

Caryl Churchill – the ‘Picasso’ of Modern British Theatre¹

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As the widely acclaimed dinner scene of Caryl Churchill’s *Top Girls* (1982) comes to a close, top girl Marlene’s female guests descend into a state of drunken chaos. This is the moment when the erudite Pope Joan spews out words of Latin and the erstwhile monosyllabic Dull Gret breaks into her tirade about leading the peasant women’s up-rising against the devils from hell, as depicted in the painting by Brueghel from which her character is drawn.

Directing this scene in his revival of *Top Girls* in 2011 to 2012, Max Stafford-Clark, the play’s original director,² packed a concluding, three-way political punch between Joan, Gret and the audience: ‘Let them eat bread’ was the cry from the stage as Gret hurled bread rolls at Joan, who in turn batted them back at spectators. While an altogether more playful note than any that I am able to recall from Stafford-Clark’s 1991 revival of *Top Girls* at the Royal Court, it was nonetheless laced with a serious, political purpose. The Gestus of ‘bottom girl’ Dull Gret³ launching her bread-roll missiles at top girl Joan, made visible and palpable Churchill’s overarching concern with the materialistic, individualistic drive for ‘success’, achieved at the expense of a disadvantaged and disempowered majority of women, while the audience was also on the receiving end of their respective angry, unhappy feelings about their lives, unleashed and discharged into the auditorium. Seated near the front of the stalls for a matinee performance of *Top Girls* at the West Yorkshire Playhouse, Leeds, for instance, I was quite literally caught up in this moment: Joan was excellent ‘in bat’ and I was among those spectators close enough to the stage to catch the spray of flying bread crumbs.

A major play in Churchill’s canon, one that Stafford-Clark claims as the ‘[b]est play that I’ve directed’⁴ and playwright Mark Ravenhill confesses to ‘read... once a year’,⁵ *Top Girls* is representative not just of Churchill’s commitment to a socialist-feminist politics, but

more broadly to her enduring concern with a contemporary world unjustly divided between ‘us’ and ‘them’, those who have and those who have not. For over fifty years, Churchill has sought to shape and re-shape her political-theatre voice, representing and interrogating questions of social and political injustice, thereby inviting audiences to see the damaging effects of a contemporary world disfigured by capitalism.

In an essay published in 1960, Churchill identified the playwright’s role as not to ‘give answers’ but to ‘ask questions’.⁶ ‘We need’, she argued, ‘to find new questions, which may help us answer the old ones or make them unimportant, and this means new subjects and new form’.⁷ The purpose of this critical perspectives essay is to historically contextualise the different ‘subjects’ and the ‘form’ Churchill’s theatre has taken over the years of asking difficult, political questions of the world we have, a world that persists in the unequal distribution of wealth and in which the most basic needs (bread) remain unevenly met, this in the interests of the more socially democratic futures that might be.

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Churchill was born in London in 1938 just before the onset of World War II, but as her family relocated to Montreal, Canada in 1948, her view of England was rather different to that of the harsh, economic realities of the post-war years. Rather, she confessed in an interview, that her idea of England was of ‘little green fields and country life’, that she had ‘a tourist’s view of England as old and pageantry’.⁸ Such a view was altered by her return in the late fifties to study at Lady Margaret Hall, Oxford University: from ‘inside’ England she began to form a very different ‘perspective’.⁹ England seen through a politicising lens would, in due course, inform her playwriting, whether it turned on the bleak, economically harsh, landscape of the fens (*Fen*, 1983) or intervened in the dangerous lure of the tourist gaze that

frames the violent and fatal events in *Icecream* (1989). Equally, the question of how to *form* politicising perspectives would become an enduring preoccupation of Churchill's, this in the interests of bringing about her ideal vision for society as 'decentralized, nonauthoritarian, communist, non-sexist – a society in which people can be in touch with their feelings, and in control of their lives'.

Among her early works, many of which were for the radio, *The Ants* exemplifies the issue of politicising perspective. Originally conceived for television but, on the advice and intervention of her agent, Peggy Ramsay, broadcast on the radio (BBC 3, 27 November 1962), this play resonates with the widespread fear generated by the UK's H-bomb testing in the late fifties and the nation's failure to unilaterally disarm its nuclear weapons, as called for by the newly formed Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND). It represents a divorcing couple whose personal animosity towards each other eclipses their care either for their son's feelings or for the political events occurring in the world at large, a world that is at war. To be clear, this is not an issue-based play, but a drama in which Churchill experiments with how to make visible the dangers of personal concerns divorced from the bigger political (war) picture, core to which is the couple's son's struggle to gain perspective on what might be occurring in the family. The child at risk from the adults' 'divorce' from the atrocities happening in the world around them, is a subject Churchill returns to, most significantly in her later, major play *Far Away* (2000), while the child – the girl child in particular – comes to figure throughout her work as a repository for damaged futures (Angie in *Top Girls*, Joan in *Far Away* or the girl child in *Seven Jewish Children* (2009)).

As a young girl who was deeply troubled, 'easily reduced to tears', by the idea that half the world was starving and, moreover, frustrated by paternal explanations that this was how the world was and had to be,¹⁰ Churchill grew into left-wing politics as the means not only to understand but also to right and transform the social wrongs she perceived in the

world around her. Involving herself in a minor way in the CND movement was symptomatic of Churchill's identification with left-wing politics that in the mid- to late sixties, under Harold Wilson's Labour government (1964-70), were initiating widespread social reforms.¹¹ Hence it would be logical to assume that Churchill's experience of living through the sixties was a happy one. For this was the decade that witnessed countercultural and social revolution on an international scale: America experienced the rise of Black, New Left and anti-Vietnam movements; 1962 saw Algeria achieving independence from France after the Algerian War (a subject later taken up in Churchill's *The Hospital at the Time of the Revolution*); May 1966 was the advent of the Cultural Revolution in China; and 1968 brought world-wide student protests for social change. However, at home, with three small children (she married barrister David Harter in 1961) Churchill did not feel 'a part of what was happening in the sixties'.¹² Her writing for radio was a solitary experience; her personal, domestic, and, she notes, relatively comfortable circumstance,¹³ made her feel apart from rather than a part of the revolutionary zeitgeist. This disjuncture between 'personal' and 'generational' axes¹⁴ accounts for why, in brief, she suffered from the 'gloomy feeling that when the Revolution came, [she] would be swept away'.¹⁵

Churchill's struggle to combine motherhood with a career as a professional playwright arguably accounts in part for the time it took her to break out of radio writing and move into theatre, when compared to the playwriting careers of her male contemporaries (Alan Ayckbourn, Alan Bennett, Edward Bond, Trevor Griffiths, David Rudkin, or Tom Stoppard), or even those born in the forties (Howard Barker, Howard Brenton, David Hare, or David Edgar). Moreover, the inequalities of the British theatre industry in the late sixties meant that there were far fewer opportunities for women as playwrights.¹⁶ That said, Churchill counts herself as a beneficiary of the changing landscape of British theatre that was being transformed by the advent of fringe theatre. Catherine Itzin's survey of 'political

theatre in Britain since 1968' cites 1972 as the year when "'fringe" theatre – and particularly lunchtime theatre – had become firmly established in the landscape of London theatre'.¹⁷

With state (Arts Council) subsidies enabling an outcrop of alternative theatre companies and the founding of new spaces for new writing, British playwrights were presented with far more opportunities than ever before to have their work staged. 1972 was also a landmark year for Churchill: *Owners*, directed by Nicholas Wright, premiered on 6 December in the Upstairs, studio space of London's Royal Court Theatre, was her first play to be professionally produced. The production, the play text and an interview with Churchill (in conversation with socialist playwright Steve Gooch) featured the following month as the 'centrefold' in the theatre magazine *Plays and Players*.¹⁸ In the same issue, a feature length round-up of plays from 1972 and the critics' awards for that year, lamented the 'dearth of new plays' that left barely any competition for Stoppard's *Jumpers* – the 'walkover winner' for the Best Play Award.¹⁹ By contrast, however, Itzin's chronology of alternative theatre productions offers a substantial listing for 1972 (including *Owners* and Churchill's *Schreber's Nervous Illness* that had a lunchtime production at the Kings Head, opening also on 6 December), evidencing perhaps, that the critics' more mainstream, West End focus, had largely eclipsed a view of the new playwriting that was thriving on the alternative scene.

Situated outside of the West End in the wealthy environs of Sloane Square, the Royal Court Theatre is a subsidised venue that has a reputation for presenting hard-hitting, contemporary and provocative plays, a tradition dating back to the regime of its pioneering Artistic Director, George Devine (1956-65). Making her professional theatre debut at the Court with *Owners*, marked the beginning of Churchill's enduring relationship with the theatre, an association that situated her within the theatre's genealogy of socially committed drama, ranging from the kitchen-sink realism of John Osborne to the Brechtian repertoire of Edward Bond.

Committed to the Court as a writer's theatre, 'the only theatre there was to write for',²⁰ but also to experimenting with dramatic form in the interests of interrogating urgent social questions, Churchill eschewed the Osborne tradition of social realism. *Owners*, for example, weaves the subject of owning through the fabric of an Ortonesque tinged, 'funny angle[d]' realism,²¹ this to expose the absurdity of a Western investment in what Wright, her director, termed 'emotional capitalism'.²² Deploying the gender-reversal technique of an active female (Marion) and inactive male (Alex), the emotional drive to own property, things and human life (Marion) is resisted by a passively styled altruism (Alex). With characters in various states of mental disrepair that encourage violent, albeit grotesquely funny, fantasies and acts of violence towards others, Churchill upends realism in the interests of defamiliarising the capitalist need and greed to own.

Seeking to expose the drama of Western capitalism, Churchill's playwriting increasingly adopted and adapted the techniques of defamiliarisation associated with a Brechtian dramaturgy, widely practised among alternative theatre-makers and politically motivated dramatists. Janelle Reinelt's full-length study *After Brecht: British Epic Theater*,²³ for instance, insightfully and appositely groups Churchill with those political playwrights whose theatre benefited in some ways, however obliquely, from a Brechtian legacy: Howard Brenton, Edward Bond, David Hare, Trevor Griffiths and John McGrath.

During the seventies, Churchill's exposure to Brechtian theatre practices came through the opportunities she had to work with alternative theatre companies. With the new writing, fringe company Joint Stock, Churchill was to forge a relationship that would span a ten-year period from *Light Shining in Buckinghamshire* in 1976 to *A Mouthful of Birds* in 1986. Her collaboration with Joint Stock director Max Stafford-Clark is even longer. Appointed as the Artistic Director of the Royal Court Theatre in 1979, a position he held until 1993, Stafford-Clark also partnered Churchill on several Court productions of her work

throughout his period of office. Joint Stock introduced Churchill to workshopping processes and to the democratising practice that elicited creative thinking from all those involved – writer, director, performers and technicians. *Light Shining* was indebted to the ‘creativity’ and ‘commitment’ of the actors;²⁴ to a process of dialectical enquiry that enabled her, as the writer, to distil research, ideas and practical explorations into an historicising treatment of the seventeenth-century, English Civil War, performed by the company in a Brechtian-styled ensemble.

Utterly inspired by her experience of *Light Shining*, Churchill kept faith with the Joint Stock ‘method’ continuing, as previously explained, to work with the company that emerged as one of the most significant alternative theatre companies of the seventies, this alongside her commitment to the Court as a writer’s theatre. In this she differed from many of her (male) leftist contemporaries who cut their political teeth on the alternative circuit, but subsequently looked to make their political voices heard in more mainstream circles: the National Theatre (that moved into its South Bank premises in 1976); the RSC (that acquired a London base, the Warehouse, in 1977); or the more lucrative media of film and television. For instance, the early careers of Hare and Churchill evidence certain points of convergence: both were writers in residence at the Court (Hare 1970 to 1971; Churchill 1974 to 1975) and had works staged there in the seventies; both had productions with Joint Stock: Hare was involved in founding the company and was the writer for their 1975 production of *Fanshen*, ‘one of the classic achievements of political theatre’.²⁵ Thereafter their careers take distinctive turns as, in contrast to Churchill, Hare, disillusioned with his perceived limitations of political theatre as practised on the alternative scene, eschewed the revolutionary, Chinese peasant classes of *Fanshen* for dramatic critiques of the privileged middle-classes, and went on to further his writing (and directing) career at the National, as well as on the small and large screens. I observe this not to be critical of Hare’s career choices, but to highlight

Churchill's steadfast commitment to the Court and to the fringe as a *political* choice. Equally, while both writers arguably shared a frustration with a Western failure to revolutionise, what keeps Churchill, unlike Hare, within a Brechtian, epic refrain is its dramaturgical capacity to realise socially transformative, politicising perspectives. And last but not least, while Hare was lamenting the inefficacies of the consciousness-raising tactics of political theatre,²⁶ Churchill was exploring their efficacy within a feminist-political, Brechtian-inflected framework.

For the affectivity of domestic gloom that Churchill experienced in the sixties as detailed earlier, is what brought her to a feminist consciousness that found its way into her playwriting in the seventies. It surfaces explicitly in *Vinegar Tom*, her play for the other fringe company she worked with in the seventies: the socialist-feminist collective, Monstrous Regiment. Both *Light Shining* and *Vinegar Tom* premiered in 1976. Feminist activism is what occasioned the meeting between Churchill and the 'Monsters': company member Gillian Hanna recalls that they 'had been introduced to Caryl (in Hyde Park, after a march, NAC (National Abortion Campaign))'.²⁷ The discovery of a shared interest in feminism and the subject of witchcraft resulted in the commissioning of *Vinegar Tom*.

Vinegar Tom is a crucible of seventies feminism that was brought about by the Women's Liberation Movement (WLM). Its scenes locate in the seventeenth century, but songs intersperse and break up the action to insist that women's oppression is not consigned to the historical past but is an urgent contemporary issue. Thematically, body politics, core to the WLM, come to the fore: women's reproductive control over their bodies figures as crucial to the formation of their potentially, liberated selves. One woman seeks advice from a local cunning woman on aborting an unwanted child. Another is condemned to marriage, while those whose bodies mark them out as socially, economically and sexually abject, whose lives contravene patriarchal control of their sexuality and reproductivity, are humiliated, punished

and condemned to death. Ultimately, the women in the play are shown to be unable to achieve the kind of solidarity needed to rise up against and to resist their oppression. Achieving solidarity between women and organising collectively was core to how the WLM shaped itself politically, and this in turn influenced the structural organisation and creative practices of *Monstrous Regiment*. The emphasis in *Vinegar Tom* on the representation of a *community* of women at risk, rather than one woman's struggle to survive, called for ensemble-based acting, while the music served, as Hanna put it, to 'smash [the] regular and acceptable theatrical form [of a traditional play]'.²⁸ Overall, Churchill's socialist-feminist viewpoint in combination with a presentational rather than representational aesthetic, aimed to raise the feminist-political consciousness of audiences: to make them see and feel their way towards the necessity of social change in the interests of women's equality.

The sixties sexual revolution that had given rise to gay and women's activism, came under further feminist scrutiny in *Cloud Nine* (1979), a play Churchill workshopped with Joint Stock. With a first act set in the colonial times of the British Empire and a second in present-day, 1979, but with characters inhabiting a time-span of just twenty five years, *Cloud Nine* offered a political perspective on the dystopian legacies of un-liberated sexualities and the utopian possibilities of transcending heterosexually constrained gender norms. It was a landmark play in Churchill's repertoire: confirmed her as a major, innovative and political dramatist in British theatre and brought her to international attention when in 1981 the play transferred to New York where it ran for two years.

In terms of British politics, however, for those on the Left like Churchill, there was little to celebrate in 1979 as this was the year that saw Margaret Thatcher elected Prime Minister of a Conservative government, a position she held until 1990. The 'Thatcher Years' systematically undermined the socialism that had underpinned Britain's post-war transformation into a social welfare state. Implementing policies to cut back on public

spending, to reduce support for education, health and welfare, Thatcher's right-wing government brought about the state of a materially divided nation. To borrow from *Top Girls*, the eighties might have been 'stupendous', for a 'high-flying' minority like Marlene, but were 'frightening' for the majority at the bottom of the social strata.²⁹

The alternative theatre scene of the seventies was an inevitable casualty of the Thatcher regime, with cut backs to arts subsidies seeing an erosion of the fringe companies that had formerly been able to thrive. With socialism and socialist structures on the wane in theatre and in society at large, leftist playwrights sharpened their attack on Tory Britain, exemplified in Churchill's case with eighties plays such as *Top Girls*, *Fen* and *Serious Money*, her ferocious satire of the ridiculous money that was being made on the London stock market.

In his retrospective snapshot of British theatre in the eighties, critic Michael Billington cites *Serious Money* as one of a handful of 'outstanding individual events', this in a decade otherwise characterised by a rise in musicals and revivals of classics rather than the staging of new work. With all theatre that relied on state subsidy, rather than just the theatre that had made up the alternative sector, feeling the economic squeeze, the opportunities for new dramatists to emerge were again reduced. Further, 'marginalized, or set in their vision', Christopher Innes argues that 'the most distinctive [male] voices' in British theatre were in trouble by the nineties: Pinter 'withdrawn from the theatre'; Bond 'sacrific[ing] drama to ideology; Barker and Brenton unable 'to develop'; Schaffer 'retreat[ing] into commercial theatre'; Hare, Stoppard and Ayckbourn, 'significant', but 'old guard'. Bucking an otherwise seemingly dismal theatre trend, however, the eighties was the decade that saw a gradually increasing number of women playwrights coming forward, largely due to the openings and legacies created by women's companies such as Monstrous Regiment, and, in other ways, to a 'woman friendly' reception at the Royal Court under Stafford-Clark's directorship. Women

playwrights to have their work staged at the Court during Stafford-Clark's regime, include Sarah Daniels, April de Angelis, Angela Dunbar, Charlotte Keatley, Sharman Macdonald, Clare McIntyre, Louise Page, Winsome Pinnock and Timberlake Wertenbaker. The importance of Churchill to these younger generations of women dramatists cannot be overstated: the 'Picasso' of British playwrights, according to Daniels,³⁰ (6), Churchill, as De Angelis attests, pioneered the way for women to be taken seriously as playwrights in a male-dominated profession.

Churchill's politically charged capacity for theatrical reinvention that, in contrast to her male contemporaries saw her work constantly evolving, accounts for why she is held in high esteem by playwrights of both genders and across different generations. That capacity for reinvention found fertile ground not just in her text-based repertoire for the Court, but also in other of her performance collaborations with dancers and musicians. While *A Mouthful of Birds* was Churchill's last Joint Stock project in 1986, it was also the first of several projects with the dance company Second Stride and its founder member and choreographer, Ian Spink. Experimenting with words in combination with movement, and, in the case of other collaborations, also with music (*The Lives of the Great Poisoners*, 1991; *The Skriker* 1994; *Hotel* 1997), Churchill was exceptional in moving between a culture of playwriting and the experimental performance scene. As a mode of experimentation that assisted with her enduring attention with how to form urgent social questions in politicising ways (ecological matters in *Poisoners*; the damaging force of global capitalism, *Skriker*; urban desolation and alienation, *Hotel*), this interdisciplinary work also has a bearing on her text-based playwriting: with her struggle to find dramatic expression for a contemporary world in which her ideal society, given the reactionary political temperature, appeared less and less obtainable.

Mad Forest (1990), Churchill's dramatisation of the Romanian revolution in 1989, is the last of her plays to deal with the subject of revolution and to endorse Brechtian-influenced techniques for their politicising perspectives. Capturing the zeitgeist of post-1989 Europe, the collapse of communism in Eastern European nations, *Mad Forest* puts into question democratic futures founded in neo-liberal ideas, policies and economies. Throughout the nineties and beyond, Churchill's political quarrel lies with 'emotional [global] capitalism': with attachments to capitalism occurring on a global scale, whose conditioning and control of people's lives anesthetises a capacity for cooperation and community.

Feeling their way through the socialist theatre of the past and the Thatcherite legacies of the eighties, was a new generation of British playwrights, credited with rescuing new writing from the moribund state into which it was perceived to have fallen by the end of the eighties and the start of the nineties. Resistant to cultures of ideologically driven playwriting, this generation shaped their political discontents through experientially formed, brutal and taboo-breaking dramas, widely characterised as in-ye-face theatre. The politicising impulse (or not) of this work has been much debated, but at its best, key exponents of this new wave, such as Sarah Kane and Mark Ravenhill, effected hard-hitting critiques of a generation lost to global capitalism (Ravenhill) and a contemporary world laid waste by the dehumanising inability to care for others (Kane). Churchill's enduring concern with an acute inability to see, think or feel the bigger political picture, parallels these variously configured but uniformly dystopian outlooks, making her very much the 'contemporary' of this nineties generation.

In terms of British politics, the picture did shift in the nineties. The 1997 General Election brought in a New Labour government under Tony Blair, the first Labour government to be formed since Thatcher's election in 1979. However, with Blair's government distancing itself from the old Left, rebranding 'New Labour' as a party that endorsed the global, free market economy, this was little to rekindle the spirit of socialism. Dispirited by the lack of

change, Churchill, in Stafford-Clark's view went through a 'period of writing anti-plays' in the mid-nineties, citing *Blue Heart* (for his Out of Joint company) and her short play, *This is A Chair* (for the Royal Court) both of which premiered in 1997, as examples. Yet, at the same time, this 'anti-play' crisis over the political efficacies of theatre also marks Churchill's dramaturgical shape-shifting towards increasingly elliptical, condensed modes of dramatic writing that eschew a Brechtian-styled dialectics in favour of a more visceral-critical 'sensing' of the divorce between the personal and political, and of capitalism's relentless 'progress'. In this regard, the apocalyptic *Far Away* (2000) is a veritable tour de political force.

Events at the Royal Court during the 2000s, occasioned celebrations of Churchill's work: in 2002, a new, full-length play, *A Number*, was presented in tandem with a series of readings from earlier works, marking her thirty-year history at the theatre; in 2008, ten playwrights directed readings of their favourite Churchill play to celebrate her seventieth birthday. Both are markers of the high esteem in which Churchill is held by the Court and the playwrighting community at large. In between these two events, in 2006 as part of their year-long, fiftieth anniversary of playwrighting programme, the Court staged *Drunk Enough to Say I love You?*, Churchill's chilling and trenchant critique of a love affair between two men that figuratively captures the dangers of falling for the capitalist, American 'dream'. Advance press coverage of the programme highlighted plans to include contributions from Harold Pinter (performing in *Krapp's Last Tape*) and a new play, by Stoppard (*Rock n' Roll*) his first ever for the Royal Court and controversial in some quarters given his more mainstream career and antipathies towards the leftist sympathies that characterise the work of many of the theatre's writers, Churchill included. Resistant to the lure of Hollywood that has seduced Stoppard, and altogether eschewing opportunities to promote or publicise her theatre work, Churchill's reputation, is as her erstwhile radio director, John Tydeman (who also directed

Churchill's *Objections to Sex and Violence* at the Court in 1975) 'up there with Stoppard, although her reputation may be lower than it should be – because she has chosen to stay in the background.'

Whatever the merits and rankings accrued by or accorded to British dramatists writing for the stage from the mid-twentieth century onwards, none can surpass Churchill in respect to her theatrical inventiveness. Stylistically recognisable, Pinter's theatre has, for instance, coined the term Pinteresque, but Churchill's innovative dramaturgical shifts make it comparably harder to define the Churchillean. Rather, to expect the unexpected has come to inform the horizon of Churchillean expectation. Her two most recent plays at the time of writing, both premiered at the Royal Court in 2012, evidence Churchill's continuing experimentation with form. What might be described as emotional technology themes *Love and Information* that has a cast of over a hundred characters (played by sixteen performers) who, through multiple scenic moments, are seen processing 'bytes' of information and their emotional responses to lives and relations conditioned as they are by today's technologically driven world. It reflects her career-long obsession with the crises of identity, the struggles for self knowledge. But the 'awfulness of everything' at large in the world, as essayed in *The Ants*, is also back in *Ding Dong the Wicked*, a short play that delivers a sharp, dark, political critique of warring factions: one war, two countries, two sides, two families, each resolute in their belief that militaristic right is on their side. The idea of revolution for the social good is banished from the stage; no dialectical questioning of rights and wrongs enters the theatrical frame.

Seeing Stafford Clark's revival of *Top Girls* in the same year as these two new plays, served to remind of the Churchillean legacies in British theatre: her theatrical inventiveness, at times playful, but consistently pressed into the service of forming urgent social and political questions. The question mark that punctuated feminist futures in *Top Girls*, like all

other of Churchill's calls for more socially progressive futures, remains still to be answered. Yet her demand for radical intervention into the 'frightening' nightmares of a world lost to capitalism is as enduring and undiminished as her theatrical powers of reinvention. She is quite simply and deservedly the 'Picasso' of modern British playwrights.

Notes

¹ 'Picasso' is attributed to Churchill by playwright Sarah Daniels, on account of her theatrical inventiveness: interview, 'Sarah Daniels', in Heidi Stephenson and Natasha Langridge (eds), *Rage and Reason: Women Playwright on Playwriting*, London: Methuen, pp.1-8, p.6.

² The revival was a co-production between Stafford-Clark's Out of Joint theatre company and Chichester Festival Theatre. The play toured nationally from 2011 to 2012. Stafford-Clark was the original director of *Top Girls* in 1982 at the Royal Court and directed the play's Court revival in 1991.

³ 'Bottom girl' is coined by Stafford-Clark to designate a socially disadvantaged class of women, as represented by Gret and her contemporary double Angie, a class hard-hit by the years of Conservative government in the eighties, and suffering again under the Conservative led coalition formed with the Liberal Democrats in 2010, thereby marking an 'apposite' moment for the play's revival. Stafford-Clark's commentary on the revival can be heard at:

<http://www.outofjoint.co.uk/prods/top-girls-in-conversation.html>

⁴ Qtd in Philip Roberts, *About Churchill: the Playwright and the Work*, London: Faber & Faber, 2008, p.210.

⁵ *Guardian*, 9 April 1997, p. 14.

⁶ 'Not Ordinary, Not Safe: A Direction for Drama?', *The Twentieth Century* (November 1960), pp. 443-51, p. 446.

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ *Omnibus on Caryl Churchill*, BBC1, broadcast November 1988.

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ Significant were the 1967 Abortion and Sexual Offences Acts.

¹² Qtd in Catherine Itzin, *Stages in the Revolution: Political Theatre in Britain Since 1968*, London: Eyre Methuen, 1980, p.279.

¹³ Interview with Mel Gussow, 'Genteel Playwright, Angry Voice', *New York Times*, (22 November 1987), p.26. Those circumstances were to change when her husband 'left the bar and started working for a law centre'. As Churchill puts it, 'We did not want to shore up a capitalist system that we didn't like', qtd in Itzin, *Stages in the Revolution*, p. 279.

¹⁴ I draw here on E. Ann Kaplan's distinction between the 'age: personal/longitudinal axis' and the 'generation: cultural axis': 'Feminism, Aging and Changing Paradigms', *Surfaces*, Vol. VII. 110; <http://www.pum.umontreal.ca/revues/surfaces/pdf/vol7/kaplan.pdf>

¹⁵ Qtd in Mel Gussow, 'Genteel Playwright, Angry Voice'.

¹⁶ For a survey of the industry's sexual politics through the sixties and seventies, see Michelene Wandor, *Understudies: Theatre and Sexual Politics*, London: Eyre Methuen, 1981.

¹⁷ *Stages in the Revolution*, p. 135.

¹⁸ *Plays and Players*, January 1973. The interview is published on p.40 and p.1 of a special insert containing the script of *Owners*, pp. II –XVI.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 'Plays & Players 1972 Awards', pp.20 -31, p. 22.

²⁰ Churchill, qtd in Roberts, *About Churchill*, p. xxv.

²¹ Churchill explained that 'the playing [of *Owners*] has to be kept sharp, or parts of the play could seem like clichéd naturalistic scenes, whereas things which might be naturalistic should really be thrown up at funny angles'. *Plays and Players*, January 1973, p.1 of the special insert.

²² *Ibid.*

²³ Reinelt, *After Brecht: British Epic Theater*, Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan press, 1994.

²⁴ Qtd in Ronald Hayman, 'Partners: Caryl Churchill and Max Stafford-Clark', *Sunday Times Magazine* (2 March 1980), pp. 25-7, p. 27.

²⁵ Itzin, *Stages in the Revolution*, p.330.

²⁶ Delivered in his 1978 Cambridge lecture on political theatre. For a digest see Itzin, *Stages in the Revolution*, pp. 330 -336.

²⁷ Gillian Hanna, compiler, *Monstrous Regiment: Four Plays and a Collective Celebration*, London: Nick Hern Books, 1991, p. xxxvii.

²⁸ Hanna, *Feminism and Theatre*, Theatre papers, 2nd series, no. 8, Dartington, Devon: Dartington College, 1978, p.9.

²⁹ *Top Girls, Plays: Two*, London: Methuen, 1990, p. 137, p.141.

³⁰ See note 1.