once you thought that it was important to have an ideology. / SALLY. An ideology which does not take children into consideration is something you can put up your ass! / SIMON. [*ironical*] I'm starting to believe that Freud is right. Man is culture and woman is just nature. She gives away all her power when she gives birth, losing all possibilities to influence and change society".

Since Sally is not able to come to terms to Simon's unwillingness to become a father, she eventually decides to give birth to the new child and become a single mother. When she tells her parents, she is confronted with her mother's confession:

> Jag hade också planer en gång i tiden. Fast det har väl ni glömt bort. Jag tänkte bli sjuksköterska så småningom. Men först var jag tvungen att försörja mej, sen stannade jag hemma och passade upp dej för att du skulle få läsa vidare och bli något. Ett par år senare skaffade du Mia. Då tog jag hand om henne för att du och Jon skulle få läsa vidare…och sen blev det mamma… (65)[73]

Similarly to Gloria in *Till Julia*, as we will see, Sally's mother here blames her motherhood for having hindered her from following her plans of becoming a nurse. She considers herself responsible for Sally's success, since she allowed her to study in order to become "something". She tells her how she also had to take care of her granddaughter for her, and then even her own mother, now suffering from dementia. Her husband scornfully comments that "du har ju velat allt det här själv" (66),[74] belittling her wife's efforts and a life dedicated exclusively to her family. Sally's mother feels she is a victim of a system in which she is compelled to look after everyone else around her, and points at the fact that it has always been easy for Sally to make decisions, since she has always had her mother by her side, to help her whenever this was needed. However, now Sally is determined to be completely independent from her own mother, and tells her that she is perfectly able to "stå på egna ben" (66).[75]

The play ends with a reconciliation between Sally and Simon, who confides to her that he is not afraid anymore. He confesses that he has always been unsure about what place he should take in Sally's life, whether it be Jon's substitute or Jon's contrary. He concludes by saying that he feared that their baby would have only been Sally's baby, a form of replacement of Mia, for whom she could not be a good mother. His last line: "Vill du ha ett barn med mej Sally?" (78)[76] closes that circle that had started with him telling her that he would have loved to be the father of her child. He throws a ball to Sally, who almost

[73] "I also had some plans back in the day. Even if it looks like you forgot that. I wanted to become a nurse when I was a young girl. But first I had to look after myself, then I was forced to stay at home to take care of you and make sure you could go on studying to become something. A couple of years later you had Mia. I took care of her so that you and Jon could go on studying…and then it was mum's turn…"
[74] "It was your own decision".
[75] "stand on her own feet".
[76] "Do you want to have a baby with me, Sally?".

misses it but then catches it, thus giving the idea of a new-found understanding between the two.

4. Interchangeable family roles: *Till Julia* (1987)

4.1. The reproduction of (un)mothering

Unlike many of her other plays, especially the more experimental ones in collaboration with Suzanne Osten, *Till Julia* presents itself as a traditional chamber play, with precise stage directions that enhance the realism of the pièce. The description of the setting, for instance, is very detailed and all the different props are presented with a very specific function. If we go beyond the naturalistic elements on stage, placed by the playwright in an attempt to create familiarity in the spectators and a sense of great intimacy, it becomes clear that the set is dense with symbols: "En trång trerumsvåning, modell äldre. Högt i tak, stuckatur. En gång var väggarna vita. Här syns tydliga hål efter nedtagna tavlor" (Garpe 107).[77] The audience is presented with an ancient flat with old plaster ceilings and high walls that were once white. There is a suggestion of decadence already from these two elements, as if to imply a correspondence between the once glorious baroque space and the elder protagonist of the play, Gloria, who was also a radiant actress once, or at least she thinks she was. On the once-white walls there seem to be some lighter spots where paintings used to hang, another indication of the overall decay, or maybe the end of all artistic illusions. The only picture we see is that of a naked woman with a big black cat, an oil painting by Lena Cronqvist. We could speculate that the naked woman foreshadows the final denouement of the character of Gloria, who at the end of the play will be stripped of all her deceptive dreams and will be left alone in the house, only with a cat.

Before we even encounter the protagonists, we are introduced to them via their clothes hanging on the racks. These are neatly arranged onto two separate clotheslines, to indicate the lives of a mother and a daughter soon to be separated. The big mirrors inside the open closets not only echo Gloria's vanity, but also represent the contrast between real life and artistic reflection/deception, something which will be at the core of the mother-daughter battle.

After the highly naturalistic yet symbolic setting description, Garpe adds an extremely imaginative prologue which is clearly intended to be told by Julia, even if this is not specified in the script.

[77] "A narrow three-room flat, old-style. High plaster ceilings. The walls were once white. Holes on the walls are clearly visible where paintings used to hang".

> På natten är jag astronaut och jag går på månen. Jag sätter andlöst ner den ena foten och lyfter sen den andra. Och under ett långt ögonblick svävar jag fritt i luften. Det är mörkt och tyngdlöst. På denna okända planet är varje steg en rädsla för att aldrig mer få fast mark under fötterna. Hjärtat bankar hårt. […] Min stora fasa är att jag aldrig skall kunna återvända till jorden. Hon svävar där långt borta, blåvit och lysande. Stjärnorna gnistrar omkring henne. Hon är fruktansvärt bräcklig. Plötsligt hör jag ett stort bultande hjärta slå. Det fyller hela universum. (108)[78]

If we assume that this prologue is attributed to the daughter Julia, we could argue that what she dreams every night, that is being an astronaut leaving the earth, is a premonition of what she will experience in real life. Julia is ready to become an independent young woman, and even if we see her as a strong character, compared to her mother Gloria, she too is in distress. She sees herself as an astronaut landing on the moon, and yet the joy that one would feel after such a great accomplishment is undermined by the thought of not being able to set foot on earth ever again. Mother earth is here clearly associated with Gloria, whereas the unknown planet is the independent life outside of the maternal womb awaiting her. The fact that the Swedish word "jord" ("earth") is feminine and can be replaced with the pronoun "hon" ("she") makes the link between mother and earth even more evident. Furthermore, that planet looks frail from afar, just like Gloria, who is perceived by her daughter as a broken, dysfunctional character. At the end of her monologue, Julia hears the beating of a giant heart filling the whole universe, and, as a foetus, this here might be the heartbeat of its mother from the womb. This beating connects the unknown planet and the frail earth, foreshadowing a possible reconciliation between mother and daughter.

The first act opens with Julia entering the very untidy flat. She is looking for her mother Gloria, who is lying still on her back, as if she were dead. Julia first refers to her with her birth name "Gloria", only to call her "mother" when she believes something might be wrong with her. However, Gloria is just wearing one of her countless masks, this time only a facemask. Julia understands that her mother is preparing for a new role and asks her

[78] "At night I'm an astronaut, walking on the moon. I hold my breath as I put one foot down an I raise the other. And for a long moment, I hover in the air. It is dark and weightless. And I'm afraid with every step I take on this unknown planet that I'll never set foot on solid ground again. The heart is pounding hard. […] My big fear is that I can never return to earth. She hangs there, in the distance, far away, bluish white and shining. Around her, stars are twinkling. She is so terribly fragile. Suddenly I hear the beating of a giant heart. The sound fills the whole universe".

"Vilken roll är nu?" (110).[79] Since her mother cannot answer because of the facial mask that would otherwise be ruined, the daughter starts studying Gloria's face:

> Det är som att titta på en karta. Masken torkar och man ser varenda rynka…jag menar linje…Här vid ögonen är skrattet. Hur du tänkt på att skratt lämnar spår efter sig. Men tårar…dom syns inte efteråt. Här uppe i pannan är mormor. Hon hade också så skarpa veck. (110)[80]

Julia is able to read her mother's face as if it were her own. She muses on the fact that smiles leave marks on one's face, whereas tears flow and are then forgotten, maybe hinting at the covert sadness that has characterized their whole relationship, while on the surface everything was deemed normal. She also notices that her Grandmother had the same wrinkles on her forehead, suggesting that the same dynamic between Gloria and herself had once characterized the relationship between Gloria and her late mother.

The daughter then turns to the audience and tells us about her blurry childhood, a blur that is enhanced by the constant presence of smoke: "Nej rök. Gammal rök, färsk rök. Min mamma rökte alltid. […] Det var inte svårt att skiljas från barndomshemmet. Jag röktes helt enkelt ut" (110).[81] Smoke makes every boundary blurry, even in the relationship between Gloria and Julia, which is in no way a traditional mother-nurturer/daughter-nurtured relationship, as we will appreciate throughout the play. Ironically, Julia tells herself that it will not be that hard to leave her home, as she will be metaphorically exhaled like cigarette smoke. Boundaries between mother and daughter are also hard to define from a psychological point of view, as explained by Adrienne Rich, who famously invoked the steady exchange of feelings and experiences, both positive and negative, between the two women (*Of Woman* 225).

Julia tells her mother, who is still silent, about her new landlady Emma, an elderly woman whom she met because she had worked as a nurse at her place. We soon realize that Julia is a nurturer at heart, and is keen on taking care of people around her. She will go from being her mother's to Emma's caregiver. In the meanwhile, as her daughter is telling her all about her serious future plans which do not involve her, Gloria is silent and moves

[79] "Which role is it now?".
[80] "It's like looking at a map. The mask dries and I can see every wrinkle…I mean line…Here around the eyes I can see smiles. Have you ever thought that smiles leave marks? While tears…never shown afterwards? And this is Grandma up here in your forehead. She also had such sharp wrinkles".
[81] "No, smoke. Old smoke, fresh smoke. My mum smoked all the time. […] It wasn't hard to leave home. I just was smoked out".

her legs in the air, like a child playing. Finally, after six long minutes she finally utters: "Det är Fröken Julie" (110),[82] answering to the question about the role she is going to play and not responding to any of the other things Julia has told her in the meantime.

Miss Julie is one of Strindberg's most performed plays and a Scandinavian classic. Especially for Nordic actresses, playing its title role Julie is a rite of passage. The story of attempted emancipation of the noble Julie in the play, who falls in love with her father's valet Jean, is considered one of the best examples of the Nordic Modern Breakthrough.[83] The tragic character of Julie has become the symbol of youth and ingenuity, and for this reason she should be normally performed by young actresses, despite her dramatic complexity, which requires great experience (Lombardi 236). Gloria has been waiting all her career to finally play this role. She is not young anymore, yet she is convinced she has all it takes to perform this part.

Gloria is a tragic character constantly living in her past dreams. She shares the name with the great Hollywood actress Gloria Swanson, protagonist of the 1950 Billy Wilder cult movie *Sunset Boulevard*, and just like the iconic Norma Desmond of the film, she is an overly dramatic diva obsessed with her physical appearance. Both Gloria and Norma (and even the real actress Swanson) have not played a role for a very long time, and live in their delusion, blaming people around them for their unhappiness. In Gloria's case, she has ritualized a verbally aggressive behaviour towards her daughter, whom she identifies as the reason she stopped being a supposedly successful actress. Gloria is not able to recognize that she is perpetrating the same rituals that she had experienced through her own mother, another actress who had to leave the stage supposedly because of her motherly duties.

The theme of childhood memories resonates in this first part of the play, while Julia is packing. Since she lives in her past, memories plays a central role for Gloria:

> Allt finns kvar. Allt går att minnas. Vi är fulla av oframkallad film. […]
> *[Gloria inspekterar sitt ansikte framför spegeln. Julia fortsätter att inspektera böcker].*

[82] "It's Miss Julie".
[83] The Modern Breakthrough was famously theorized by Danish intellectual Georges Brandes near the end of 19th century. It encouraged authors to abandon old literary conventions and venture into unexplored literary realms, adopting more liberal views on sexuality and religion.

> […] Sen finns det andra bilder som borde få gulna i en stängd låda…men även om man låser in kopiorna så finns negativet alltid kvar. (113)[84]

Gloria says this while she is inspecting her face, whereas Julia is inspecting her books. Garpe uses the same verb "inspektera" in the stage directions, stressing on the one hand how Gloria is vain and unable to understand her daughter's actions, on the other hand how Julia is more practical and less self-absorbed. Also Gloria's language, like Julia's, is metaphoric. She believes memories are indelible, and even if we try to suppress them, locking them in a drawer, the negatives always remain. Gloria is here referring to the painful memories of her childhood, and the way she was harshly treated by her mother. The Grandmother is the big absent character in the scene. She never appears but she is always referred to through anecdotes and the actual objects that she has given to her niece. Like in a play by Ibsen or Strindberg, Garpe lays great importance on the lack of action of stage, leaving space to the memories of the characters and a dialogic structure which allows more room for their psychological development.[85]

When remembering her own mother, Gloria cannot help but observe the tragic life she had to endure: "Hon stod inte ut med ensamheten och hon orkade inte ta sej ur den" (114).[86] The Grandmother's condition painfully echoes Gloria's, in that she is also experiencing a form of depression, a condition which is at the same time her shelter and her damnation.

Gloria, traumatized by her own relationship with her mother, seems preoccupied only with one thought, that of having hindered her daughter in some way. She asks her various times: "har jag hindrat dej?" (116),[87] to which Julia reassures her, saying "no", but still looking somewhat confused. The theme of "hindering" goes on, with Gloria recollecting her other traumatic experience, that of being stripped of the role of Miss Julie when she was younger, only because of her pregnancy. She remembers how she was

[84] "They're all still there. All the memories. Like rolls of undeveloped film. […] [*Gloria inspects her face in the mirror. Julia continues to inspect books*] […] Then there are other pictures that should be left to yellow in some locked drawer…but even if you lock up the copies, the negatives remain".
[85] Szondi attributes to Ibsen the "epicisation" of theater –not in the Brechtian sense, but rather in that the action is simply narrated, recalled as if it were a novel, while nothing happens. According to Szondi Strindberg is even more radical in the process of filling psychic content on the scene. The scene itself becomes a psychic place, increasingly disconnected from the criteria of likelihood with an external reality. However, this is not always true in *Fröken Julie,* where Strindberg resorts to analytic-retrospective technique less structurally than Ibsen, with the explosive psychic tension in the "brain struggle", which becomes an immanent form of action (Szondi 198-204).
[86] "She couldn't stand solitude, but she couldn't break out of it".
[87] "Have I ever hindered you?".

humiliated by the director, who had dismissed her because of her physical appearance and her rising "bulle" ("bun"). To that Julia replies, introducing the theme of abortion:

> JULIA. Du kunde ha tagit bort … bullen.
> GLORIA. Det var många som tyckte det…
> JULIA. Och du…?
> GLORIA. Svaret vet du.
> JULIA. Jag vill höra det igen…
> GLORIA. Jag tänkte inte så…
> JULIA. Därför det var försent.
> GLORIA. …Det hade blivit försent därför att jag egentligen ville ha barn. Jag ville aldrig vara ensam mer. […] Men om det finns någon rättvisa i världen så får jag rollen nu. Och då blir slutsumman att jag fått både dej och rollen. (118)[88]

Gloria confesses that the reason why she did not get the abortion that everyone was expecting is that she felt lonely. Naively, Gloria understands motherhood in terms of companionship: she has never been truly a mother to Julia, an authoritative role model. Instead she has always treated her more like a sister, an equal, not realizing how dysfunctional this is. Furthermore, Gloria believes that she has somehow completed her nurturing "mission", and hence it is now fair for her to get the role she has been waiting for all her life.

The mother goes on treating her daughter like a sister, complaining that she always takes her clothes and scribbles on her scripts. She then asks Julia to help her fit the dress for the theatre rehearsal, claiming that "Jag har rusat runt med dej i affärer, jag har svettats i provrum…jag har knäppt, knutit, tyckt ditt, tyckt datt…" (122),[89] and thus implying that it is now her turn to "be dressed" by someone, exactly like a child. She sees motherhood and daughterhood in a transactional way. In a rather patronizing manner, Julia replies that she has not time to put clothes on her, as if she were the busy mother dismissing the needy requests of a child. Julia calls this petty behaviour "klimakterienoja" ("menopausal paranoia"), which unsettles her mother even more. Believing that this comment has to do

[88] "JULIA. You could have gotten rid of…the bun. / GLORIA. Some people thought I should…/ JULIA. And you…? / GLORIA. You know the answer to that. / JULIA. I want to hear it again. / GLORIA. It never crossed my mind…/ JULIA. Because it was too late. / GLORIA. It was too late because I really wanted a child. I never wanted to be alone again. […] But if there's any justice in this world I'll get the role now. And the bottom line will be that I've got both you and the role".
[89] "I have taken you to the shops, I have sweated in the changing rooms…buttoning, zipping and telling this and that".

simply with her age, Gloria turns to the dress she is wearing, and tells her that it is ageless and that her mother too, wore it, and that she looked so much like Gloria Swanson in it. Once again, the three women are connected, this time through a garment which symbolizes the desired role that they have always wanted to play, a role which has always been hindered by the presence of a child.

Gloria is ridiculed by Julia and feels humiliated. The dress, or better the costume, symbolically represents her dreams of becoming a successful actress. When mocked by her daughter, she decides it is not worth wearing anymore. She aggressively takes it off with Julia's help and throws it in one of the black plastic bags, thus foreshadowing her actual decline. Julia tries to console her, playing the mother/nurse role:

> JULIA. [*med systerröst*] Det här kommer att bli så bra ska lilla Gloria se. Nu ska vi bli så fina bara vi klär på oss. Visst ska vi klä på oss lilla Gloria.
> GLORIA. [*skrattar avvärjande*] Tack. Det räcker. Det var bara ett svart litet hål jag trampade ner i. Nu är jag uppe igen. [*Paus.*] Julia, jag älskar dej. (126)[90]

Even if it looks like a game, Gloria is in desperate need of motherly comfort, something which she has never truly experienced. In a long monologue she claims: "Jag var glad när min mamma dog. Min egen död kom visserligen närmare men också mitt eget liv. Jag var fri från det missnöje jag alltid kunde läsa in i hennes ansikte" (138).[91] She tells Julia how frustrating it was to have her mother always criticizing her work, never giving her any display of attention. Death is here seen as a liberating moment, as if Gloria had truly started living her life only after the role model she did not want or maybe could not follow, had disappeared. She even adds that the presence of her mother used to affect every performance, in that she always felt judged and disapproved of.

[90] "JULIA. [*in a nurse-like tone]* It's going to be alright, my little Gloria. We are going to look so nice, let's just wear our clothes. That's right, let's get dressed, little Gloria. / GLORIA. [*Bursts out laughing*] Thank you. That's enough. It was just a little black hole I fell into. Now I'm back up again. [*Pause.*] Julia, I love you".
[91] "I was happy when my mum died. It brought me closer to my own death, but also to my own life. I was free of the disapproval I could always read in her face".

4.2. Awakening and forgiveness

The first act of *Till Julia* is an intense exchange between mother and daughter, an exchange which at times is a normal dialogue, but more often becomes a juxtaposition of separate monologues that the two women say to each other, or better, *at* each other, without really responding. Julia and Gloria understand their present condition as a result of their past experiences: they both recollect ancient childhood memories to try and make sense of the painful reality they are living. On the one hand a neglectful and self-absorbed mother who in turn has been neglected by her own mother, and on the other hand a very confused daughter navigating adult life without stable guidance, and forced to adopt a nurturing role she has never seen performed properly.

In the second act, the unstable balance between the two is shaken even more by the arrival of a third character, Charlie, Gloria's former lover and Julia's problematic surrogate father. He too is an actor, and similarly to Gloria he finds it hard to combine personal and working life. Julia, who has never really spent time with her biological father, has always looked at Charlie as an escape from Gloria's loveless womb. Seeing him as the embodiment of freedom and independence, she connects him also to erotic desire, as it becomes evident when they are left alone onstage:

> JULIA. Men hag älskar dej Charlie. Jag har alltid älskat dej. [*Julia omfamnar Charlie hårt, borrar in ansiktet i honom.*] Jag älskar din lukt.
> CHARLIE. Jag stinker.
> JULIA. Du luktar Charlie, bara Charlie. […] Jag vill att du håller mej hårt, Charlie. Du får aldrig lämna mej igen.
> [*Charlie kysser desperat Julia, håller fast henne*]
> CHARLIE. Du får aldrig lämna mej.
> JULIA. Charlie.
> CHARLIE. Du är min…[*Den allt hetare omfamningen bryts. Charlie vräker Julia ur sängen. Hon ligger på golvet och gråter.*]
> JULIA. Pippi i Söderhavet…jag hittar den inte… […]
> CHARLIE. Förlåt. Det var klänningen. (151152)[92]

[92] "JULIA. But I love you Charlie. I have always loved you. [*Julia embraces Charlie hard, burying her face in his chest*] I love your smell. / CHARLIE. I stink. / JULIA. You smell like Charlie, just Charlie. […] I want you to hold me tight, Charlie. You must never leave me again. / [*Charlie desperately kisses Julia, holding*

It is not by chance that Charlie, is both Gloria's and Julia's object of desire. The blurred lines between mother and daughter and the confusion of roles, also have an effect on Julia's sexuality. She has never had emotional guidance and has never witnessed healthy relationships; hence, she unconsciously projects her idea of sexuality onto Charlie, the only other presence outside of the mother-daughter relationship. Nevertheless, her embrace maintains a childlike naivety, and it looks more like the need to finally experience a deeper connection with someone who can understand her. She needs a father to be a point of reference other than her unstable mother since he is "the most available person who can help her to get away from her mother" (Chodorow 121). Charlie is for Julia an idealised relationship, whereas Gloria stands for the "presocial" or "nonsocial" unidealized object-relational experience, something which Julia is ready to detach from.[93]

Yet, the roles of mother and daughter are interchangeable also in the eyes of Charlie. Julia, wearing Gloria's black dress becomes her mother, and the disturbed surrogate father, takes advantage of the situation seeing the identities of the two women as a continuum. However, Julia is stronger than Gloria and even stronger than Charlie, and after he has kissed her, she realizes that something is not right. Charlie cannot be the stable fatherly figure she is desperately looking for, because he is broken, just like Gloria. She starts crying and then goes back to checking her childhood books, in a clumsy attempt to get her daughter role back. As it will become more evident towards the end of the play, Julia is the proof that even within a dysfunctional family, one can find the tools to experience a form of awakening, finally forgiving the broken parent and thus finding a way out of the vicious circle. What she experiences with Charlie is the first epiphany, which will have its full realization in the last confrontation with Gloria, where the two women finally start talking in a more genuine way, avoiding confrontation and for the first time starting to listen to each other.

In the last scene, Julia and Gloria are alone again. They first start arguing in the usual manner, not listening to each other, but simply reciting their lines. Gloria is furious with Julia because she was not notified when she did not get the role of Miss Julie in the play and because she has been humiliated once again at the restaurant with the director. They both speak at the same time, with Julia recollecting when she was only ten and she

her tight.] / CHARLIE. You must never leave me again. / JULIA. Charlie. / CHARLIE. You are mine… [*he abruptly stops embracing Julia. Charlie throws Julia down the bed. She lays on the floor and cries*] / JULIA. Pippi in the South Seas…I can't find it…[…] / CHARLIE. I'm sorry. It was that dress".

[93] See Mitchell, Juliet. *Psychoanalysis and Feminism*. Pelican, 1974.

had to save her mother from a sleeping pills overdose. In a way, by lying to her about the part, Julia was attempting to save her mother from the great disappointment that she would have experienced. Finally a moment of quiet arrives, and when Gloria confesses that she would have preferred to die that day when her daughter saved her life, Julia asks: "Och lämna mej? […] inte ens ett barn?" (155),[94] unable to understanding how a mother can abandon her child. However, Gloria replies: "Nej, inte ens ett barn. Så skamligt var det. Jag var själv ett barn, ensam och övergiven. Allt var kaos" (156),[95] confessing that she has also felt like a child, and maybe she still feels like one. However, Gloria seems to finally come to terms with her past, and asks for Julia's forgiveness multiple times, to which her daughter replies with one of the biggest truths of the play: "Man kan vara lite hursomhelst som morsa. Virrig, slarvig, lessen, hysterisk. Men man är mamma" (156).[96] On the one hand Julia recognizes that there is not just one way of inhabiting the role of nurturer, but what is certain is that Gloria will never stop being her mother. On the other hand, she establishes her independence from her, stating that "Jag är alldeles egen person" and that "jag tror att det finns en tanke med mej som du inte alls kan påverka. Och den gör mej till den jag är. Inga skitiga tummar i världen kan förändra det" (157).[97] She finally sees her as a separate entity, with a specific purpose which Gloria cannot influence with her "dirty thumbs", as she calls them. However, as proposed by Adrienne Rich "we are, none of us, 'either' mothers or daughters; to our amazement, confusion, and greater complexity, we are both." (*Of Woman* 226). Leaving Gloria's flat, the symbolic womb, Julia departs from her mother, yet she will never truly abandon her, since she is part of her. Rich also lays importance on the uselessness of patriarchal labels: the relationship between the two characters cannot be described in the traditional language of patriarchy where the mother has to be the nurturer and the daughter the nurtured. These roles, as we have seen in this analysis, are completely interchangeable.

In the final exchange, Gloria discloses the details of her mother's death. Very similarly to the suicide attempted when Julia was only ten, Gloria's mother had taken a large number of pills. However, instead of saving her like Julia did with her, Gloria confesses that she let her die, because she wanted to be freed from her. The main difference

[94] "And leave me? […] not even a child?".
[95] "No, not even a child. That's how shameful it was. I was a child myself, forgotten and abandoned. It was all chaos".
[96] "A mother can be all kinds of things: flaky, sloppy, unhappy, hysterical. But she can't stop being a mother".
[97] "I am my own person. […] I Believe there's a purpose in me that you cannot influence at all. Something that makes me who I am. An no dirty thumb in the word can change it".

between Gloria and Julia is that the daughter has here understood that the killing of the mother is useless, as she will always be part of her. Again in the words of Rich, “where a mother is hated to the point of matrophobia there may also be a deep underlying pull toward her, a dread that if one relaxes one’s guard one will identify with her completely” (235). What she can do is just recognize this bond, accept it with all its flaws and go on with her life. From the perspective of Chodorow’s theory of the reproduction of mothering, a daughter will always relate to her mother even in her adult life, embracing the same role which has been “reproduced” in her during her childhood (Chodorow 95). The spectator is left with a sense of reconciliation between mother and daughter. When Julia is stepping offstage, Gloria asks her if she could at least keep the cat, which here comes to represent Gloria’s first attempt to go on with her life as a separate individual, without forgetting the strong mother-daughter bond which will never be taken away from her.

CONCLUSIONS

Throughout this thesis I have taken into consideration works from very different literary contexts. However, I have tried to identify some of the common motives and themes that are recurrent in the six case studies. In my view, all the plays under examination can be analysed with the help of different psychoanalytical approaches. As I have pointed out, the concept of "matrophobia" proposed by Rich –that is the rejection of the mother figure or even the fear of becoming someone's mother, links many of the female characters in the plays. With very few exceptions, most female characters have troubles coming to terms with the social implications of being a mother. They all try to escape from what they perceive as an obstacle to the pursuit of their true identity in a world that sees them only as nurturers. As a consequence, I have presented the idea of female bond predicated by Irigaray as a preferable way out of the patriarchal construct. This can be found in many instances: it is the sense of community in *Jösses Flickor*, where the members navigate their subjectivities always in relation with each other and their different experiences, and it is also the bond created by *Top Girls*' Angie with her friend Kit, whom she sees as an ally in her battle for independence. However, I have also pointed out how Chodorow's theories on the reproduction of mothering are still in place in various instances. Many of the daughters depicted in the plays reject their mothers, and yet they find themselves following the same path, keeping them as role models. It is the case of *Cloud Nine'*s Victoria, who is initially just a doll who then experiences something very similar to what her mother Betty had endured, and *Till Julia*'s Julia, where the daughter has to take over her mother's role not realising that she is perpetrating the same dynamics.

In the close reading of the texts my goal was to dedicate more space to the representation of the daughter in relationship to her mother. Looking at the ways in which the characters inhabit their daughter role, I came to the conclusion that Angie in Churchill's *Top Girls* and Julia in Garpe's *Till Julia* navigate the mother-daughter bond in opposite ways. On the one hand there is Angie, who rejects her mother figure Joyce and looks up to Marlene as her father figure, unaware that she is her biological mother. She is presented as a pure yet naïf character who cannot survive in the 'frightening' world dominated by the logics of individualistic achievement, and thus she is destined to failure. On the other hand there is Julia, who lives a dysfunctional relationship with her mother Gloria and yet realises how deluded her parent is and how necessary it is to detach from her. She is determined to

find her own path, yet she does not wish to abandon her, as she sees that the mother-daughter link is impossible to destroy. However, both Angie and Julia leave their mother figures in the pursuit of personal independence. Angie has never known her father and Julia has never had a close relationship with hers, and yet they both seem to associate others to the father figure. For Angie it is Marlene and for Julia it is her mother's former boyfriend Charlie. Following Mitchell's theories, the mother is confined to the pre-social order, represented by the interior world of the womb/home. The father, on the other hand, is the first projection of the world outside the symbiotic relationship with the mother (Mitchell 110).

The other aspect that I was keen to explore was the representation of motherhood and the impact of second-wave feminism on feminist theatre practices. I have concluded that is possible to draw parallels between Marlene in Churchill's *Top Girls* and Sally in Garpe's *Barnet*. Both characters are disgusted by biological motherhood, seen as an impediment to their careers. Marlene cannot even talk about the physiological aspects of being a woman, like menstruation or lactation. Believing that womanhood and motherhood do not coincide for her, she camouflages herself into a powerful man in her mannerisms and in the way she dresses. Similarly, at the beginning of the play Sally rejects the idea of having children and being trapped in the biological functions that motherhood entails. A character that annihilates herself in order to fulfil the mother role is Betty in Churchill's *Cloud Nine*. She too feels trapped in that role, something which prevents her from voicing her true desires. She has never been in touch with her female body, and this becomes evident from the fact that her role is performed by a male actor. This makes her a closeted woman who has never really found a true connection with her own body until later in life, when she finally discovers how to give herself the pleasure she has never felt.

In conclusion, it is possible to state that even if Churchill and Garpe act in different political and cultural contexts, in their theatre production they both successfully intertwine the public/political with the private/existential. In the UK, where the economic recession of the 1970s paves the way for the instauration of Thatcher's radical policies, Churchill resorts to grotesque and comic techniques to render a cruel, but profoundly serious representation of interpersonal relationships. Human relations seem compromised by colonialism and the world of capitalism she depicts offers no escape. When radical feminism becomes increasingly political, it does so with the total distortion of the hopes of a more just and egalitarian society, with the model of personal "success" imposed by Thatcher. On the contrary, the political and utopian beginnings of Margareta Garpe and

Suzanne Osten are the expression of a climate of confident openness to the future and faith in the conquest of freedom and emancipation Yet, already in *Jösses Flickor* this conquest is not told in naive terms, and it already shows some cracks. Finally, in her 1980s plays Garpe is still political, yet she explore more existential aspects within the realm of the family. She remains feminist and progressive but deals with the difficulties of relationships and the social implications of emancipation from family constraints.

All the plays that I have examined offer valuable insights into what has been one the central topics of second-wave feminism in Great Britain and Scandinavia. Churchill and Garpe, like many other women playwright of the 1970s and 1980s have proved that also theatre can be an extremely useful tool to investigate on sexual politics at large. However, these authors are far from finding a resolution to these pressing matters that ignite the feminist debate even today. After all, "playwrights don't give answers, they ask questions".[1] It is up to us readers and spectators to interpret these texts, contextualise their contents, and let ourselves be inspired by them.

[1] Churchill, Caryl. 'Not ordinary, not safe', *The Twentieth Century*. November, p. 448, cited in Aston, 2001 p. 80.

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