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Aphra Behn, One of Churchill's Top Girls?: Assessing Caryl Churchill's Lack of Deference to Behn's Legacy

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirement  
for the degree of Bachelor of Arts in English from  
The College of William and Mary

by

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This thesis revolves around two moments in English theatrical, cultural, and political history: the 1660s-1680s and the 1680s-1710s. During the Stuart Restoration, the theatre particularly served as a space to meditate on issues of political legitimacy, loyalty, and monarchy. Following the English Civil War and the death of Oliver Cromwell, Parliament called on Charles II to govern, effectively restoring the Stuart line. In many ways, then, Restoration plays, particular Restoration comedies written by Tory writers, reflect the values and attitudes espoused by Charles II, namely, a commitment to libertinism and bawdy humor; valorization of the Cavalier figure; and a preoccupation with manliness (*Restoration Theatre and Crisis* 164-5). Featuring highly convoluted plots that frequently involved the cuckolding of aging, rich, and foolish husbands, Restoration comedies staged various forms of social and sexual transgression, in turn, delighting audience members from commoner to king. Simultaneously, these plays provided opportunity to justify political identities and alliances. As the political landscape shifted, so, too, did depictions onstage transform to alternately accommodate or challenge evolving attitudes, resulting in theatrical culture that varied widely thematically and topically from year to year (“Aphra Behn the Restoration Theatre” 32). Nevertheless, in Restoration comedies by Tory playwrights, royalist values, such as loyalty to the hereditary nobility and validation of England’s class system, remained central to the plot. Generally, then, Restoration comedies by Tory writers tended to uphold dominant systems and structures of power, even as they challenged notions of social propriety by staging illicit sexual relations.

Though the Restoration’s valorization of male libertinism left few opportunities for women to realize professional success, one woman, Aphra Behn, managed to distinguish herself as a prolific and popular seventeenth-century playwright. Behn appealed to noble sponsors through defending Tory politics (Staves 16). While most other seventeenth-century English

women largely confined their writing to religious matters, Behn dared to challenge the norms of propriety by penning plays that explicitly dealt with sexual desire, violence, and sensual humor (Staves 12-3). Behn's daring style served as a source of inspiration for later women writers, such as Virginia Woolf, who, in *A Room of One's Own*, declared "[a]ll women ought to let flowers fall upon the tomb of Aphra Behn, as it was she who earned them their right to speak their minds" (Woolf). Still, while many seek to cast Behn as a proto-feminist playwright, Behn's politics do not neatly align with the political or economic sensibilities espoused by twentieth-century feminists. Specifically, through adopting "a conventional Tory rhetoric of gender and female subordination," Behn confounds those who wish to portray her in direct historical parallel to the liberated, liberal feminists of the 1960s and 1970s ("Behn's dramatic response to Restoration crisis" 69). Moreover, through adhering to Royalist ideology, which valorized the hereditary nobility and cast those who dared challenge England's class system as usurpers and anarchists, Behn rejects the antecedents of the social and political movements underpinning second-wave feminism ("Behn's dramatic response to Restoration crisis" 69-70). Hence, as Woolf's assessment suggests, Behn did earn women right to speak their minds insofar as she demonstrated the economic and theatrical value of women's literary production; however, she did not seek to completely overturn the overarching social and political structure of English society in the way her feminist literary descendants might have hoped.

One twentieth-century feminist playwright, Caryl Churchill, exemplifies the ways in which twentieth and twenty-first century women playwrights have profited from Behn's success. Unlike Behn, however, Churchill dares to explicitly confront the inadequacies and contradictions inherent in England's class-based social system, a system Churchill depicts as oppressive and violent due to its reliance on patriarchy and unfettered capitalism (Aston 18, 38). Furthermore,

while Behn vilified the English revolutionaries of the seventeenth century, Churchill celebrated their efforts in *Light Shining in Buckinghamshire*, in effect, suggesting that the Levellers and their comrades represent the ideological ancestors of social reformers and revolutionaries of the 1960s and 1970s (Reinelt 21). Apart from Churchill's general debt to Behn as a female writer, then, Churchill also derives much of her creative inspiration to Behn's historical moment, in particular, the revolutionary figures and ideals Behn sought to discredit in her work. Due to this, though Churchill in many appears as a literary descendant of Behn, her work also marks a clear fork in the growth of the feminist playwright ancestral tree. While Churchill certainly profited from elite institutions and privileges, she nevertheless remained committed to placing the social and political concerns of everyday people, not members of the upper-class, at the center of her work. Consequently, Churchill refuses to repay her debt to Behn's legacy through endorsing Tory politics.

Perhaps more importantly, despite her direct engagement with seventeenth-century English politics and the renewed prevalence of Restoration comedies in the twentieth century, Churchill does not directly cite Behn as a literary influence. Given the relative paucity of female playwrights included in the literary canon, it seems noteworthy that Churchill, a playwright who indexes notable historical women in plays such as *Top Girls*, does not draw more directly from Behn. This lack of deference, or even reference, to Behn proves all the more striking in light of the relative frequency with which many male twentieth-century playwrights drew from male Restoration writers, such as John Dryden and William Wycherley (Kaplan 37). Further, while Churchill's willingness to tackle sexual taboos appears to align her with the "swinging London" scene typified by John Osborne's *Tom Jones*, she largely rejects the theatre of the so-called angry young men, discounting their emphasis on rampant, often exploitative, male sexuality in order to

highlight the experiences of women (Stubbs 363, 371). Still, even if Churchill wished to disavow Osborne and his cohorts, this dismissal need not coincide with a simultaneous rebuke of Behn, as other twentieth-century feminist directors and theatre companies began staging plays written by women of the Restoration. Indeed, in 1984, the Women's Playhouse Trust staged a revival of *The Lucky Chance*, a production that "marks the beginning of significant interpolation of plays by women into the 'Restoration' repertoire" (Copeland 159). Thus, Churchill's apparent lack of attention to Behn is conspicuous.

This thesis, then, considers the *lack* of overt links between Behn and Churchill. First, the paper establishes Behn as a feminist playwright through analyzing her critiques of gender dynamics in relation to sex, violence, commerce, and space in *The Lucky Chance* (1686), *The Rover* (1677), and *The Roundheads* (1681). In this section, particular attention is paid to the ways in which Behn's Tory politics complicate her depictions of gender relations, particularly in *The Roundheads*. Second, the paper traces the twentieth-century revivals of Restoration plays in order to reflect on the continued relevance of Restoration comedy to twentieth-century theatre, particularly the theatre of the angry young men. Additionally, this section includes brief consideration of the theatre of John Osborne, alongside commentary on the swinging London scene, so as to discuss Churchill's rejection of the theatre of the angry young men in the context of her feminist politics. Third, the paper provides analyses of *Light Shining in Buckinghamshire* (1976), *Cloud Nine* (1979), and *Top Girls* (1982) to contextualize Churchill's theatre in relation to her socialist and feminist political views. Finally, the paper closes with a consideration of Behn and Churchill's divergent approaches to feminist politics and theatre, and ultimately, argues that whereas Behn takes a more pragmatic, individual-based approach to feminism, Churchill conceives of feminism as a broad social justice movement necessitating the overthrow

of established power systems. After considering these differences, though, the paper clarifies that both playwrights empowered their women characters through emphasizing their wit and agency, and as a result, both advanced feminist theatre. Hence, while Churchill may not wish to explicitly link her own plays to Behn's work, she remains indebted to Behn, and thus, one may reasonably conceive of Churchill's plays as the latest in a theatrical genealogy rooted in Behn's comedies.

...

Given the patriarchal attitudes espoused by many leaders and thinkers of seventeenth-century England, distrust of women's sexual freedom paralleled animosity toward women's participation in economic markets, twin concerns Behn explores in *The Lucky Chance* (1686). Indeed, within the context of writing by male Restoration playwrights, "[m]isogyny and fear and dislike of women's sexuality permeate the libertine writings of Rochester and others" (*Restoration Theatre and Crisis* 159). Similarly, English society's legal and economic systems disempowered women financially, as they severely limited women's control over their fortunes. In contrast to her male contemporaries' dismissal of women's experiences, Behn addresses women's precarious economic position in plays like *The City Heiresses*, in which she "underline[s] her sense that, when it comes to women's fortunes, the legal system is likely to give more weight to patriarchal economic interests than to the desires of women" (Staves 17). Similarly, one may interpret Behn's treatment of female agency, particularly in relation to sexual politics and economics, in *The Lucky Chance* as a subtle rebuke of libertinism's most oppressive, patriarchal elements. Behn calls out those who criticize the lewd humor of her plays, arguing that if a man wrote her works, those same critics would profess "that person had made as many good comedies, any one man that has write in our age" (*The Lucky Chance*, Preface, 96-8). In addressing the claim that her play "'tis not fit for the ladies," Behn appeals directly to the women



in her audiences, noting that “the first copy of this play was read by several ladies of very great quality and unquestioned fame, and received most favorable opinion” (Preface, 12-3, 99-102). While Behn’s qualification that the women who first read *The Lucky Chance* constituted “ladies of very great quality” upholds normative seventeenth-century values concerning the importance of class in determining the value of an individual, the emphasis paid to the women’s “unquestioned fame” inverts seventeenth-century conventions regarding gender and space, as it valorizes, rather than vilifies, women in the public sphere (Preface, 99-102). Indeed, by proclaiming that she “value[s] fame as much as a hero; and if [the public] rob[s] her of that, [she] can retire,” Behn reinforces her view of female fame as inherently worthwhile (Preface, 136-8). Through the use of “rob,” Behn implicitly connects her loss of esteem in the eyes of the public to the unlawful loss of property, an apt comparison, as Behn’s livelihood as a playwright depends on the popularity, or “fame,” of her plays with the public (Preface, 137). Through her Preface, then, Behn links the concept of female sexuality with that of women’s ability to occupy public spaces, specifically, spaces associated with the accumulation of notoriety and financial gain. In doing so, Behn challenges libertinism’s elevation of male sexual and material gratification at the expense of female autonomy and prosperity.

In *The Rover*, Behn portrays instances of men relying on the patriarchal social and economic structures of seventeenth-century society in attempts to exploit the women around them for sexual and economic gratification. Based on Thomas Killigrew’s 1664 play *Thomaso, or the Wanderer*, Behn’s *The Rover* (1677) centers on the exploits of a Cavalier, Willmore, as he attempts to woo the beautiful Hellena, a woman destined to live out her days in a nunnery (Copeland 18-9). Although clearly taken with Hellena at first sight, Willmore also pursues the affections of Angellica Bianca, a charming courtesan who waives the fee for her company in

exchange for Willmore's vow of constancy. Though the love-triangle between Willmore, Angellica, and Hellena constitutes the principal concern of the play, *The Rover* also features a secondary romance between Hellena's sister, Florinda, and Colonel Belvile, a seemingly doomed match given Florinda's betrothal to another man. One of the most distressing and politically-charged moments of the play occurs when one of the Englishmen, Blunt, attempts to rape a disguised Florinda. The scene opens with Blunt bitterly reflecting on Lucetta's deception the previous night, a deception that leads Blunt to vow he "shall never be reconciled to the sex [women] more" (*The Rover* IV.5.9-10).<sup>1</sup> As Blunt murmurs to himself, per Behn's stage directions, he outfits himself with "an old rusty sword," the worn, phallic imagery symbolizing Blunt's sense of sexual and social impotence following Lucetta's trickery (*The Rover* IV.5). When Florinda desperately stumbles into Blunt's chamber, rather than granting her the "safety" from suffering "ruin" she explicitly begs him for, Blunt responds by asking her "[i]s there any ruin so inevitable as that which now threatens thee," casting his assault of Florinda as a certainty (IV.5. 29, 30-1). Though Florinda protests, pleading that Blunt, as "a gentleman, pity a harmless virgin, that takes [his] house for sanctuary," Blunt dismisses her appeal, declaring he "will be revenged on one whore for the sins of another" (IV.5. 37, 50-1). Here, Florinda's protest that Blunt feels she must "be sacrificed for the crimes of the most infamous of [her] sex" touches on the systemic nature of misogyny, as Blunt's rage, though ostensibly sparked by one woman, now extends to all women, irrespective of their actions or individual identity (IV.5.57-8). Here, then, Florinda's "morally correct character (according to the patrilineal economy that constrains and confines her), ultimately affords her no freedom or protection from violation and abuse" ("Revisioning the Female Body" 118). Only through evoking the authority of another man,

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<sup>1</sup> Behn, Aphra. *The Rover in The Rover and Other Plays*. Ed. Jane Spencer. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995.1-88 Print. : All subsequent citations refer to act, scene, and line in this edition.

Belville, does Florinda manage to persuade Blunt not to rape her (IV.5. 112-3). Consequently, the prevention of Florinda's rape reinforces, rather than undermines, the notion that men hold all meaningful power in Behn's society, and that oftentimes, this power threatens to result in violence against women. Thus, through Blunt's attempted rape of Florinda, Behn emphasizes the pervasive threat of sexual and physical violence faced by women as a result of patriarchy.

Behn also addresses the close relationship between a woman's social class and her perceived economic and social value. Apart from physical and sexual violence, Blunt's attempted rape of Florinda also touches on notions of economic coercion and liberty, in particular, the ways in which gender impacts a person's value and status within the marketplace. As Heidi Hutner argues, Behn manages to undermine "the patriarchal concept of women and 'others' as property" through showcasing her women characters' wit and imbuing them with agency, in particular, the freedom, albeit limited, of mobility ("Revisioning the Female Body" 102). However, while Behn as a playwright refuses to reduce her female characters to objects, the male characters of Behn's plays continually seek to reinscribe "the ideology of passive and commodified womanhood" onto the female characters (104). For instance, only after Florinda presents Blunt and Frederick with "a ring" do the men abandon their plans to sexually assault her (IV.5). Here, Blunt's observation that "'tis a wonderful virtue that lies in this ring, a mollifying virtue" suggests a literal, material dimension to the commodification of womanhood, wherein a woman's virtue is directly tied to her economic position (IV. 5. 118-9). Similarly, Blunt's declaration that "'there's more persuasive rhetoric in [the ring] than all [Florinda's] sex can utter'" equates a woman's value to society to her economic class (IV.5.119-20). Frederick echoes Blunt's sentiment, offering, "'twould anger us vilely to be trussed up for a rape upon a maid of quality, when we only believe we ruffle a harlot" (IV.5.121-3). Here, in contrasting a "maid of

quality,” a figure whose virtuous character, according to Blunt’s assessment, derives from her financial prosperity, with “a harlot,” an individual whose economic position is inextricably tied to her sexuality, Behn acknowledges the ways in which seventeenth-century English society often conflated a woman’s social and economic position with her sexuality (IV.5.121-3).

Behn’s portrayal of Angellica further underscores her preoccupation with women’s ability to function as economic agents, as it acknowledges the limitations and dangers inherent in female participation within the marketplace. The audience’s introduction to Angellica comes via a poster bearing her portrait and advertising a price of “a thousand crowns a month” for the pleasure of her company (II.1. 107). Through publicly advertising her services and going on to declare “nothing but gold shall charm [her] heart,” Angellica undermines notions of female submissiveness, particularly as they pertain to matters of sexuality, materiality, and marketing (II.1. 136). In contrast to the writers of *The Rover’s* source material, despite Angellica’s subversive behavior, Behn refuses to vilify the courtesan, instead presenting her as “an ambiguously portrayed misfit” (Copeland 51). Similarly, the casting of Elizabeth Barry, an actress viewed as respectable, as Angellica allowed for a portrayal that “classed [Angellica] with discarded mistresses, and high-status mistresses at that, rather than with prostitutes,” in effect, lending Angellica a sense of propriety, even in her disgrace (Copeland 54). Hence, Behn’s characterization of Angellica establishes her as spectacular, without reducing her to object of scorn or derision.

Through her characterization of Angellica Bianca, Behn highlights the ways in which women’s limited commercial avenues and sexual agency under seventeenth-century English society places women in precarious positions financially, socially, and emotionally. Rather than castigate Angellica for daring to defy seventeenth-century norms regarding sexual propriety and

female respectability, Behn seemingly delights in Angellica's brazen disregard for societal norms. However, Behn's portrayal of Angellica suggests her fall derives not from her overt sensuality, but from her dismissal of economic concerns in the pursuit of romance. Indeed, Angellica's desire to "fee[d] [her] vanity" serves as a source of audience amusement, rather than derision (II.1.121). For instance, when Angellica disregards the monetary price set for her services and offers the penniless Willmore terms such that he need only offer "[his] love for [hers]," Moretta's mournful declaration that Angellica "love such a shameron" casts Angellica's decision in a sympathetic, albeit comedic, light (II.2. 152, 159-60). Following Willmore's admission of his inconstancy, Angellica declares herself fallen, "like a long worshipped idol" (V.1. 292). In comparing herself to an "idol," and Willmore's affections to "worshi[p]" and, later in her speech, "blind devotion," Angellica casts her understanding of love in pagan and material terms, a clear inversion of the Christian notion of love as confined to expression within marriage—ideally viewed as a spiritual, not material, partnership (V.1. 292, 295). In order to enjoy the same sexual freedom as the male Libertine, a woman needed to take on the role of "the whore, who parceled her sexuality out piecemeal at a high rate of exchange while withholding her identity, her self," for only in trading in her sexuality did a woman manage to engage in sex outside the bounds of matrimony (Finke 27). In failing to abide by the economic and emotional parameters of this form of exchange, Angellica loses much of her economic value, and with it, her material and social clout. Moreover, rather than mock women who suffer as a result of these limited opportunities, as Behn's affectionate portrayal of Angellica suggests, society ought to regard such women compassionately.

Behn further clarifies the relationship between women and commerce through depicting the successful, reputable path to marriage followed by Hellena. In contrast to Angellica's overt

engagement with the market, Hellena, though she displays “a materialist pragmatism,” does not overtly engage with the commercial market, a strategy that secures her romantic and financial stability (Copeland 20). Unlike Angellica, wooed to romantic indulgence by Willmore, Hellena refuses to compromise until Willmore agree to marry her (V.1. 471). In order to convince Willmore to wed her, Hellena employs the language of economy, referring to Willmore’s request for “[o]ne kiss” as “a sneaking sum” (V.1.464-5). Likewise, through linking the threat of Willmore leaving her with “[a] cradle full of noise and mischief,” the product of childbirth, with the possibility of resigning herself “to weave incle,” an unsatisfying form of domestic labor, Hellena couches her refusal of Willmore’s romantic advances in terms of biological and material production (V.1.456-8). While Angellica sacrifices her financial security in order to pursue her romantic aspirations, Hellena cites her financial prosperity as a feature that enables her to realize her romantic goals, observing “the three hundred thousands crowns my uncle left for me [...] will be better laid out in love than in religion” (V.1.522-3). Through constructing the choice between marrying Willmore and entering a nunnery in financial terms, Hellena implicitly links matters of economy with female sexuality, as the choice between wearing a wedding band and donning a habit symbolizes a choice between active female sexuality within the confines of marriage or lifelong celibacy in the context of a convent. In this way, Behn reinforces the connection between women’s social, economic, and sexual identity, effectively linking a woman’s overall wellbeing to her ability to successfully inhabit social norms governing these three facets of female identity. Though a woman may find financial prosperity as a faithful wife or an enterprising prostitute, as demonstrated by Angellica’s relationship with Willmore, attempting to transcend the sexual, economic, or emotional parameters bounding these distinctions imperils her position financially as well as socially.

The idea that a woman, irrespective of her sexuality, remains vulnerable to attack under a “patriarchal economy,” serves to address the ways in which economic and gendered concerns intersect to make women vulnerable to physical attack (“Revisioning the Female Body” 111). For Behn, a woman’s engagement in sexual activity necessarily introduced the possibility of motherhood, as alluded to by Hellena in her dismissal of Willmore’s offer to work on her “that great miracle of making a maid a mother” absent the commitment of marriage (V.1.453-4). Due to the social constraints of the seventeenth-century, Behn’s women must navigate a complicated series of social norms pertaining to sexuality, class, and financial standing, in order to enjoy prosperity and security. Even then, Behn does not entertain romantic notions regarding a woman’s potential to enjoy happiness within the narrow confines of normative notions of womanhood, instead offering audiences endings that cast her plays’ visions of society as “fantastic,” suggesting that the comedic endings belie a sense of dissatisfaction faced by Behn’s women following the curtain’s close (“Revisioning the Female Body” 118). In her portrayals of women, Behn underscores the relationship between women’s agency and their economic value, particularly the value associated with the commodification of her body or virtue. More specifically, Behn’s plays “register the ironies confronting intelligent women who recognize and comment incisively on their complicity in a society that hinder or denies their rights to property, free will, and sexual pleasure” (Markley 101). While Behn’s women remain cognizant of their limited options, oftentimes these characters end up “acting as though their knowledge d[oes] not matter” (Marley 101-102). For instance, though Angellica knows her value as a courtesan will suffer if she pursues an affair with Willmore, she still accepts his amorous proposal (II.2.157). Though Angellica regains some sense of dignity in the play’s final scene, where she commands Willmore to “[l]ive to undo someone whose soul may prove/ [s]o bravely constant to revenge

[her] love,” her pursuit of Willmore’s love diminishes her selectivity, and by extension, diminishes her ability to fetch a high price for her services as a courtesan (V.1.356-7). Through Angellica, then, Behn most clearly emphasizes the precarious position a woman’s sexuality and social status places her within the seventeenth-century marketplace.

Though Angellica Bianca serves as the most direct embodiment of the relationship between a woman’s sexuality and her security in economic terms, Behn’s other female characters, most notably, Florinda, contend with bodily insecurity as a result of their perceived social and sexual status. Indeed, through Florinda’s near-rape, “Behn demonstrates that in a patriarchal economy virgin and whore are equally subject to male domination” (“Revisioning the Female Body” 111). In other words, regardless of a woman’s sexuality, class, or economic standing, under Behn’s treatment of seventeenth-century English society, she remains vulnerable to male exploitation. Even assertions of female agency, such as Hellena claiming control her inheritance as a means of marrying Willmore despite her brother’s disapproval, hinge, on some significant level, on male indulgence. Furthermore, male self-interest, rather than a respect for female autonomy, often motivate the men’s acquiescence to the women’s wishes, as Don Pedro ultimately approves of Hellena’s marriage to Willmore out of concern for “[his] life” rather than a desire to secure his sister’s happiness (*The Rover* V.1. 528). Thus, while Behn allows her female characters to display significant agency and wit, she also tempers her treatment of women’s autonomy by gesturing toward the limited choices women face as a result of the patriarchal structure of seventeenth-century English society.

Apart from invoking matters of economy, Behn also employs costumes and cross-dressing in order to highlight the precarious position women’s gender places them in: assuming new guises creates opportunities for greater freedom—for a time. Like its source material,



Thomas Killigrew's *Thomaso, The Rover* is set during carnival, a festival that provides occasion for Hellena to dress in disguise (Burke 119). Entreating Florinda to "put off this dull humour with your clothes, and assume one as gay, and as fantastic, as the dress [her] cousin Valeria and [she] have provided," Hellena links the adoption of gypsy dress—and with it, the performance of a different class of womanhood—with freedom from "dull humour" (I.1. 176-8). Nevertheless, while "female disguise[...] promises freedom [...] that freedom only functions within the context of the seventeenth-century marriage market and its class-based assumptions about feminine value" ("Revisioning the Female Body" 107). Indeed, dressed as a gypsy, Hellena still confronts the sexual advances of Willmore, an occurrence that leads her to protest, "[w]hy must we [women] be either guilty of fornication or murder if we converse with you men," thereby demonstrating the limited liberty enjoyed by women, even those, such as gypsies, ostensibly unbound by the constraints of aristocratic society (I.2.194-5). In contrast, dressing in drag enables Hellena greater freedom of mobility, empowering her to enter Angellica's room in order to win back Willmore by informing Angellica that Willmore "paid his broken vows to [her]" (IV.2.259). Performing maleness, then, provides Hellena not just with greater freedom of movement, but also with freedom of speech, and with it, the ability "to asser[t] [her] wil[l]" and claim Willmore ("Revisioning the Female Body" 108). Still, the freedoms conferred by dress remain precariously secured, as Willmore's recognition of Hellena leads her to fear that "[h]e'll tell [Angellica] who [she is]" (IV.2 324-5, 331). Similarly, Angellica's adoption of "a masking habit and a vizard" allows her to take on a male persona (V.1). However, though Angellica "dresses as a man and attempts to kill [Willmore] with a pistol," her attempt at performing male-coded violence falls apart once Don Antonio enters and identifies her by her female name ("Revisioning the Female Body" 108) In *The Rover*, then, most every identity coded female

suggests some element of danger, thereby underscoring women's limited autonomy under libertinism.

In addition to exploring the ways in which performances of gender both empower and entrap women – in ways Caryl Churchill would also explore—Behn emphasizes friendships between women as largely restorative, while also implicitly casting competition between women, particularly for men, as counterproductive. For instance, the opening of Act Three, Scene One, centers on a conversation between Florinda, Valeria, and Hellena, during which Valeria cautions Hellena “thou wilt love this wandering inconstant [Willmore] till thou find'st thyself hanged about neck, and then be as mad to get free again” (III.1. 27-9). Though *The Rover* ends with Hellena safely and securely coupled with Willmore, one gets the sense that Valeria's words of warning prove wise, as *The Rover Part II* begins shortly after Hellena's death, a tragedy that enables Willmore to pursue a courtesan, La Nuche (“Revisioning the Female Body” 107). Similarly, as Helen M. Burke points out, Florinda's “embrace of Valeria” when the latter saves the former “from the risk of rape and incest” constitutes a moment in which Behn “points obliquely to an alternate kind of political order, one in which women, not men, would have the leading role” (Burke 127). A social and political organization predicated on female authority aligns with the philosophy espoused by fellow woman and Tory writer of the Restoration, Mary Cavendish, in which “the absolute is reimagined as that which she conceives to be the private and the feminine” (Gallagher 27). While Behn does not dramatically discredit heteronormative marriage or its associated nexuses of power, she does characterize the private spaces inhabited solely by women as spheres of safety, of sensibility, and of community. In this way, then, Behn sets the stage for Churchill's brand of English nationalism on the political and theatrical stages, a

vision that hinges on the inclusion and prioritization of a sense of solidarity amongst women, and with it, the safeguarding of women's liberty and safety.

Behn's politics were also nakedly partisan. In her works, Behn remained committed to valorizing and legitimizing the royal family, a position that led her to address threats to Stuart line, such as the Exclusion Crisis, the political controversy surrounding the succession of James II to the throne (Finke 37). After Charles II failed to produce a legitimate heir—a failure critics of the Stuart family regarded with deep disdain and disgust due to the antics of Charles' bastard son, the Duke of Monmouth—a movement within the Whig party formed bent on preventing Charles' brother, James, from succeeding him (*Restoration Theatre and Crisis* 39). Opposition to James stemmed not only from dislike of Charles, but also from fears that James' French and Catholic sympathies might lead to forms of tyranny springing “from popery or royal misrule” (*Restoration Theatre and Crisis* 119). In light of the high mortality rate and rampant destruction resultant from the European wars of religion in the previous century, Whigs' anxieties regarding James' Catholic sympathies seem highly logical, particularly in light of James' second marriage to a Catholic, Mary of Modena (O'Donnell 6). For Tories such as Behn, however, radical Puritan movements, not popery, constituted the greatest threat to England's stability (*Restoration Theatre and Crisis* 111). Additional, though the English Civil War loomed in the background of works by both Whig and Tory, their interpretations of the war's causes differed, as “Tories accused Whigs of fomenting rebellion; Whigs asserted that foreign and popish influence in high places and the intransigence of the king's ‘bad advisers’ was the problem” (*Restoration Theatre and Crisis* 111). In the opinion of Tories, then, preventing civil war “can be presented as overriding all other contradictions,” including perceived shortcomings of members of the royal family (*Restoration Theatre and Crisis* 119). Vested with the “divine right” to rule and earthly

“patriarchal authority,” the Stuart kings, in the eyes of Tories, could wield the legitimate authority needed to ensure England’s stability (*Restoration Theatre and Crisis* 121-2). Thus, in service of her Tory beliefs, Behn often vilified the Puritans and their ideals in order to glorify the monarchy.

Of Behn’s plays, *The Roundheads* (1681) constitutes her most direct attack against the Whigs, as in this play, she lampoons the ambitious folly of those supporting the English Protectorate, while simultaneously establishing the loyal Tories as gallant heroes. Set during the chaotic events of 1659 to 1660, when the New Model Army removed Oliver Cromwell’s son, Richard, from his position as Lord Protectorate, *The Roundheads* serves as an allegory for the Exclusion Crisis (*The Theatre of Aphra Behn* 139). Though Behn drew inspiration for *The Roundheads* from John Tatham’s *The Rump*, she distinguishes her work from its source material by emphasizing the central roles played by women in this political drama (140). Still, even as Behn centers women’s experiences, she also highlights the heroism of her Cavaliers. Certainly, Behn’s portrayal of Loveless as an avowed member of “the crowd of Loyal Sufferers” for the royalist cause distinguishes him as a heroic martyr (*The Roundheads* V.4).<sup>2</sup> Moreover, though Loveless and Lady Lambert engage in an illicit tryst, Loveless lacks the brutishness that characterizes *The Rover’s* Blunt, instead winning Lady Lambert’s favor through promising to protect her from the “rude officious Honesty” of the mob (V.4). Similarly, Freeman’s promise to protect Lady Desbro from “the Rabble [that] gather round the House” speaks to his chivalric nature, a nature that sharply contrasts with the cowardice of Lady Desbro’s late-husband (V.4). While Loveless and Freeman do engage in affairs with married women, then, their characterization complicates the “association of royalism with figures of flamboyant sexual

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<sup>2</sup> Behn, Aphra. *The Roundheads* in *The Works of Aphra Behn*, Ed. Montague Summers. New York: Benjamin Blom, 1967. 331-425. Print: All subsequent citations refer to act, scene, and line in this edition.

potency,” as they both lack “the destructive side of the two Willmores [from *The Rover*, Parts 1 and 2]” (*The Theatre of Aphra Behn* 146). While the Cavaliers personify virtue—specifically, loyalty—as well as desirability, the Roundheads come across as feeble and moronic, such as when Lambert’s wife derisively recalls the time Lord Lambert spent as a “sneaking Slave to Cromwell,” before cuckolding him (IV.4). When, at the play’s close, Lambert’s army deserts him, Cromwell’s widow declares him “Fool of Fools, not to fore-see the danger of that nasty Rump [Parliament],” suggesting that even the supporters of the Roundheads recognized the folly of their leaders (V.2). The play’s Epilogue, in which Behn ironically praises the Whigs, serves to definitively cast “the Good Old Cause” as a lost and foolish cause, while simultaneously emphasizing the need to remain “true to th’ King” so as to avoid such political fiascos in the future (Epilogue). Hence, *The Roundheads* serves as an historical allegory through which Behn defends James II’s succession as king.

As in *The Rover*, Behn reveals characters’ political and personal values through their attitudes towards material objects and the transfer of these objects, transfers that often coincide with the consummation of romantic relationships. For instance, Lady Lambert’s transfer of the royal crown to Loveless allows Behn to highlight their respective attitudes towards monarchy, loyalty, and personal power (*The Theatre of Aphra Behn* 141). Lady Lambert opens the scene by offering Loveless Oliver Cromwell’s diamond bracelet, declaring, “Persons like me, when they make Presents, Sir, must do it for their Glory,” attests to her ambition and sense of self-worth (IV.4). Confessing that “the great Monarch of the World,” Cromwell, “once ty’d [the bracelet] about [her] arm,” Lady Lambert alludes to her affair with the late-Lord Protector of England (IV.4). While “[Lady Lambert’s] affair with Cromwell [...] is the means by which she [has advanced socially] and become a public whore,” her thinly-veiled allusion to this sexual and

social advancement does not elicit the same delight as Angellica's overt sale of her sexual services in *The Rover* (Latta 24). Instead, Lady Lambert comes across "through Loveless eyes—as completely irrational," as hinted at by his protests that the bracelet comprises "too magnificent" a gift to accept (Latta 25, IV.4).

Behn further underscores the divergent attitudes held by Lady Lambert and Loveless with respect to property through Lambert's presentation of the crown, an object Loveless beholds in awe, crying:

**Loveless:** Hah—a Crown—and Scepter!  
Have I been all this while  
So near the sacred Relicks of my King;  
And found no awful Motion in my Blood,  
Nothing that mov'd sacred Devotion in me? [*Kneels.*]  
--Haile sacred Emblem of great Majesty,  
Thou that hast circled more Divinity  
Than the great Zodiack that surrounds the World.  
I ne'er was blest with sight of thee till now,  
But in much reverenc'd Pictures—[Rises and bows]. (IV.4)

Here, Loveless's allusions to "Blood" in relation to "[his] King" validates the conception of the King as rightful parent of the realm, as well as the lawfulness of a right-to-rule based on heredity or blood (IV.4). Furthermore, by expressing appreciation for the crown not on the basis of its precious metals, but as a "sacred Emblem of great Majesty," Loveless reveals that he values objects in terms of their relational proximity to people, particularly monarchs (IV.4). In addition, Loveless's use of religious language, such as the repetition of the word "sacred" in relation to the "Relicks of [his] King," the "Devotion in [himself]" stirred by the sight of these objects, and the "Emblem of great Majesty," validates the belief in a king's divine right to rule, a doctrine further justified in this speech through declaring the crown "hast circled more Divinity/ Than the great Zodiack that surrounds the World" (IV.4). In contrast, Lady Lambert merely concedes the crown "a lovely thing," the use of the word "thing" gesturing towards the instrumental, rather than

religious, purpose the crown holds for her (IV.4). Indeed, for Lady Lambert, the crown serves as a tool for furthering her own political ends, and thus, “she wants [Loveless] to put on the crown so that she can have the aphrodisiac of coming into his arms as a queen” (*The Theatre of Aphra Behn* 141). In large part, one may attribute their differing responses to the crown to differences in gender, as Loveless, under Tory rhetoric, may achieve success through loyalty to the king, whereas Lady Lambert must align herself with a politically powerful man in order to exercise social clout, a contrast that reflects “how irrationally, yet how inevitably, the woman’s honour is bound up in that of the man” under the patriarchal social structure of the seventeenth-century (*The Theatre of Aphra Behn* 143). Tellingly, the moment Lady Lambert revokes claim to her material goods, bidding “[a]dieu” to her “dear Mansion” and “Bed of State” in order to claim Loveless coincides with her abandonment of her political aims, her “hopes of *Royalty*,” in effect, trading political ambition and Whig sympathies for love and Toryism (V.5). Thus, through objects and material and sexual transactions, Behn illuminates the ways in which party politics and sexual politics relate, in the process, elevating Toryism.

Some scholars contend that in *The Roundheads*, Behn’s derisive depiction of women—principally, Lady Lambert and Lady Desbro—demonstrates her subordination of her proto-feminist leanings in favor of strict adherence to Tory politics; however, such arguments ultimately prove unpersuasive. For example, Susan J. Owen suggests that Behn’s characterization of the women in *The Roundheads* as shrill, and the cavalier men as heroic, results from her “mak[ing] a vigorous effort at this time to subordinate her capacity for feminist insight to the sexually conservative tropes of Toryism in order to demonize the Whigs’ attempt to turn the world upside-down” (“Behn’s dramatic response to Restoration politics” 69). While Lady Lambert, reviled as a “She-Politician” by the Captain of the Prentices, initially appears

petty and scheming, over the course of *The Roundheads*, as observed briefly above, “Behn complicates and finally redeems the character of Lady Lambert, ambitious for female command but finally reformed by her love for the Cavalier Loveless” (V.3, *The Theatre of Aphra Behn* 140). Just as Behn’s portrayals of women in her other plays—for instance, Angellica Bianca—rely on nuance in order to underscore the precarious position of women in seventeenth-century England, then, audiences ought to interpret the character arcs of Behn’s women characters in *The Roundheads*, particularly Lady Lambert, as illustrative of Behn’s understanding of the intersections between gender, sex, and politics—specifically, the ways in which women must adapt in order to enjoy safety and some measure of satisfaction. This understanding of Behn’s priorities and perspectives in *The Roundheads* need not diminish her credentials as a proto-feminist playwright; after all, to count as a feminist, writers need not compose *likeable* female characters. Indeed, the attention with which Behn focuses on the growth of the mob in the final scene reflects her commitment to characterizing violence against women as inherently dishonorable. More specifically, the mob’s hunt for the “Sorceress,” a woman charged with magical tyranny as a result of failing to abide by the normative ideal, sparks anxiety both in Lady Lambert, the subject of this witch hunt, and in Loveless, the moral compass of the play (V.5). For these reasons, one may still regard Behn’s writing in *The Roundheads* as proto-feminist.

Still, other critics go too far in attempting to centralize Behn’s proto-feminist leanings in analysis of *The Roundheads* by contending that Behn relied on “radical Protestant prophetic discourse and practices” in order to defend her right to speak and publish her writing publicly (Latta 28). Yet this line of reasoning fails to account for the rich tradition of female autonomy within Tory thought, a tradition discussed earlier in this paper. Though women Tory intellectuals such as Mary Cavendish and female Protestant prophets might both have reviled the patriarchal



structures that refused to acknowledge female creativity or autonomy, this does not mean that these groups drew from similar traditions. Instead, then, *The Roundheads* constitutes Behn's measured consideration of matters of politics and gender, as it suggests that even when one espouses loyalty to a particular political party, such loyalty does not prevent—and indeed, may require—critical responses to the actions of those in power, particularly those that oppress or endanger the most vulnerable members of society, including women.

Considered alongside one another, *The Rover*, *The Lucky Chance*, and *The Roundheads* all gesture towards Behn's credentials as a proto-feminist playwright and as a Tory. Though Behn's political loyalties and the cultural constraints of her time prevented her from advocating for major revisions to the accepted, patriarchal and classist social system—and thus, undermine arguments in favor of the “Aphra Myth,” the idea that Behn actually held views aligned with twentieth-century feminists, but, due to institutional conspiracy, lacked the space to thoroughly air these views— she still managed to distinguish herself from her male contemporaries by granting her female characters agency and wit (Copeland 160-1). Moreover, while scenes in Behn's plays often teeter on the brink of violence, particularly sexual violence directed towards women, she continually rescues her women characters from such violation. Similarly, whereas male audience members or directors might interpret the near-rape scenes as humorous, in continually rescuing her women characters from assault, Behn meaningfully refuses to employ sexual violence simply as a tool for amusement, thereby underscoring the very real dangers faced by women. Little wonder, then, that twentieth-century feminist theatre groups such as the Women's Playhouse Trust turned to Behn as a source of inspiration, a kind of ideological and theatrical forbearer (Copeland 159). The great mystery, then, is why Caryl Churchill, one of the most notable feminist playwrights of the twentieth century, failed to follow suit.

...

While Restoration comedies fell out of favor during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the end of the Victorian era led to a shift in cultural values, in particular, to more liberal sexual mores, and as a result, directors proved more willing to revisit the risqué plays of the seventeenth century. As early as 1920, English directors returned to the Restoration, and as a result, “earlier comedies by John Dryden, William Wycherley, and George Villiers entered the repertoire of performed plays” (Kaplan 37). In part, one may trace the revival of Restoration plays to evolving attitudes towards English nationalism in general, and the character of English national theatre in particular. For some, revivals of Restoration comedies served to augment “cultural and class divisions and hierarchy,” as reliance on the “unbowdlerized playscripts” alienated many audience members from lower- and middleclass backgrounds, while providing “indices of cultural and social superiority” to members of the upper-class (46). Additionally, this elitist take on the Restoration marked an attempt to align British nationalism with modernity through providing “a Decadent and Aesthetic representation of passion, frankness, and sophistication defined against [...] the philistinism and propriety of the Victorian” that also denigrated “the contemporary theater-going ‘masses’” (57). Through emphasizing the bawdy humor and Tory ties in their productions of Restoration theatre, then, proponents of an elitist brand of national theater validated England’s class-system and the associated power structures of patriarchy, heteronormativity, and imperialism.

For other directors, staging Restoration plays allowed for the imagining of a more inclusive form of nationalism, a form that sought to validate the experiences of individuals from all backgrounds, not just elites. Staging Restoration comedies provided for the performance of a national historical and cultural past, in the process, generating “an aesthetic of inclusiveness”

that implicated, rather than alienated, middle-class audiences (Kaplan 46). Indeed, when the Playfair theatre staged Restoration comedies, they interpreted the plays through the lens of the twentieth-century, in effect, “stag[ing] a merry, inoffensive, and compassionate Restoration but *as* a twentieth-century interpretation” (55). In other words, while elitist interpretations of Restoration plays sought to preserve a sense of inaccessibility and exclusivity through emphasizing the cruder and class-based elements of the comedies, more “middle-brow” takes on Restoration comedy attempted to set the audience at ease, and in doing so, offer a version of “national culture as a bond of solidarity among classes” (39). Such a policy reflected growing national anxieties regarding class-relations, anxieties proponents of middle-brow Restoration theatre sought to remedy by conceiving of England’s shared theatrical heritage as “a unifying cultural bond,” a bond “especially effective in resolving class conflicts” (46). For advocates of middle-brow Restoration revivals, theatre served a sociological, as well as an artistic, purpose. To this end, theatres such as the Playfair inflected their interpretations with twentieth-century sensibilities, such as “the evocation of early twentieth-century feminism in [Edith] Evans’s portrayal of Congreve’s Millamant and the jazzy posturing of the servants” (55). Such performative strategies allowed for the formation of “a modern relationship to the past,” one that privileged “the twentieth-century middle-brow “we”” rather than the royal *we* favored by proponents of elitist revivals (55).

In many ways, the populist, class-conscious sentiment that propelled the middle-brow Restoration revivalist movement prefigured the theatre of the angry young men, the movement associated most directly with John Osborne. Indeed, many scholars view Osborne’s 1956 play *Look Back in Anger* as reflecting the frustrations faced by many English progressives, as “[m]uch of the radicalism that had been directed towards the Labour Party during [World War II]

began to evaporate” as the realities of governing took hold (Rebellato 13). At the same time, as the abuses of the Soviet Union came to light, English socialists sought to distance their movement from that of the Soviets (14). Due to this, proponents of socialist theatre aimed “to restore sincere, authentic unity to the voices of the national culture,” leading to the creation and staging of plays that hinged on Britain’s identity as a nation, rather than the identity of a particular social class (99). At the same time, evolving attitudes towards sexuality, resultant from the theorizations of Michel Foucault, among others, enabled playwrights to conceive of “the nineteenth-century reconstruction of sexuality” as “a keystone in transforming political and personal life,” a characterization that implicated issues of sex and gender “in interactions that go far beyond what is usually conceived of as ‘sexual’” (156). More specifically, this shift toward a more libertine attitude towards sex—a clear echo of the Restoration period’s valorization of male sexual liberty—also allowed for the popularization of the “swinging London” scene in film and theatre (Stubbs 362). Though many critics viewed this artistic movement as the product of “a broader national passage between historical eras, a moment of transition,” the inclusion of Osborne as a central figure in this moment points to a sense of continuity between the theatre of the angry young men of the 1950s and the sexually liberal dramatic landscape of the 1960s (364). Additionally, the movement’s “commitment to fashion,” as evidenced by the flamboyant costuming of Osborne’s *Tom Jones* in the 1963 film adaptation, casts the swinging London scene, in part, as a reverberation of the Restoration era, an observation further strengthened when one considers *Tom Jones*’s emphasis on “a connection between deviancy and the upper classes,” a concept Behn and her contemporaries often validated through the inclusion of a heroic, libertine cavalier figure (363, 373). Within theatre circles of the twentieth century, then, elements

of the Restoration began to resurface, resulting in the creation of plays and films that championed masculinity, sexual liberty, and material culture.

In her plays, Churchill also validates notions of sexual freedom; however, unlike her male contemporaries she refuses to privilege masculinity, instead taking care to critique patriarchal structures and gendered violence. In this way, Churchill rejects not only the theatre of John Osborne and his angry young men, but also, the Restoration playwrights from whom they drew inspiration. By extension, Churchill also repudiated the Tory politics embraced by many of these playwrights. Instead of the Tories, Churchill turned to the legacy of the Puritans, those Roundheads Behn so roundly rebuked in her 1681 play. Christopher Hill's 1971 book *The World Turned Upside Down*, an account of the social and economic movements underpinning the English Civil War, served as a touchstone and an inspiration. Hill conceived of his work in Marxist terms, arguing:

There were, we may simplify, two revolutions in mid-seventeenth-century England. The one which succeeded established the sacred rights of property (abolition of feudal tenures, no arbitrary taxation), gave political power to the propertied (sovereignty of Parliament and common law, abolition of prerogative courts), and removed all impediments to the triumph of the ideology of the men of property—the protestant work ethic. There was, however, another revolution which never happened, though from time to time it threatened. This might have established communal property a far wider democracy in political and legal institutions, might have disestablished the state church and rejected the protestant ethic. (Hill 15)

Through characterizing the civil wars years in terms of “two revolutions,” Hill acknowledges the distinct, often divergent, ideologies held by those ostensibly loyal to Oliver Cromwell and his forces (Hill 15). In addition, defining each line of revolutionary thought in terms of its attitudes towards property, Hill sets the stage for a Marxist reflection on the movements of the English Civil War, a connection he makes explicit later in the introduction when he contends “the

Diggers,” one of the revolutionary groups of the seventeenth century, “have something to say to twentieth-century socialists” (Hill 15). For Hill, then, the radical politics of the 1970s represented a chance at realizing that “revolution which never happened,” the Marxist revolution, a revolution with antecedents Hill traces to the social and political movements of the English Civil War (15). Indeed, Hill conceives of the seventeenth century as the age in which individuals first dared imagine “that the world might be permanently turned upside,” resulting in a total reimagining of the social, political, and economic order of England (17). By Hill’s estimation, the revolutions of the seventeenth century provided an historical legacy from which twentieth-century radicals might draw. While the policies and attitudes advanced by groups such as the Levellers and Diggers failed to displace the royalist, property-based politics of Tories in the seventeenth century, Hill suggests that such movements might inform the radical movements of the 1970s to allow for a successful, Marxist disruption of twentieth-century Toryism, and with it, a rejection of Margaret Thatcher’s neoliberal conception of Great Britain.

Hill’s work provided the source material for Churchill’s *Light Shining in Buckinghamshire* (1976), enabling Churchill to challenge dominant historical narratives in order to center women’s voices (Reinelt 21). Set in two acts, *Light Shining* progresses in a series of related, though independent, scenes featuring well-known figures from the English Civil War period, such as Oliver Cromwell and General Ireton, alongside lesser-known characters, such as radical Protestant women and vagrants. Throughout the play, actors switch off playing characters, enabling the audience to view “each scene [...] as a separate event rather than part of a story” (*Light Shining in Buckinghamshire*, “A Note on the Production”). Throughout these scenes, Churchill celebrates the revolutionary spirit of radical reformers, such as the Levellers, while underscoring the difficulty in translating revolutionary spirit into sustainable, meaningful

societal change. Indeed, in the play's closing scene, individuals initially captivated by the revolutionary spirit of Cromwell and his Roundheads bemoan their impoverished, famished state. While the preacher, Hoskins, muses that "Jesus Christ did come and nobody noticed," the Drunk merely observes that "[t]he day the king came back there was bread and cheese and beer given free," in effect, forfeiting the revolutionary fervor in favor of material concerns, the maintenance of the body through the satisfaction of hunger and thirst (*Light Shining* 61-2).<sup>3</sup> Still, Churchill's portrayal of revolutionaries—such as the closing scene's Hopkins, Cobbe, Brotherton, Briggs, and Claxton—presents the radicals of the English Civil War as heroes espousing views ahead of their time.

Like Hill, then, Churchill largely valorizes the social, political, and economic movements operating at the time of the English Civil War; however, unlike Hill, in *Light Shining*, Churchill centers the experiences of women. Indeed, Churchill goes to great lengths to "dramatiz[e] how ordinary women were disciplined and punished for deviant behaviour [within these movements] and how they resisted" (Reinelt 21). While much of Hill's discussion centers on the work of radical men, going so far as to argue, "[i]n the freer circumstances of the 1640s and 1650s most 'madmen' appear to be political radicals," Churchill regularly foregrounds the voices of madwomen, women who dared to defy societal expectations with respect to their political or sexual conduct (Hill 279). From Margaret Brotherton, whom council members find "guilty of vagrancy and sentence [...] to be stripped at the waist and beaten" to Hoskins, forcibly removed from a church after she insists on speaking up, despite the Preacher's admonition that he "do[es] not allow women to speak in church at all since it is forbidden," Churchill's female characters face severe censure, even violence, for daring circumvent gendered social norms (*Light Shining*

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<sup>3</sup> Churchill, Caryl. *Light Shining in Buckinghamshire*. New York: Theatre Communications Group, Inc., 1985. Print.: All subsequent citations refer to page numbers in this edition.

*in Buckinghamshire* 5, 15). Through these scenes, Churchill takes a dramatized, feminist approach to historiography, in the process, engaging with Second-wave feminism's focus on "her-story," which Reinelt discusses in relation to its commitment to highlighting,

[T]he exclusions from history of the agency of women and the importance of their roles, the neglect of research on ordinary women and the dearth of material about everyday life, and the significance of sex and gender differences to the conceptualization of socio-political life in any era. (Reinelt 21)

By featuring Margaret Brotherton, Churchill abides by "her-story's" pledge to expose the struggle of "ordinary women," as Brotherton, convicted of "[b]egging," endures the plight of poverty suffered by so many women, a plight compounded by the lack of opportunities for economic advancement available to women at this time (Reinelt 21, *Light Shining* 4). Similarly, Hoskins disrupts accepted discourses surrounding religion, her citation of verse twenty-eight from chapter 2 of Joel and its assertion of the spirit anointing "the handmaids" as well as "the young men" and "the servants" rupturing the gender and economic barriers to spiritual authority (14). Moreover, through invoking the Bible, Hoskins, and by extension, Churchill, demonstrate the inherent instability of England's patriarchal, class-based system, as this passage from Joel sanctifies women and the working class as divinely chosen individuals (14). Hence, Churchill engages with Hill's research in order to advance her own interpretation of history, one that advances the arguments of Second-wave feminism, particularly as they pertain to emphasizing the social and political role of women, especially ordinary women.

The Putney Debates constitute another area in which Churchill expands on Hill's work, as her dramatization of the debates and placement of the scene just before intermission suggests that the debates formed the climax of the seventeenth-century revolutionary moment. Historically, the Putney Debates constituted a "three-day conversation in which the Leveller



position was eventually defeated” (Howard 39). More specifically, while the Levellers contended, “that all men, and not only those with freeholds of forty shillings a year, should have the right of election,” others, particularly army officials, opposed this expansion of male suffrage (Howard 39). In *Light Shining in Buckinghamshire*, Churchill introduces the Leveller’s Agreement of the People through Sexby, “elected representative or agitator from Fairfax’s regiment of horse,” who discusses the agreement to the debate in his opening remarks (23-4). Employing the word “[w]e” throughout his presentation of the Agreement of the People, Churchill’s Sexby frames the Agreement of the People in terms of the concerns “of the common soldiers” and the “native rights” of men (23-4). Among the concerns addressed by the Agreement of the People, Sexby emphasizes the dissolution and re-election of Parliament; restraints on the power of members of Parliament to exert control over citizens, particularly in religious matters; and expansion of suffrage to include all soldiers (24). Similarly, the concerns raised by “Colonel Thomas Rainborough, a Leveller” seek to upend the status quo through abolishing property qualifications and preventing Parliament from compelling men to act in service “of an obligation when he sees it to be evil” (23, 25). Both Sexby and Rainborough challenge English government’s preoccupation with wealth as a marker of citizenship through their emphasis on the inherent rights to citizenship all men ought enjoy, irrespective of property, with Sexby observing “it seems now, except a man hath a fixed estate in the kingdom, he hath no right in this kingdom” (31). Indeed, Rainborough goes so far as to claim that a property-less soldier who fought in Cromwell’s army “hath fought to give power to men of riches, men of estates, to make himself a perpetual slave” (32). This contention, coupled with Rainborough’s quip that “[w]e find none must be pressed for the army that have property” serves to link economic disempowerment with increased exposure to violence, all in the service of the

privileged, propertied classes (32). Such a critique serves as the bedrock of Churchill's central argument in *Light Shining*, the idea that, as Howard puts it, "in the renunciation of property lies the road to something better [...] often represented as the freedom from the tyranny of desire that ownership brings with it" (Howard 42). Under this interpretation, then, the work of Levellers and army agitators represents noble attempts at combatting tyranny through challenging notions of citizenship based on ownership, as such conceptions exacerbate relationships steeped in inequality and exploitation.

In contrast to her depiction of Sexby and Rainborough as radicals concerned for the common man, Churchill's characterization of Oliver Cromwell and General Henry Ireton casts these men as largely appropriating the language and spirit of the revolutionary movements in order to maintain much of England's system of class, and by extension, the oppressive practices this system enables and encourages. For example, throughout his speeches, Cromwell switches between the use of "I" and "we," the use of "I" signaling Cromwell's commitment to legitimizing his own authority as the leader of the army and foreshadowing his later status as the singular "I" of the English Republic, when he will serve as Lord Protector of England (24, 26, 29). While Sexby's use of "we" underscores his commitment to representing the views of the people, Cromwell's employment of "'we'" in phrases such as "we must consider the ways and means" or "[w]e have in times of danger issued several declarations," reads more like the royal *we*, thereby aligning Cromwell with the monarchy, in consequence, suggesting that Cromwell's suggestions will inaugurate a subtle political evolution, not a radical revolution (24). Likewise, Ireton's assertion that he objects to expanding the suffrage to include "[t]he people of England" unless "it only means the people that had the election before" aligns the general with the preservation of England's system of class and its collection of oppressive power-relations (27).

Cromwell's assertion that the Agreement of the People "without any qualifications [...] will not pass freely" and subsequent motion to revise the document in "a committee" marks a commitment to the preservation of institutional power at the expense of the people, as Cromwell forms the committee from members of his own army, rather than individuals from the broader community (34). Through emphasizing Cromwell and Ireton's commitment to upholding bedrock elements of the social and political establishment, such as property requirements for voting, Churchill implies that truly revolutionary social movements must derive from grassroots efforts. Indeed, Churchill's own commitment to pulling from "the collective labour of the actors in creating [*Light Shining in Buckinghamshire*] as well as in rehearsing and performing it" coupled with her practice of "drawing on the words of historical figures and texts from [the English Civil War]" in her practice as a playwright mirrors the community-based approach Churchill favors politically (Howard 42). Hence, in the text of the play as well as its preparation, Churchill underscores the centrality of democratization in successful political or theatrical production, as the sharing of authority and intellectual or physical property best combats the abuses inherent in class-based, hierarchical political organizations.

Though Churchill's engagement with the seventeenth century in *Light Shining* gestures toward a link between her and Behn, the structure and content of Churchill's plays written after *Light Shining*—specifically, *Cloud Nine* and *Top Girls*—further distinguishes her from Behn, effectively aligning Churchill with the Brechtian, not the Restoration, tradition. Even in *Light Shining*, Churchill relies on "Brechtian techniques," her refusal to cast a single actor for each character echoing Brecht's use of masks and cross-casting within his plays, such as *The Decision* (1930), in order to deliver political commentary (Aston 53). Likewise, Churchill's focus on "ordinary people—vagrant women, common soldiers, labourers"—mirrors Brecht's commitment

to “not focus[ing] on ‘heroes’ with whom the audience would identify”—such as, in the case of *Light Shining*, Oliver Cromwell or General Ireton (Howard 39). In keeping with her commitment to Brechtian theatre, Churchill’s writing process on later works, such as *Cloud Nine*, relies on a collectivist approach, and her deployment of a group-based workshop-model in the initial stages writing reflects her commitment to “a resistant, post-Brechtian democratization of stage politics and sexual politics” (Aston 107). Similarly, Churchill’s use of experimental theatre techniques, such as cross-gender and cross-racial casting, coupled with her willingness to breach temporal bounds and social mores in *Cloud Nine*, and to a lesser extent, *Top Girls*, appears to situate her plays in “distant lands,” a clear nod to Brecht’s tendency to disorient audiences to foster greater critical engagement with the material (Schechter 46). Moreover, though Churchill does not explicitly stage discussions with her plays’ audiences as part of the performances like Brecht did with his *Lehrstücke* plays, she does provide space for the audience to ruminate on her work, as her plays, such as *Top Girls*, lack a sense of neat resolution (Schechter 46). By constructing her plays in a Brechtian fashion, Churchill emphasizes her commitment to deploying theatre as a means of realizing social justice, particularly social justice as mediated through Churchill’s socialist and feminist politics. In the process, Churchill further distances herself from John Osborne who “willfully disclaims [...] Brecht,” and by extension, disavows the Restoration scene, including Behn, from which Osborne and his cohorts drew inspiration (Rebellato 148). Hence, even as Churchill engages with many of the same feminist themes Behn touches on in her work, through adapting and adhering to practices of Brechtian theatre, Churchill breaks the bounds of realistic theatre in order to present more absurdist, experimental works, and consequently, further distances herself from the Restoration.

In *Cloud Nine* (1979), Churchill more explicitly critiques sexual politics by drawing attention to “the parallel between colonial and sexual oppression” (*Cloud Nine* i).<sup>4</sup> In service of this vision, Churchill sets Act One in Victorian Africa, where Clive, a colonial administrator, resides with his wife, Betty; Joshua, a black servant; Edward, his son, Maud, Clive’s mother-in-law; Ellen, Edward’s governess; and interacts with neighbors Mrs. Saunders, a widow, and Harry Bagley, an explorer. Here, Churchill employs cross-casting in terms of gender and race in order to critique white supremacy and heteronormativity . More specifically, in the introductory notes, Churchill specifies that “[i]t is essential for Joshua to be played by a white, Betty [in Act One] by a man, and Edward [in Act One] by a woman” (iii). For Churchill, the casting of a white actor in the role of Joshua serves to underscore the ways in which colonialism privileges whiteness to such an extent that non-white individuals may feel a sense of self-hatred and disassociation with their communities, a view Joshua explicitly espouses when he declares “My skin is black but oh my soul is white/ I hate my tribe. My master is my life,” a set of lines that further characterizes Joshua as an idealized version of a black, colonized subject, as it includes an allusion to a line from William Blake’s poem “The Little Black Boy” (2). Act Two of *Cloud Nine* takes place “in London of 1979,” the same temporal and geographic location of the play’s premiere (ii). Although “[a] hundred years have passed” in terms of the setting, “for the characters only twenty-have years” have elapsed (ii). This transition allows Churchill to explore Betty’s character development after she leaves Clive, and to investigate the adult lives of Betty’s children, Edward and Victoria, alongside their lovers, Gerry, Martin and Lin, while also suggesting that many modern attitudes toward sexuality, particularly sexual taboos, derive from the Victorian era. In this section, too, Churchill challenges casting conventions, as Victoria and

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<sup>4</sup> Churchill, Caryl. *Cloud Nine*. New York: Theatre Communications Group, Inc., 1985. Print.: All subsequent citations refer to page numbers in this edition.

Martin's child, Tom, while called out by other characters onstage, is not played by an actor, while Lin's daughter, Cathy, is played by a male actor. Churchill concludes the play through staging a hug between the actor who plays Betty in Act One and the actress who plays Betty in Act Two, a scene meant to symbolize Betty's acceptance of herself and consequent rejection of oppressive Victorian standards.

In drawing a connection between 1970s attitudes towards sex and Victorian models of desire and family, Churchill echoes many of the concerns introduced by Michel Foucault in his 1976 work, *The History of Sexuality: Volume 1*. More specifically, like Churchill, Foucault addresses the commonly-held conception that many of the repressive beliefs and behaviors society imposes with respect to sexuality derive from the Victorian era, a belief Foucault terms "the repressive hypothesis" (Foucault 10). Foucault goes on to challenge this perception of the Victorian era as marking "the accentuation or even the establishment of a regime of sexual repression beginning in the seventeenth century" (Foucault 10). Even as Churchill's decision to locate the action of Act One within Victorian Africa might lead one to postulate that Churchill accepts the repressive hypothesis, the characters consistently challenge heteronormativity, with varying levels of success. For instance, an exchange between Harry and Joshua upsets the racial and gendered boundaries underpinning normative Victorian sexuality:

HARRY: Have you checked there's nobody in the barns?

JOSHUA: Yes sir.

HARRY: Shall we go in the barn and fuck? It's not an order.

JOSHUA: That's all right, yes.

*They go off.* (15).

Through suggesting a sexual tryst with Joshua, Harry upsets the Victorian notion that sex ought to occur between a married, heterosexual couple, ostensibly, for reproductive purposes, a

transgression compounded by the site of the act—“the barn” – as well as the term used to describe the action—“fuck,” rather than some sort of euphemism (15). Additionally, in clarifying that “[i]t’s not an order,” Harry attempts to stage the conversation as an egalitarian exchange, while implicitly acknowledging the entrenched racial hierarchy that elevates his status at the expense of Joshua (15). Though some may justifiably argue that Harry’s disavowal authority is largely superficial, given that Joshua is armed, and that Harry is aware of this after asking “[g]ot a gun have you,” it seems more likely that in this scene, Churchill characterizes the breaching of sexual mores as an opportunity to upend white hegemony (14-15). The final moments of Act One, in which “the artifice of the occasion [Harry’s marriage to Ellen] is exposed, or literally blown away, as Joshua shoots Clive,” similarly serves to link the rupture in racial hierarchy with disruptions of heteronormativity (Aston 34). Whereas in Behn’s works, violence often takes the form of gendered aggression, such as in Blunt’s attempted rape of Florinda, for Churchill, the appearance of the gun points to several different types of oppression, including sexual, gendered, and racial oppression. Hence, through layering critiques of colonialism’s institutionalized forms of racism with commentary on the fragility of heteronormativity, Churchill calls into question the legitimacy and stability of white supremacy and compulsory heterosexuality, thereby invoking an intersectional approach to feminism that contrasts sharply with Behn’s more narrowly focused proto-feminism.

While characters recognize the homosexual feelings and relations between men in both acts of the play as legitimate—as a legitimate fear and a legitimate form of romantic expression, respectively—in Act One, homoerotic desire between women remains illegible, while in Act Two it serves as the impetus for much of the action. For example, when Betty confesses her love for Harry to Ellen, Ellen takes the opportunity to kiss Betty, ostensibly, under the pretense of

acting out Harry's interaction with Betty (26-7). In response, Betty, though irritated, characterizes Ellen's action as a form of mockery, rather than seduction, exclaiming, that her love for Harry "[is] not a joke" (27). When Ellen tries to legitimize her feelings, stressing she "worship[s] you, Betty," Betty continues to position their relationship in strictly friendly terms by emphasizing that Ellen "is [her] only friend" (27). Later, when Ellen again attempts to voice her romantic feelings for Betty, Betty further invalidates her desire, stressing "[y]ou don't feel the way you think you do," before promising to "forget all about" Ellen's declaration (39). In recasting Ellen's avowal of romantic affection as a matter of personal confusion rather than genuine desire, Betty renders Ellen's lesbian identity invisible (Aston 36). Furthermore, the cross-gender casting of Betty in Act One "highlights the visibility of heterosexuality, marking the invisibility of lesbian identity and desire" (Aston 33). For members of the audience, then, visually, the exchanges between Betty and Ellen in Act One appears conspicuously heteronormative, making the kiss Ellen bestows on Betty that appears so daring and queer on the page, optically heterosexual and mundane when viewed onstage. Still, Churchill's foregrounding of homosexual desire and relationships marks a clear departure from the heteronormativity relationships featured by Behn. Though homosexual desire featured in work of other seventeenth-century writers, as "a shift toward more formal normative heterosexuality" did not occur until the eighteenth century, the relations and relationships featured in Behn's work, both illicit and licit, remain decidedly heteronormative (Copeland 4). Consequently, Churchill's work marks a departure from Behn's brand of feminism, as it challenges compulsory heterosexuality on a contextual, if not visual, level.

Through contrasting the experiences of Mrs. Saunders in Act One and Betty in Act Two, Churchill explores the precarious position of women, even heterosexual women, due to



heteronormativity's emphasis on the family, while also suggesting that women may overcome these pitfalls through community-building. While Clive and Betty celebrate Harry-the-bachelor as an adventurer, Mrs. Saunders "as a woman on her own [...] poses a threat to the family unit and, like Ellen, must also be expelled" (Aston 33). Even as Mrs. Saunder's unmarried status threatens the family unit, her gender imperils her, fears that "[t]he cook was going to let his whole tribe in through the window" leading her to seek refuge with Clive and his family (*Cloud Nine* 16). Though initially, Mrs. Saunders consents to a sexual tryst with Clive, his persistent pursuit of her leads her to clarify that though "I answered yes once. Sometimes I want to say no," a proclamation that leads Clive to express his passion for her in terms of necrophilia, of, in the event she "were shot with poisoned arrows," still coupling with her even though in doing so, he "poison[ed] [himself]" (16). For Mrs. Saunders, her lack of placement within a family of her own leads to geographic displacement, a state she acknowledges with her observation, "I will keep leaving everywhere I suppose" (29). As demonstrated by her flight to Clive's home and subsequent negotiation with him, such an itinerant lifestyle necessarily opens her up to the possibility of violence or unwarranted aggression. In failing to abide by societal norms governing sexuality, marriage, and reproduction, then, Mrs. Saunders exposes herself to a host of dangers and discomforts.

Churchill's use of cross-gendering casting also warrants closer inspection, as initially, it may appear counterproductive. Indeed, this technique seems to challenge accepted power structures, as "[c]ross-gender and cross-racial casting, and the doubling of roles are techniques central to Churchill's destabilizing of fixed sexual identities determined by dominant heterosexual ideology" (Aston 32). In many ways, Churchill's use of cross-gender casting prefigures work by queer theorists such as Judith Butler, who point to the performativity of

gender as a means of subverting heteronormativity. More specifically, Butler's 1993 essay, "Critically Queer," presents a means of reading the male actor's portrayal of Betty in Act I of *Cloud Nine* as a demonstration of heteronormativity's fragility, for, as Butler writes:

[D]rag exposes or allegorizes the mundane psychic and performative practices by which heterosexualized genders form themselves through the renunciation of the *possibility* of homosexuality, a foreclosure which produces a field of heterosexual objects at the same time that it produces a domain of those whom it would be impossible to love. Drag thus allegorizes heterosexual melancholy, the melancholy by which a masculine gender is formed from the refusal to grieve the masculine as a possibility of love. (Butler 25)

Through this passage, Butler establishes that drag serves as a means of embodying "heterosexual melancholy," the unexpressed grief associated with refusal to feel or act on homosexual desire (Butler 25). Given the heteronormative climate of Victorian England, then, Betty's opening pronouncement that she "live[s] for Clive" and "what men want is what I want to be" may appear misplaced, as surely Clive desires a woman, not a man, in order to fulfill his Victorian role as family patriarch (*Cloud Nine* 1). However, in the context of heterosexual melancholy, the cross-gender casting of Betty renders Clive and Betty's marriage with the appearance of a homosexual relationship. This queering of the Victorian marriage serves as the source for some dramatic irony, as Clive reacts to Harry's embrace by declaring this action "disgusting," stressing that he "feel[s] contaminated" by Harry's homosexual desire, desire he refers to as "[t]he most revolting perversion," before observing that "Rome fell [...] and this sin can destroy an Empire" (40). Given Clive's apparent endorsement of platonic—and, implicitly, homosocial or homoerotic friendship—just a page earlier, when he states "[f]riendship between men is a fine thing," constituting "the noblest form of relationship," his analysis of Rome's fall as a result of homosexuality betrays a misreading of ancient history, and with it, unwitting, if selective,

cooption of the homoerotic elements of male sociality in classical times (39). While visually, Clive and Betty's relationship in Act I appears just as homoerotic as Harry and Clive's pairing, Clive valorizes his marriage through underscoring "the necessity of reproduction" and observing that "[t]he family is all important" (39). Through placing Clive's defense of heterosexual marriage just before his attack on Harry's homosexual desire and employing cross-gender casting for Betty, Churchill creates a disjunction between the defense of heteronormativity Clive engages in verbally, and homosexual relationship implied visually by the two actors playing Clive and Betty. Hence, cross-casting Betty in Act One enables Churchill to implicitly cast homophobia as a form of hypocrisy, while also calling into question the stability of heteronormative desire and relationships. In contrast to Behn, who employs drag in her work primarily to highlight the precarious position occupied by women in seventeenth-century society, Churchill deploys drag as a discursive strategy to emphasize the instability of heteronormativity and the model of the nuclear family. While Churchill, like Behn, remains interested in the inequalities suffered by women, Churchill's brand of feminist politics empower her to critique not just the status of women, but also, society's preoccupation with compulsory heterosexuality, particularly heterosexual marriage and reproduction. Hence, unlike Behn, who depicts heroines acting within the established parameters of society, Churchill dares to challenge the overarching social structures that enable oppression.

Of Act One's characters, only Joshua dares to interpret Ellen's conduct towards Betty as romantic, an interpretation he attempts to convey to Clive by declaring that Ellen "talks of love to [his] wife," an act Joshua feels incriminates both Ellen and Betty, marking them as "[b]ad women" (43). In response to this suggestion of lesbian desire, however, Clive simply declares Joshua "goe[s] too far" (43). Through ordering Joshua "out of [his] sight," Clive punishes the

verbal acknowledgment of lesbian desire while simultaneously forcing this observation's messenger, Joshua, to leave his visual field, a move that renders female homoerotic desire both unheard and unseen—effectively, invisible (43). Still, through characterizing claims of lesbian desire as utterances that take things “too far,” Clive hints at the political threat posed by queer discourses, an anxiety Foucault points to as a major catalyst for the institutionalization and formalization of discourses of sexuality aimed at preserving heteronormativity (Foucault 31). In other words, only through redirecting homosexual discourse and desire into heteronormative channels can heterosexuality retain its illusion of stability. Indeed, Clive attempts to redirect Harry's homosexual desire through orchestrating a marriage between Harry and Ellen, a proposal Harry half-heartedly delivers, asking Ellen, “I don't suppose you would marry me” (43). Both Harry's proposal and Ellen's response, [w]hat if I said yes,” are phrased as questions, a discursive strategy that establishes the marriage as inherently unstable, as each implicitly acknowledges a lack of desire (43). Similarly, Harry's speech at the wedding serves to parody discourses of heterosexuality, as he proclaims:

My dear friends—what can I say—the empire—the family—the married state to which I have always aspired—your shining example of domestic bliss—my great good fortune in winning Ellen's love—happiest day of my life. (46)

Here, the fragmented nature of Harry's speech belies the sense of political and genetic continuity his entrance into a heterosexual marriage is meant to bestow, the disjointed allusions to “the empire” and “the family” highlighting the precarious nexus of powers institutional and personal underpinning heterosexual hegemony (46). Moreover, the moment “Joshua shoots Clive” serves to underscore the reality “[t]hat the ‘desired’ purification of Harry and Ellen in Act One will not be achieved” (34). Thus, even as characters onstage refuse to recognize homosexual desire, through the discursive practices of characters, Churchill stresses the inherently vulnerable

position of heterosexual hegemony, in the process, laying the foundation for more overt avowals of homosexual desire in Act Two.

In contrast to Act One's Betty, Act Two's Betty, in the process of leaving Clive, manages to find self-acceptance through cultivating a sense of identity separate from her roles as wife and mother, and through embracing friendships with other women. Initially, when asked by Lin if she has "any women friends," Betty responds that she has "never been so short of men's company that [she has] had to bother with women," a response that highlights Betty's internalized sexism (64). Indeed, Churchill further underscores Betty's disassociation with women through Betty's response to Lin's query about whether she likes women, where Betty states:

They don't have such interesting conversations as men. There has never been a woman composer of genius. They don't have a sense of humour. They spoil things for themselves with their emotions. I can't say I do like women very much, no. (64)

Here, the persistent use of the word "they" distinguishes Betty from her fellow women, suggesting she does not identify with her gender, a form of dramatic irony, given Betty's portrayal by a male actor in Act One (64). This lack of identification with other women aligns with Harry's reduction of Betty's identity to her relation to men, where he refers to her as "a mother;" "a daughter," and "a wife" (23). Furthermore, in observing that women "spoil things for themselves with their emotions," Betty suggests that a woman's lack of satisfaction ultimately derives from her own insistence on paying attention to her "emotions," or else, her lack of "a sense of humor" (64). Betty goes on to respond to Lin's protest that Betty is "a woman" with the proclamation that "[t]here's nothing says you have to like yourself," an observation that further emphasizes Betty's internalized self-loathing (64). Later, however, after Betty regains a sense of comfort with her body and personal autonomy, she expresses a desire to

live with Victoria, Lin, and Edward, a desire that marks a rejection of the heteronormative family structure in favor of abiding within a community of women, as at this point, Edward identifies as a woman (82-3). Indeed, Lin's response to Victoria's complaint that she "[doesn't] want to live with [her] mother" that Victoria ought not "think of her as your mother, think of her as Betty," speaks to a rejection of the bourgeoisie family model in favor of community structures that support women's identities as individuals, undefined by their relations to men (83). Through tracing Betty's character arc, then, particularly the ways in which her pursuit of a community of women directly prefigures the literal and metaphorical embrace of her past and present selves, Churchill reveals a commitment to liberal feminism's focus on "sisterhood and solidarity among women," as identifying with other women empowers Betty to finally accept herself, and with this acceptance, chart her own path uninhibited by Clive or his repressive attitudes (Reinelt 30). Like Behn in *The Rover*, then, Churchill characterizes friendship between women as a source of support and affirmation. Nevertheless, whereas Behn's women characters relied on their friendships with one another in order to safely navigate their relationships with men, here, Churchill positions female friendships and communities as an alternative to male-ordered society. In daring to imagine societies free of men, Churchill further distances her work and feminism from the plays and politics of Behn, as men remained key figures in Behn's work, even as she celebrated camaraderie between women.

Though much of Churchill's social commentary in *Cloud Nine* hinges on queering society, she also offers a feminist critique through highlighting the ways in which a focus on heterosexual marriage and reproduction limit women's freedoms. For instance, Churchill's portrayal of the girls in the play highlights the ways in which societal pressures undermine female agency even in childhood, the portrayal of Victoria in Act One by a literal doll

highlighting “the ways in which women are oppressed by dominant doll-like [...] representation so femininity and the absence of female desire” (Aston 37). Likewise, the casting of a grown man as Lin’s young daughter, Cathy, marks a transition from the demure socialization girls under the Victorian regime to the more assertive attitudes possible under the libertine attitudes of the 1970s, attitudes that enable Cathy to shout out an obscene nursery rhyme about “[s]illy Jack” with “great balls of fire” and later, yell at her mother to “fuck off” (Cloud Nine 48, 67). While the casting of a grown, male actor imbues Cathy’s lines with an air of absurdity, and by extension, comedy, it also serves to underscore gendered notions of language, the idea that boys or men may employ crude expressions in jest, whereas such behavior from girls constitutes a shocking, even subversive act. Such casting also marks an inversion of the drag techniques employed by Behn. Though Behn’s heroines might dress as men in order to realize greater freedom of mobility, their guise provides only temporary passage into male-dominated spheres, and, as in the case of Hellena’s deployment of drag during Carnival, always presents the risk of detection, and with it, punishment, even violence (Burke 121). In contrast, through calling for the casting of a grown man in the role of Cathy, Churchill employs drag to permanently—or, at least for the duration of Act Two of *Cloud Nine*—destabilize notions of gender, suggesting that outside the confines of the theatre, gender similarly lacks stability. Consequently, individuals may transcend the gender binary in order to perform identities that best align with their talents and preferences. Thus, the use of cross-gender casting in *Cloud Nine*, particularly the casting of an adult man as Cathy, further distinguishes Churchill’s feminism from Behn’s, as it points to the need to overturn oppressive systems, like the gender binary, rather than simply seek concessions within the existing structures of inequality.

*Top Girls* (1982) serves as Churchill's meditation on the struggles faced by women in Margaret Thatcher's England. In *Top Girls*, Churchill builds on her earlier critiques of compulsory heterosexuality and patriarchy by focusing on the exploitative actions of her female characters within the context of late-twentieth-century capitalism, in the process, illuminating the ways in which adherence to patriarchal structures and toxic masculinity implicate people of all genders. In Act One, high-achieving businesswoman, Marlene, organizes a dinner featuring powerful women hailing from a vast area of countries and centuries. Over drinks and food, the women discuss the difficulties inherent in navigating life while female, including challenges stemming from motherhood, political engagement, and romantic entanglements with men. In Act Two, the audience views Marlene at work, where she wins a promotion at the expense of a male coworker, much to his wife's chagrin. Also in this Act, Marlene's biological daughter and legal niece surprises her at work, much to Marlene's displeasure. Act Two concludes with a flashback to the previous year, where Marlene visits Angie and Angie's adopted mother—Marlene's sister, Joyce—at home, a scene that allows Churchill to explore the resentments and frustrations stemming not just from family dynamics, but also, from anxieties stemming from issues of class. Behn's drama centers on figures from nobility, as even poor figures, such as Gayman, enjoy aristocratic status, their impoverished status the result of dispossession and tragic reversals of fate, rather than birth (Copeland 71). In contrast, Churchill delights in foregrounding the voices of working-class people, a clear nod to her socialist politics ("Introduction" 4).

Through depicting Marlene's behavior and reception at work, Churchill underscores the ways in which the large-scale entrance of women into the workforce in the late twentieth century destabilized gendered notions of productivity. Marlene's cutthroat behavior as a business executive "demonstrates that capitalist impulse is not determined by the biological difference



between male and female, but illustrates how women may take on the values of the masculine” (Aston 20). For instance, in response to Mrs. Kidd’s protests that Marlene’s promotion harmed Howard as “he’s got a family to support,” Marlene responds by declaring that if Howard is unsatisfied with his current workplace, “he can go and work somewhere else” (*Top Girls* 69-70).<sup>5</sup> Marlene’s disgust at Mrs. Kidd’s suggestion that Howard’s distress at his inability to secure a promotion largely stems from discomfort with his new reality “working for a woman” is justified, as the gender of one’s boss ought not, on its own, influence one’s contentment with life at work (69). Nevertheless, Marlene’s failure to acknowledge a worker’s obligations to family within a discussion of workplace environment reinforces the doctrine of separate spheres underpinning Victorian notions of gender, work, and domesticity. Indeed, Mrs. Kidd’s pronouncement that Marlene “is not natural” following this exchange further highlights the pervasive gender norms undergirding this discussion, as it suggests that Marlene, in rejecting the roles of mother and wife in order to take on a professional position and refusing to consider the familial obligations of others, defies not the statutes of society, but the very laws of nature. Thus, through this scene, Churchill highlights the ways in which Marlene’s entrance into the business world allows her to transcend the gender binary with respect to her labor.

Churchill further emphasizes Marlene’s transgression of gendered norms through contrasting her actions with those of her sister, Joyce, a character who embodies traditional notions of femininity, domesticity, and female productivity. When Marlene bemoans their mother’s life as a “[f]ucking waste,” Joyce responds “[d]on’t talk to me,” before ordering Marlene not to “come back” home (89). In other words, in leaving the domestic sphere of home, and with it, the obligations to care for her mother and biological child, Marlene, by Joyce’s

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<sup>5</sup> Churchill, Caryl. *Top Girls*. New York: Samuel French, Inc., 1982. Print.: All subsequent citations refer to page numbers in this edition.

estimation, forfeits claim to her childhood community and family. Unlike Joyce, who “go[es] and see[s] [their mother] every week,” Marlene has failed to invest time or emotional labor in caring for her parent, and thus, cannot lay the same claim to their mother as Joyce (89).

Similarly, through declaring “I don’t know how you could leave your own child,” Joyce suggests that in surrendering the title of mother, Marlene forfeited any inherent deed to a meaningful relationship with Angie (90). Through voicing a sense of entitlement to relationships with her mother despite the lack of consistent time or energy she devotes to her, Marlene devalues the emotional labor or domestic responsibilities undertaken by her sister, and in the process, displays a derisive attitude toward traditional femininity.

Marlene’s application of transactional language to family relationships reveals her complete assimilation into the business world, a realm often defined by exploitation, individualism, and masculinity. Transactional language continues to define the discussion of Marlene’s relationship with Angie, as Marlene contends that Joyce “[was] quick enough to take [Angie],” the word “take” casting Joyce’s adoption of Angie as a sort of hostile takeover, an opportunistic acquisition for Joyce’s benefit (90). For Marlene, familial relations fall into patterns of ownership, rather than relationships formed on the basis of reciprocal affections and complementary duties and responsibilities. Due to this, Marlene interprets Joyce’s reproaches as assertions of authority over their mother and Angie, leading Marlene to declare that Joyce feels that “it’s just [Joyce’s mother], just [Joyce’s] child” (89). By extension, Marlene’s inability to shift from the profit-maximizing paradigm of the business world to the family-centered perspective of domestic life parallels the difficulty of accurately evaluating the challenges and successes of those who work within the domestic realm—principally, women—within a capitalist framework. In this way, Churchill echoes many of Behn’s concerns regarding women’s

opportunities within the English marketplace. Whereas for Behn, a woman's decision to become sexually active—with the exception of Angellica Bianca—necessarily diminished her social and economic value, for Churchill, motherhood, not sexual activity, lessened a woman's chances of enjoying financial success, as the advent of reliable contraception, a hallmark of second-wave feminism, allowed women to engage in sexual relationships without becoming mothers (Reinelt 22). Thus, through the argument between Joyce and Marlene, Churchill underscores the inadequacies of a binary understanding of business and home, as this system exacerbates the frustrations of individuals operating within each realm, and makes successful movement between these two realms, particularly for women, acutely painful, if not impossible.

In addition to her use of transactional language, Marlene's interactions with Angie underscore the pitfalls of wholly accepting capitalist conventions by highlighting the indirect damage inflicted by the adoption and application of aggressive, capitalist ideology and practice. In particular, "Marlene's relationship, or lack of a relationship, with her daughter," examined alongside "Pope Joan's narrative of being stoned to death for birthing a baby" in the play's opening scene, emphasize that "[c]hildren and a career in a man's world are mutually exclusive" (Aston 40). In order to succeed in the male-ordered world of business, then, Marlene must forgo a mother-daughter relationship with Angie. Though Marlene protests that she "could have taken [Angie] with [her]" when she left home to find work, Joyce presses, arguing that "[Marlene] didn't want to take [Angie] with [her]," in large part, due to the impact of Angie's presence on Marlene's earning potential, the loss of "a few [...] thousand a year" (90). Churchill further emphasizes the spatial distance between Marlene and Angie through referencing Marlene's time in America. Here, Marlene's willingness to go "[d]riving across the states for a new job in L.A.," juxtaposed with her unwillingness to travel within her own country to visit her biological child,

believes her postcard's ending sentiment that she "wish[es] [Angie] were here," and thus, the distance in miles mirrors the emotional distance between Marlene and Angie (85). This sojourn to America also leads to temporal disjunction between Marlene and Angie, as Marlene does not learn of Joyce's separation from her husband, Angie's adoptive father, until "three years" after the event, a lack of awareness Joyce directly attributes to Marlene's time "in America" (85).

Apart from her physical distance from Angie, Marlene reveals a sense of emotional estrangement with her child throughout her limited interactions with Angie. For instance, when Angie calls out "[h]ello" upon entering Marlene's office, Marlene mistakes her for a job candidate, asking Angie if "[she] h[as] an appointment" (64). Marlene's error in mistaking the voice of Angie, her biological child and legal niece, for that of a stranger, is compounded by the fact that Angie is still a child. In failing to distinguish between her niece and a client, then, Marlene also neglects to acknowledge the distinction between childhood and adulthood, or the duties and privileges accorded to those in each stage of life. Similarly, Marlene's deference to concepts of temporality and productivity inhibits her from understanding Angie's perspectives or objectives, those ideals informed by issues of belonging and identity independent of the constraints of time or money. Indeed, Marlene's questions to Angie focus on matters of transportation, on the "train" or "bus" Angie must take; on consumption, such as the "[s]hopping" Angie might partake in or the tour of "The Tower of London" she might take; and on duration, on "[h]ow long [Angie] is planning on staying with [Marlene]" (66, 65, 67). In contrast, Angie frames her discourse in terms of Marlene, characterizing her trip to London as her "looking for [Marlene];" conceiving of the office building as "where [Marlene] work[s];" and interpreting the hierarchy of the business as "[Marlene] in charge of everything" (65-7). Moreover, when Marlene attempts to reframe Angie's visit in terms of time by asking her "how

long are you planning on staying,” Angie reconfigures the discussion in terms of Marlene’s attitude toward her, responding, “[d]on’t you want me?” (67). For Angie, her stay in London depends not on the constraints of time, but on the limits of Marlene’s love for her. In contrast, Marlene, so bound to the notions of economic productivity, views this interaction in relation to time, not as an expression of emotional intimacy. Thus, in attempting to reject Angie’s pleas for closer spatial proximity, and with it, increased emotional closeness, Marlene reinforces her commitment to capitalism at the expense of family, even the most vulnerable members of her family, and in doing so, demonstrates the corrosive influence of the male-ordered corporate world on those who inhabit it, as well as on those who depend on capitalist agents. While Behn also remains critical of commerce and its relation to women—the narrative arc of *Angellica Bianca* clearly underscoring the negative role economics may play in women’s relationships with others, particularly men—as a writer of the seventeenth century, mercantilism, not capitalism, predominated Behn’s England. Unlike Churchill, then, Behn did not—and in fact, could not—respond to capitalism’s effects on women’s relationships to their families. Consequently, Churchill’s preoccupation with capitalism signifies the temporal, as well as the ideological, gulf between her approach to feminist theatre and Behn’s proto-feminist plays.

While Marlene’s pursuit of economic prosperity leads her to extend the distance between herself and Angie, Angie seeks to bridge this distance by mapping, and then tracing, Marlene’s sites. For example, though Marlene references her time in America in economic terms, confessing, “I spent a lot,” Angie cites the “Grand Canyon” on the postcard directly, indicating her interest in physically locating her aunt (85). Moreover, Angie’s journey to London to “find [Marlene]” illustrates her desire to eliminate the physical distance between them, and despite “g[etting] lost,” Angie, in the literal sense of locating her aunt, proves successful (65, 64). Still,

Marlene's agitation at hosting Angie suggests that she will restore the distance between herself and Angie, implying that even if she "sleep[s] on the floor," Angie's mere presence constitutes a threat to Marlene's pursuit of profits (67). Through emphasizing the physical distance between Marlene and Angie—one that stretches across households, and at times, national boundaries—and stressing Marlene's unwillingness to overcome these distances, Churchill draws attention to the deleterious effects of abiding by the work and home dichotomy established by capitalism, effects felt not just by those pursuing gratification through capitalism, but to their family members as well, including children. Discrediting Tory capitalism also allows Churchill to disavow Margaret Thatcher. In distancing herself from modern Toryism's main *top girl*, Margaret Thatcher, Churchill further distinguishes herself from seventeenth-century Toryism's *top girl*, Aphra Behn, a woman who, like Thatcher, found herself "praised by men and attacked by women" (Copeland 161). Thus, Churchill's critique of Tory economic politics further distinguishes her brand of politics from Behn's proto-feminist, royalist ideology.

After explicating the corrosive influence of strict devotion to capitalism on a micro level through detailing Marlene's interactions with Angie, Churchill links the interpersonal conflicts between Marlene, Joyce, and Angie, to the interclass conflicts presented by capitalism on the macro level, through alluding to Margaret Thatcher and the Tories (Aston 51-2). In doing so, "Churchill [...] wanted to address how material success for a few women did not build solidarity or foster change for the majority" (Reinelt 30). While Marlene celebrates Thatcher as the "[f]irst woman prime minister," Joyce dismisses Thatcher as "Hitlerina," arguing that Marlene "[would] have liked Hitler if he was a woman" (95). By acknowledging that Thatcher's gender does not preclude her from oppressing others, Joyce underscores Churchill's central message, namely, that individuals, regardless of gender, may reproduce patterns of repression and coercion

inherent in a social system predicated on patriarchal structures and unwieldy capitalism. The reproduction of these patterns within Marlene and Joyce's family aligns Marlene with the Tories, comprised of "those who own," and situates Joyce—and by extension, Angie—with those "who owe" (Howard 36). Joyce, too, perceives of a distinction between herself and Marlene, as she declares to Marlene, "[y]ou're one of them," the "them" expanding to refer not just to the Tories, but to those, like Marlene, who refuse to help those "stupid or lazy or frightened" individuals forming Joyce's "us" (97). In a feeble attempt to realign herself with the family, Marlene protests that despite their differences, she and Joyce are "friends anyway," thereby attempting to retain Joyce's love and acceptance without surrendering her power of ownership, a power she fails to recognize through professing she "[doesn't] believe in class," a fantasy Joyce squashes by confessing she "[doesn't] think" she and Marlene are friends (98, 97, 98). Through this exchange, Churchill clarifies that just as Marlene's participation in oppressive systems precludes her incorporation into her family, so long as elite economic classes continue to exploit the more vulnerable members of society, the citizens deemed "stupid or lazy or frightened" due to their inability to succeed under the present system, true interclass harmony is impossible (97). By casting Marlene as the embodiment of these oppressive structures, Churchill emphasizes that women, as well as men, preserve and profit from repressive ideologies and systems, even as these ideologies and systems might simultaneously, at least to a degree, repress these agents.

Still, despite professing her disdain for helping the "stupid, lazy, or frightened," Marlene initially holds the opinion that Angie will "be all right" (97). In part, Marlene's optimism regarding Angie stems from projecting her own abilities onto her child, a tendency that leads Marlene to interpret Angie's exercise book, a collection of copied excerpts from "books about black magic" and "politicians out of the paper" as "a plot to take over the world" (88). While

Joyce continues to draw attention to Angie's place "in the remedial class the last two years," Marlene attributes Angie's lack of success to Joyce "run[ning] her down too much" (88, 97). In blaming Joyce for Angie's temperament and lesser academic achievement, Marlene transfers responsibility for Angie's fate from the structure of society—the capitalist system that often imperils those lacking the opportunities, privileges, or good fortune to succeed—to Joyce, and by extension, the working class Joyce represents. Professing that she "believe[s] in the individual" enables Marlene to hold fast to the capitalist fantasy that self-determination alone determines one's fate, a fantasy that, in turn, allows her to continue perpetuating the aggressive and exploitative practices of capitalism even as it destroys her relationship to her sister and child (*Top Girls* 95). In this way, then, Marlene betrays an unwillingness to evaluate the role of societal systems and institutions in limiting the potential of people to realize prosperity.

Even when Marlene begins to recognize that much of Angie's sense of fear, underscored through her simple repetition of the phrase "[f]rightening" at the final scene's end, as well as her lack of academic qualifications, do not stem from Joyce, she does not question the capitalist system (98, 75-6). Rather than interpret Angie's inability to find fulfilling work as a failure of the capitalism, Marlene perceives Angie's lack of academic success and professional potential as a failing of Angie as a person, a view she alludes to by referring to Angie as "a bit thick [...] a bit funny" (*Top Girls* 77). Indeed, the transformation of Marlene's gift to Angie, a dress, from a perfect fit to a prohibitively small garment symbolizes intrasexual oppression, for as Marlene's perception of Angie shifts from one of hopeful appraisal to that of dismissive pessimism, the dress morphs into a restrictive article of clothing, Angie's physical confinement mirroring her professional and emotional oppression under capitalism (Aston 41). However, instead of reevaluating the validity of capitalism, then, Marlene questions Angie's value, going so far as to



declare that Angie “[is] not going to make it” (77). Even as Marlene faces oppression due to her gender in the workplace, as demonstrated by Mrs. Kidd’s assessment of Marlene’s position as a business woman as “not natural,” she exacerbates the plight of others, and in effect, “functions as an oppressive ‘block’ to the desires and aspirations of other women,” including Angie (70, Aston 41). By acting within, rather than reacting against, oppressive patriarchal and capitalist systems, women like Marlene who adhere to “bourgeois feminism” exacerbate, rather than alleviate, the injustice and suffering faced by others (Aston 38). Through representing the conflict between the capitalist and working classes through a woman’s shifting relationship to her biological child and emphasizing the ways in which the mother’s loyalty to capitalism ultimately displaces her sense of love and responsibility for her child, Churchill advances her feminist critique of capitalism.

In her plays, then, Churchill offers audiences feminist critiques of society, critiques shaped by her understanding of English nationalism in its past and present permutations; her socialist politics; and her disavowal of many of the features of the theatre of John Osborne and the angry young men. However, in rejecting Osborne, Churchill also appears to have rejected the seventeenth-century playwrights whom the angry young men emulated: those who wrote the Restoration comedies. More specifically, through rejecting the realism—the commitment to depicting the life of everyday Englishmen in all its grimy sense of disrepair and despair—associated with the angry young men scene in favor of phantasmagoria and absurdist theatre, Churchill distinguishes herself from Osborne and his cohort (Rebellato 98). In doing so, Churchill also distanced herself from Behn. Admittedly, Behn associated with many playwrights, such as “Rochester, Otway, Dryden, Lee, Buckhurst, and Sedley,” who wrote plays elevating male-centered libertinism at the expense of female autonomy and dignity, plays Churchill, by

virtue of her commitment to second-wave feminism, likely found highly objectionable (“Rereading Aphra Behn” 2). Furthermore, Churchill’s deep disapproval of Tory politics, particularly the politics of Margaret Thatcher, implies that she likely viewed those with ardent Tory loyalties, such as Behn, with at best, disinterest, at worst, distrust or outright contempt. Rather than rely on Behn, Churchill turns to the influence of her contemporaries, particularly second-wave feminists, Marxists, and members of the Joint Stock Theatre Company. Even as Churchill appeared to advocate for a broad-reaching form of feminism, then, she refused to reach back into history and claim a potential proto-feminist predecessor. Though understandable given Churchill’s political sensibilities, in light of her commitment to elevating the work of women, including the women of the seventeenth century, her failure to refer to Behn remains conspicuous.

In neglecting, or perhaps refusing, to directly reference Behn as an influence on her work, Churchill displays her commitment to disavowing classist politics, politics she associates with Toryism, both past and present. Nevertheless, considering Behn alongside Churchill proves a fruitful exercise, as it elucidates the ways in which the varied intersections of identities and experiences may lead two people, even those who hold many of the same core beliefs, to distinguish themselves through methodology, motive, and overall objective. Indeed, though their plays indicate that both Behn and Churchill remained committed to women’s safety, autonomy, and creative potential, each held her own view regarding the appropriate manner in which women ought to achieve these goals. While in many ways, Behn challenged normative gender roles for her time, her pragmatic assessment of the extensive dangers—physical and fiscal—women face alongside the dearth of opportunities for satisfaction—professionally, politically, and romantically—led her to advocate for reasonable adaptations to seventeenth-century

England's patriarchy, adaptations that, even in Behn's plays, appeared less-than-ideal. In contrast, the popularization of second-wave feminism and continued popularity of socialism enabled Churchill to dream of far-reaching reforms, to advocate for social justice in the broadest sense: complete overhaul of the dominant systems, a fantasy she indulges in portraying in Act Two of *Cloud Nine*. Certainly, then, in many ways, one might attribute the differences between these playwrights to differences in the time of their writing.

Yet this explanation fails to fully account for the way in which Churchill appears to adapt and adopt the views of other seventeenth-century women, most notably, the women depicted in *Light Shining in Buckinghamshire*. Admittedly, the communitarian values espoused by these Puritan thinkers aligns more neatly with Churchill's socialism than Behn's Toryism.

Furthermore, in light of Churchill's critical portrayal of Marlene—a woman who rose to the top of the corporate ladder as an individual, with little regard for other women, including the women in her family—it seems likely that she regards Behn, another “top girl” of sorts, with suspicion, if not outright contempt. Still, as evidenced by the continued popularity of the Aphra Myth, other feminist scholars prove eager to accept Behn as a seventeenth-century feminist sister. How, then, should we proceed? In light of the current political climate surrounding women's issues, what types of feminisms and feminists ought we accept? At the moment, is there room in the movement for Behns *and* for Churchills, for those trying to advocate for change along a narrow set of rights or securities, and those seeking broad-ranging institutional reforms? In compromising, do we give up too much?

Answering these questions requires more time and space than this thesis allows. However, in order to begin considering these concerns, one might refer back to Act One of *Top Girls*. In selecting the women for Marlene's dinner—Churchill's theatrical response to Judy

Chicago's *The Dinner Party*—Churchill chose women like Pope Joan and Isabella Bird, women who faced great adversity, but also, at least for a time, enjoyed great privilege, privilege that did not readily extend to many other women, if to any other women. For this reason, it seems likely that, even if one strives to abide by Churchill's general example, a place ought to exist for Behn at the proverbial theatrical and feminist table. Despite Churchill's lack of direct acknowledgment, Behn paid Churchill's way, at least in part, through her prolific, proto-feminist playwriting. Within the feminist movement, space ought to exist for pragmatism and idealism, for the safeguarding of individual rights and liberties alongside the promotion of communal welfare and future prosperity. To paraphrase Virginia Woolf, Aphra Behn earned all women, including Churchill, the right to speak their minds. In gratitude, in lieu of flowers laid at Behn's grave, modern women might consider granting Behn a seat alongside accepted twentieth-century feminist writers, perhaps right next to Churchill.

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