

Two Sides of the Same Coin:

A Comparison of Caryl Churchill's
Top Girls and Charlotte Keatley's
My Mother Said I Never Should

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INTRODUCTION

Caryl Churchill was born in 1938, educated at Oxford, and wrote several radio plays before moving to the stage in 1972 with *Owners*. Since then she has continued to write mainly for the stage and has become the best known, and certainly most successful, contemporary British female playwright.

Charlotte Keatley was born in 1960, received a B.A. from the University of Manchester, an M.A. from Leeds University and has recently been a visiting fellow at Cambridge. She spent two years as a theatre critic, but has mainly lived from a combination of playwriting and the dole. Her work includes radio; a community play in Warrington, *The Legend of Padgate*, which included a cast of eighty; fifty-two speaking parts and thirty musicians, most of whom had never worked in theatre before, and which took place in two venues, between which the audience was bussed; and work with a performance art group called Visible Difference, as well as *My Mother Said I Never Should*. She is not mentioned in any critical works on women playwrights or feminist drama.

Both of these women are concerned with the position of women in society and their representation in the theatre, but they manifest this concern in their work in vastly different ways. Churchill is a 'materialist playwright', who builds her plays 'upon detailed research into the situations they represent', she draws attention to the connections between capitalist patriarchal society's 'governing ideologies and actual material conditions'¹. Keatley is a 'feminist playwright deliberately reclaiming areas of lives omitted'², who believes that 'the most powerful area of theatre [is] that its not only a live experience, but a completely three-D sensory experience, one in which things go up your spine and make your stomach turn over. . . and you see things which you can't explain in words, you feel things which you can't explain'³.

These differences are clearly outlined by the plays, *Top Girls* and *My Mother Said I Never Should*. They have many similarities, including productions around the world in the diverse cultures of countries such as Germany, Japan, and the United States. Yet their use of the elements particular to theatre puts them almost at opposite ends of the dramaturgical spectrum.

Both plays have an all-woman cast who play multiple roles, contain non-naturalistic scenes, deviate from linear narrative structure, deal with mother/daughter relationships and the ideal of motherhood itself, tell the story of a woman who gives up her child to her sister/mother to raise in order to further herself, and therefore deal with the dilemma women face of career versus family, and both plays end with an ambiguous tone toward the progress of women in the future. Here is where the similarities end, however; the actual political messages and the theatrical ways in which they are deployed contrast greatly.

CORPUS

Both plays begin with a fantasy scene, *Top Girls* with the famous dinner party in which five women out of history meet with Marlene to celebrate her promotion to Managing Director of the Top Girls Employment Agency, and *My Mother Said I Never Should* with the first of several scenes in which four women meet as children in a timeless space, '*The Wasteground, a place where girls come to play*'.¹ Each fantasy scene, however, performs a different function for each respective play.

In the 1991 Royal Court production, the first act of *Top Girls* moves at a rapid pace, which has the effect of training the audience through the technique of overlapping dialogue and an ever-changing visual tableau. Actress Deborah Findlay believes that it 'sets you up and opens you up', the audience is forced to 'listen very hard and in a way it prepares you for the rest of the evening'². In the best circumstances, it functions to make the audience more receptive to the nuances of the rest of the play, both sociological; 'the historical fantasy encourages us to look (or more pertinently with Caryl Churchill's plays, *listen*) deeply, and see the patterns of chance and, hopefully, choice that are shaping these lives'³, and political; 'certain lines are drawn so that the subsequent political discourse will be clear and understandable'⁴. (These aspects will be discussed in more detail later.) Some reviewers of the 1982 production, however, found the act 'superfluous', from 'a strictly mechanical point of view',⁵ and 'forgettable'⁶, although enjoyable.

In *My Mother Said I Never Should*, the first scene performs a similar function, signalling to the audience that this is not a traditional linear narrative. The setting is a timeless wasteground and the opening image is of four women, of varying ages from apparently sixteen to sixty, acting as children, singing a nursery rhyme which 'hints at something dark and sexual and not nice'⁷. The audience is alerted to the distortions of time and identity that will take place throughout the evening.

In this play, however, the fantasy scenes are continued throughout, and they add depth to the naturalistic scenes against which these "child scenes" are juxtaposed, as well as contributing to the psychological portrait of the characters and tracing out certain themes in the play.

The first scene foreshadows many elements of the play, including facts about the characters as well as the nature of some of the relationships. Jackie says of Doris, 'She's got no Daddy'(p. 2), and later in the play it is revealed that Doris 'grew up in what she calls – reduced circumstances . . . Her mother wasn't married'(p. 30). In this first child scene, Rosie and Jackie form a subgroup; 'JACKIE. Just ours then. (*Conspiratorial.*) They're not in our gang. Also they don't count because they're babies'(p. 1), indicating the special relationship that Jackie and Rosie come to share; 'MARGARET. . . . She still thinks you're big sister, that's why it's so magical to her'(p. 44), and the wider relationship that the two post-sixties generations share in contrast to their parents and grand-parents. Although 'Let's kill our Mummy'(p. 1) is not 'Jackie's singular idea, she just dares to say it', the fact that she does adds to one of the themes of the play, that each generation moves beyond the last. This sentiment is an attempt to 'deal with that inheritance from your mother and grandmother'⁸, and Jackie is the one who makes the first step in openly admitting that hatred that everyone feels for their mother at some time or another.

The other child scenes also serve to link the naturalistic scenes. In Act I, Scene 3, Rosie and Doris as children play 'Doctors and Nurses' and discuss having children; 'DORIS. PUSH! It's like doing a big poo. Then the babby comes out,' (p. 9). In the next scene, which is in "real time", Margaret confronts Jackie about her sexual activities, 'You don't know what might happen. . . . You can get pregnant the first time, you know' (p. 10). Thus the child scene underlines the conflict in Scene 4 with the traditional values the children adopt:

DORIS (*contemplates*). Let's be babbies tomorrow.

ROSIE. No, it's weddings tomorrow.

DORIS. Why?

ROSIE. You have to get married first. (p. 9)

In Act I, Scene 8, Rosie sings the nursery rhyme, 'Georgey Porgy', and Jackie announces that she kissed a boy, she thinks she's in love because he made her cry, and 'Daddy makes Mummy cry and she says it's because she loves him' (p. 18). In the preceding scene, twenty-year-old Margaret informs her mother that she's going to marry Ken; it is to this set of parents that Jackie refers in Scene 8, and later in the play this marriage breaks up. Scene 9 is a telephone call between Margaret and Doris, following the action in Scene 5, in which Jackie gives Rosie to Margaret. The fact that Rosie's father abandons the two comes out later in the play, but is here foreshadowed by Jackie and Rosie's child scene. This scene also highlights the bond between Jackie and Rosie, their blood-vow a metaphor for their familial relationship while the ironies inherent in Rosie's 'You can't ever lie to me now' (p. 19) emphasize the underlying deception in their relationship.

The next child scene is in Act III and is more immediately relevant to the scene following it. In Scene 3, Jackie, Doris and Rosie continue the voodoo from Act I, Scene 1, Jackie leading once again, speaking the spell to kill the mother. At the end of this scene, Doris and Rosie run off, frightened. Jackie yells after them, 'She'll be dead when you get there'. Then '*Cats wail. The shadowy figure of Margaret appears upstage*', spooky music, and Jackie cries out, 'I didn't mean to do it! Don't leave me all alone!' (p. 46) and runs off. Unreal in a different way from the child scenes, the next scene begins with Margaret in a hospital gown, hallucinating as she dies. The juxtaposition of these scenes is extremely effective. The spooky atmosphere of the preceding child scene adds to Margaret's disorientation. During her speech, she repeats or echoes several lines from earlier in the play combined with memories of her austere childhood:

Why, here we are on its iron legs, the white enamel bath. . . . Father's made his fortune! But we still have to save hot water . . . Everything is sacrifice in this house. . . . When I have babies, they will be called Sugar and Spice and all things nice. . . . Mother? . . . Mummy. . . . What happens when you die? (p. 46-47)

Jackie, as a child, comments on the bath when she visits Doris; 'Why has your bath got feet?' (p. 6); in Act I Scene 1, after the girls sing the rhyme, Rosie and Margaret coax Doris into answering the question, 'What are little girls made of?' (p. 1); and most chillingly, when Doris is putting Margaret to bed under the piano during World War II, Margaret asks her, 'what happens when you die?' (p. 6), a question which remains unanswered.

The last child scene in the play is between Margaret and Jackie, and is placed just after Rosie confronts Jackie with the knowledge that Jackie is her real mother, which she discovers from her birth certificate after Margaret's death. In this scene, Margaret and Jackie play 'King of the Golden River', a child's game which involves crossing a line. Keatley believes that 'singing rhymes about crossing a line are about death'⁹, and accordingly, Jackie says to Margaret, 'I've been to the boy's den. . . . They wanted me to kill you'. Margaret answers, 'It didn't work. JACKIE. Sure? MARGARET. Yes.' Then Margaret holds out her hand to Jackie and says, 'You can come with me. To my secret secret hide'(p. 49). This scene was cut in the 1989 Royal Court production. 'Mike Attenborough felt that that was trying to make a happy ending out of something which is irreconcilable', but

it completes the story in a very important way, it's not about a happy ending. Margaret is dead, but it's about the link you have to your mother which is always there even if you move to the other side of the world, even if you hate her. . . . And it's also about a kind of forgiveness, not in a plot sense, but as you get older and you're aware of all those influences from your family and your past, I think we get less angry and antagonistic, more aware of all the contradictions in their lives, too, and all the messes and compromises we go through, and nothing is as simple as blaming your mother or hating her.¹⁰

A few London reviewers found the spectacle of grown women acting as children 'unnecessary'¹¹, 'reducing the audience to a state of collective embarrassment . . . most notably when the great-grandmother is required to play a girl of five, indulging in a game of doctors and nurses with a sanitary towel on her head'¹², 'gimmicky and melodramatic'¹³, or simply 'embarrassing'¹⁴. Keatley dismisses these as coming from 'a certain kind of white middle-aged male critic . . . a minority . . . they're people who are anxious when they see things they can't immediately analyze or understand, they rarely spend the time to think why this is happening'¹⁵. By having the same actresses play the child scenes as the adult scenes, 'you triple the power. . . .you see an old face doing young things' and 'actually, the older the woman is, the more delightful it is to watch'¹⁶.

The child scenes also have the effect of adding depth to each character. In these scenes, different aspects of them which become hidden under the assumed adult persona are explored. As children, the women are 'more true . . . to what they are'¹⁷, 'true to that child, the impulses you have there, a lot of which are discomfiting, fears and hopes and appetites which we suppress later on'. One of the conditions of becoming an adult for women is the loss of access to physical aggression which men seem to maintain all their lives. Its substitute is what Keatley calls 'invisible violence', the 'subtext, cruelty that women use, little words that are like daggers, and pauses and looks and silences . . . that's a subversion of the same very much more physical, louder expression that we have as children, which is sort of crushed down in the process of making us good girls'. Keatley wanted to show her characters 'before they became good girls'¹⁸. Rosie and Jackie in particular, seem much more violent and aggressive in their child scenes. They, in contrast to child-Margaret, 'I don't like blood . . . I'll be sick'(p. 1-2), are not afraid of messiness and blood. Rosie in real time is much more like her child-self. This may have to do with the fact that in real time she is never older than sixteen, but it is more likely an illustration of the progress that women have made, pointing to the fact that women have more access to their true selves now and are not as constructed by patriarchal society as in the earlier part of the century. As Rosie says, 'My outside's the same as my inside. That's why when I talk Mum thinks I'm being

rude'(p. 33).

In *My Mother Said*, the fantasy scenes not only prepare the audience for the kind of play they are about to see, they reinforce certain themes and elements from the rest of the play, strengthening the net of echoes that the structure of this play produces.

Several themes are common to both plays. one is that of extraordinary versus ordinary women. In *Top Girls*, the opening act presents a group of exceptional women from history, yet it questions the admirability of their achievements. None of the women in *My Mother Said* are extraordinary, but that is one of the strengths of the play; it puts on stage the ordinary lives of ordinary women. While *Top Girls*'s lack of in-depth characterization makes its characters universal, it is just the tangibility of the women in *My Mother Said* that gives it that same quality.

In *Top Girls*, the women plucked out of history at first glance seem to have accomplished much, and Marlene toasts them on 'the way we changed our lives and our extraordinary achievements'¹⁹. Isabella Bird, a nineteenth-century traveller who fell ill whenever she had to remain in one place for long; Lady Nijo, a thirteenth-century Japanese courtesan who walked through Japan as a Buddhist nun; Dull Gret, who in Brueghel's painting leads a crowd of women into hell to fight the devils; Pope Joan, who disguised herself as a man and became Pope; and Patient Griselda, the obedient wife whose story is told in 'The Clerk's Tale' of Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales*, form the party in Marlene's dream²⁰. As the evening wears on and their stories are told, however, it is revealed that they have one thing in common; they have accomplished much, but only by making deep concessions to their individual phallogocentric societies. The epitome of this pattern is Patient Griselda, who allowed her husband to take away her children because, 'I always knew I would do what he said'(p. 23), and the exception is Dull Gret, who fights back to 'pay the bastards out'(p. 23).

Although there is the argument that 'by attempting to equate Marlene's promotion at work with the extreme circumstances overcome by the other five guests, Churchill renders Marlene's achievement petty and ludicrous'²¹, this really acts to put it in perspective. This scene questions the nature of achievement, which is then confirmed in reference to Mrs Thatcher by Joyce in Act III, 'What good's first woman if it's her? I suppose you'd have liked Hitler if he was a woman. Ms. Hitler. Got a lot done, Hitlerina'(p. 84).

It was Churchill's intention to present the audience with an image and then deconstruct it through the rest of the play:

I wanted it to set off, with all those historical women celebrating Marlene's achievement, to look as if it were going to be a celebration of women achieving things, and then to put the other perspective on it, to show that just to achieve the same things that men had achieved in a capitalist society wouldn't be a good object.²²

In this light, Marlene's success, attained by using and abandoning her family and stepping on her colleagues at work, just as generations of men have done, is seen not as a step up for women in general but a clear case of what women should not be aiming for. Indeed in this play, as observed by Mel Gussow of the *New York Times*, 'none of the heroines is really heroic'²³.

The women in *My Mother Said* are 'drawn from about fifty women'²⁴ from the North

of England whose 'lives are very much compromised' but are nevertheless 'ordinary women'. Keatley 'wanted to portray these kinds of lives and say these are important in a work, just as much'²⁵ as the extraordinary women in feminist drama, whose lives have been dragged up and reclaimed from his-story. In many of these cases, these women have been drawn so that they are shown to 'grapple with and attempt to reorder the ordinary activities of everyday life'²⁶. Yet much as the Irish poet Eavan Boland brings to the fore the details of the lives of ordinary women, Keatley's play touches on the issues confronting the average British woman of this century, who is not well-versed in feminist tracts, yet deals with the rewards and consequences of the feminist movement.

Jackie and Margaret specifically are caught up in the effects of the feminist movement; Jackie believes the propaganda that women can do everything at once, and finds that she cannot cope, a failure which haunts her, 'It doesn't matter how much you succeed afterwards, if you've failed once'(p. 48). Margaret believes that 'women did so much during the war: there's nothing to stop us now'(p. 17). This belief costs her a husband and a child.

In *Top Girls*, Caryl Churchill plays with the term "sisterhood". The first act seems to present a picture of feminist sisterhood through the ages, in Keyssar's words, 'a dramatic genealogy of Marlene's historical community'²⁷. Marlene and Joyce are sisters who in Act III meet again after having not seen or spoken to one another in six years. In neither of these cases, however, does "sisterhood" overcome the cultural or political difference in the women.

In Act I, the women talk about their own lives and cultures, and as their stories unfold, it becomes clear that 'the common denominator of the group, besides sex, is zealous regard for their distinctive cultural identities'²⁸. 'All the women at the dinner party are able to detect areas of intolerance and sexual tyranny in the cultures of the other women present: their blind spots are in the inequities of their own cultures'²⁹. They each find something offensive about someone else's culture, yet because of the nature of the situation, they prevent the conversation from turning into a row, often due to Marlene's diplomacy.

JOAN. It's no good being active in heresy.

ISABELLA. What heresy? She's calling the Church of England / a heresy.

JOAN. There are some very attractive / heresies.

NIJO. I had never heard of Christianity. Never / heard of it.

MARLENE. Well, I'm not a Christian. / And I'm not a Buddhist.

ISABELLA. You have heard of it?

MARLENE. We don't all have to believe the same.

ISABELLA. I knew coming to dinner with a pope we should keep off religion.

(p. 6)

Isabella's experiences as a traveller led her to the conclusion that 'the East was corrupt and vicious'(p. 6). She mentions that 'there are some barbaric practices in the east,' and Nijo takes offense: 'Barbaric?'. Isabella immediately retreats, keeping to the celebratory atmosphere, 'Among the lower classes. NIJO. I wouldn't know'(p. 18).

Lady Nijo's preoccupation with her clothes exasperates the audience as well as her companions. In the 1991 Royal Court production, Nijo seems to be the most irritating character, chattering on until she finally shows some deep feeling with:

NIJO. What I want to know is, if I'd still been at court, would I have been allowed to wear full mourning?

MARLENE. I'm sure you would.

NIJO. Why do you say that? You don't know anything about it. Would I have been allowed to wear full mourning?(p. 26)

Marlene distinguishes her culturally-conditioned ideology through her sensitivity to the other women's sexual subservience. Nijo describes how she did not know what to expect the first time she was sent to the emperor:

NIJO. . . . He sent an eight-layered gown and I sent it back. So when the time came I did nothing but cry. My thin gowns were badly ripped. . . .

MARLENE. Are you saying he raped you? . . .

NIJO. . . .No, of course not, Marlene, I belonged to him, it was what I was brought up for from a baby(p. 3).

Marlene is also disgusted by Griselda's story, and quite intoxicated by this time, lets it show; 'And at first he seemed perfectly normal? GRISELDA. Marlene, you're always so critical of him. / Of course he was normal, he was very kind' (p. 22). Exasperated, Marlene leaves. The others soon express the same kind of condemnation of Walter's activities in their silence following Griselda's line, 'It was always easy because I always knew I would do what he said'(p. 23). Isabella's next line confirms this sentiment, 'I hope you didn't have any more children'(p. 24).

Although Marlene tries to implicate the other women in her success, 'I want to drink a toast to you all', they do not see her promotion as a collective advancement; 'ISABELLA. To yourself, surely, / we're here to celebrate your success. NIJO. Yes, Marlene'(p. 12-13). In this scene, gender does not bond the women 'because it is a signifier distinctive to the ideologies which encode it'³⁰, each woman's view of her sex is conditioned by the culture and age to which she belongs.

There does exist the argument, however, that as a whole, the first scene advocates 'collective action' as 'the way forward from our present systems and structures'³¹ embodied in the form of Dull Gret. Linda Fitzsimmons notes that the interruptions to Dull Gret's long speech at the end are affirmative as opposed to the other interruptions which serve only to call attention to the speaker. Marlene tells Joan to shut up and Isabella says, 'Listen, she's been to hell'. Gret relates that she went to hell because 'I've had enough, I was mad, I hate the bastards'(p. 28). Fitzsimmons takes this to be an indication that Churchill is endorsing 'class and female solidarity'³² as the way out of the present situation. This, however, is not the main thrust of the act. Theatrically, what Gret's speech does do is prevent the party from dissolving into complete chaos. Max Stafford-Clark notes that:

the choice that the director always has to take with that scene is whether it disintegrates in chaos or with female solidarity. And I think it's a bit easy to say it concludes with female solidarity. There is a kind of anarchy that's quite painful in the end . . . people are having a good time, but at the same time they're going to have terrible hangovers the next day. So it's not as simple as arriving at a plateau of female solidarity.³³

Before and after Gret's speech, Joan rants in Latin. In the 1991 Royal Court production, she pulls a chair back upstage left and stands on it, under a spotlight. She is quoting from Lucretius's *De Rerum Natura*, on staying out of the fray:

But nothing is more delightful than to occupy the calm of an ivory tower built on the teachings of wise men; from here you can look down on others as they wander about seeking some path through life, as they strive to be clever, to out-do each other in reputation, battling night and day to get to the top of the pile with their power and wealth. What miserable minds men have! How blind their hearts are! To waste their brief span of life in darkness, in peril! Don't they see all nature needs is for life to be lived without physical pain, while the mind, freed from cares, enjoys a sense of delight?(p. 91)

This speech can be seen as addressed to the audience as well as the characters on stage. The irony is that neither understands it.

The final word, however, is had by Isabella, who recounts her last great excursion:

So off I went to visit the Berber sheikhs in full blue trousers and great brass spurs. I was the only European woman ever to have seen the Emperor of Morocco. I was seventy years old. What lengths to go to for a last chance of joy. I knew my return of vigour was only temporary, but how marvellous while it lasted.(p. 29)

This seems to advocate Marlene's belief in the individual, although the visual representation in the 1991 Royal Court production of Isabella, hands gripped on either side by Gret and Nijo, Marlene listening intently, and Griselda and the waitress looking after Joan who has just been sick, does give the impression of a group working together. As Max Stafford-Clark suggests, this act does give a mixed message, and the reviewers found it troubling, 'When the message comes out most strongly it is hemmed around with qualifications and contradictions. There is plenty for an audience to get a grip on, but no crude signals about where to place it'³⁴. This is in part, Churchill's intention, 'I quite deliberately left a hole in the play, rather than giving people a model of what they could be like. I meant the thing that is absent to have a presence in the play. . . I thought, what the hell; if people can't see the values, I don't want to spell them out'³⁵.

Another example of a sisterhood which does not quite live up to the name is the relationship between the real sisters, Marlene and Joyce. 'The sisters quarrel with the practised resignation of those who are both very close and also far apart'³⁶ In performance, there is a love between the sisters, which does not necessarily show up in the writing. Deborah Findlay points out that

you could play it as a row all the way through and it would be very boring and soulless, so given the fact that they are going to have this huge confrontation, they have several actually, throughout the scene, it's much more interesting and much more dynamic to look for the love and the relationship of the sisters between the two people, because they are very, very close, and they are both trying to connect and trying to have a good time that evening and in spite of that they fall out and that terrible thing happens and that's what's the real

dynamic. If you just get two people bickering at each other for half an hour it's hard to imagine an audience would turn up.³⁷

Although there is that love between them, they are irrevocably separated by their political beliefs. After they erupt into the political argument, with Marlene supporting Reagan and Thatcher, and Joyce referring to the inevitable overthrow of 'them'; 'So don't be round here when it happens because if someone's kicking you I'll just laugh'(p. 86), Marlene attempts to reconcile:

MARLENE. Come on, Joyce, what a night, You've got what it takes.

JOYCE. I know I have.

MARLENE. I didn't really mean all that.

JOYCE. I did.

MARLENE. But we're friends anyway.

JOYCE. I don't think so, no. . . .

MARLENE. Goodnight. Joyce –

JOYCE. No, pet. Sorry.(p. 87)

Capitalizing on Churchill's pun, Fitzsimmons writes, 'Joyce will have no truck with false sisters'³⁸. Thus in Act III, gender and even blood relationships are not strong enough to overcome the ideological differences between Marlene and Joyce.

In *My Mother Said*, there is no true sister's relationship. However, Rosie believes the Jackie is her sister and the relationship they share is in direct contrast to that of Joyce and Marlene. Because they did not grow up together, they do not share the jealousies and bitterness to the same degree that Joyce and Marlene do. Rosie does exhibit some sisterly jealousy over Jackie's painting abilities when she is eight, but for the most part this relationship is more analogous to that between Marlene and Angie, one which involves visits and presents rather than the power struggles and rules which are entailed in a mother-daughter relationship.

Doris touches on the community aspect of sisterhood when Rosie tells her that she's doing a project about her at school:

ROSIE. . . (as if from a school book.) 'Oldham families were all cotton or paper. Despite the decline in the manufacturing industries, community spirit remained strong.'

DORIS (reminiscing). You'd give a neighbour a bit of sugar, bit of soap, what they needed. When the King came, we scooped up the manure for the tomatoes. Pride costs nothing.(p. 34)

Although Doris does not mention women, Keatley asserts that 'they're actually the people that run the families . . . in practical ways . . . women in the street I've lived in most, they do all the DIY and paint their entire houses and they help each other out like this and they run the money'³⁹. The sisterhood alluded to here does exist and is not marred by ideological or cultural differences.

Both *Top Girls* and *My Mother Said* focus on the story of a woman who gives up her

child to attain a better future for herself. Although Keatley insists that 'I've really carefully balanced it. I don't think you can say it's any more one woman's story than another' and that 'people will say it's Jackie's story or Doris's according to their age and experiences and preoccupations'⁴⁰, the one that stands out is Jackie and her predicament with Rosie. There are several reasons for this. The play is structured so that the climax of the story is Rosie's discovery of her true parentage. As Michael Billington wrote, 'it is the sad consequence of this selflessness [Margaret raising Rosie] that provides the dramatic motor'⁴¹. Also the ages and appearances of the actors correlate with the time when Jackie and Rosie's situation comes to a head.

In *Top Girls*, Marlene gives Angie away before the action of the play and it is only revealed in the last scene that Angie is not her niece, but her daughter. Given the options, giving Angie up is obviously Marlene's choice, 'of course I couldn't get out of here fast enough,' but Joyce's motives for taking her are not necessarily altruistic, 'You were quick enough to take her... You couldn't have one of your own so you took mine'(p. 79). It is also revealed that Joyce had a miscarriage because she was so busy looking after Angie. To some, this 'overweights' the 'moral balance'⁴² between Joyce and Marlene.

In *My Mother Said*, the scene where Jackie gives Rosie up is one of the most powerful moments in the play. It is in this scene that the motivation for much of what Doris and Margaret, and now Jackie, do is revealed; 'MARGARET. You've got to go further than me – and Rosie too. Otherwise... what's it been worth?'(p. 15). Although Margaret accepts Rosie, the motives for her terms may be less than self-sacrificing. Margaret insists that Rosie believe that Jackie is her sister until she's sixteen. This possessive gesture may be a way for Margaret to compensate for her own lost child, 'You know, Mother, I thought I didn't want it till I lost it... DORIS. If you hadn't been so hasty to get that temping job, you would never have lost the baby'(p. 12). By inserting this scene between Margaret's confrontation with Jackie over sex and her arrival to pick up Rosie, Keatley points at the underlying reasons for Margaret's acceptance of Rosie.

Both of these plays deal with the choice modern heterosexual women are forced to make between children and family, and a career. In *Playwright's Progress*, Chambers and Prior write:

Although in a properly developed society women would rear children equally with men as well as retaining independent working lives outside the home, Churchill suggests that women as yet have little real choice except to opt for children, with all the associated problems, or to deny totally a vital part of their femaleness and humanity.⁴³

The same is true for Keatley. Although Jackie is reluctant to give Rosie away, she remains paralyzed by her action, 'Simon wanted children, I tried to believe I could start again. – Stupid – I just kept dreaming about Rosie'(p. 23). Marlene freely admits to having had two abortions, and it is actress Lesley Manville's opinion that now, nine years on from the time *Top Girls* is set, 'she would still be husbandless, "childless",' and would have continued rising in her career, 'from managing director of an employment agency she'd have gone up to somewhere bigger, more highly paid' ⁴⁴.

Women are presumed to have an unencumbered choice in these plays, 'the existential choice for women has, then, to be either to take on a private or a public role'⁴⁵. Yet it can be argued that 'the rationalization [is] of "the survival of the fittest", and this is partly where

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we find Thatcher's Britain in our contemporary theatre⁴⁶, the suggestion being that aware or not, these women are making choices informed by the structure of society around them, Marlene's by the individualist, bourgeois feminist, capitalist ideologies, and Jackie through the Protestant work ethic, that fueled on her grandfather and for which Margaret's childhood was one of sacrifice. It has been suggested that 'Marlene, too, is a victim of the hierarchy in which she operates'⁴⁷. The same is true for Jackie, the system being one which devalues motherhood and domestic work as "not real work".

Closely related to the theme of choice between career and family is that of the ideal of motherhood, and mother/daughter relationships. This is the main theme of *My Mother Said I Never Should* and is an important part of *Top Girls*.

The mothers in *Top Girls* prove to be more interested in themselves than their children, for the most part, the exceptions being Gret, Isabella, and Joyce. Joyce, however, is not a model mother. At one point she calls Angie a 'fucking rotten little cunt'(p. 36). Each of the women at the dinner party recounts how she lost her children or had them taken away from her, usually without any real resistance on her part. Griselda allows her children to be taken away, presumably to be killed, on her husband's whim. Nijo cries over the loss of her children, but she has absorbed the cultural ideology enough to say, 'It was only a girl'(p. 16). Also after the father of her last child has died, 'oddly enough I felt nothing for him [the child]'(p. 18), indicating perhaps that her children were only meaningful to her as an extension of their fathers. Pope Joan is not 'used to having a woman's body'(p. 16), and her ignorance costs both her and her child's life. Although Marlene remains silent on the subject of children, in the 1991 Royal Court production she looks suitably uncomfortable as the women talk about their children, and as the play continues, it is revealed that Marlene has willingly given up her child to make a better life for herself, and in the end she writes off that child as 'a bit thick'(p. 66).

Although Linda Fitzsimmons finds motherhood the 'central issue'⁴⁸ of the play, none of the mother/daughter relationships are fully explored. Motherhood and children is a peripheral issue in Churchill's play, a tool for the illustration of women's position and responsibilities in a patriarchal society.

The details that are presented, however, reveal a relationship fraught with frustration and emotional violence. Although Joyce continues her aforementioned sentence to Angie with, 'You can stay there and die. I'll lock the back door'(p. 37), she does have feelings for Angie. She bristles when Kit infers that Angie is 'simple'; 'She's not simple. . . She's clever in her own way'(p. 43), and in the last act she becomes furious at the possibility that Marlene might take Angie away from her. Angie, on the other hand, tells Kit that she's going to kill her mother, and after Joyce berates Angie about cleaning her room, Angie changes into a dress that Marlene gives her in Act III and tells Kit, 'I put this dress on to kill my mother'(p. 44).

Michael Swanson attributes this 'mutually-destructive mother/daughter relationship'⁴⁹ to the fact that Joyce 'has no viable role model for positive motherhood – only ineffectual and unhappily remembered parents and an overly ambitious sister'. He even suggests that what Joyce feels for Angie is not love for her, but the need for some control in her life, 'the use of her power over Angie is one of the only ways that she can feel enough to live – and the possibility of losing that power is frightening'⁵⁰.

The whole of *My Mother Said I Never Should* is about mother/daughter relationships.

It doesn't overtly question the maternal ideal, but allows the audience to see the difficulties of mastering modern motherhood, as well as witness the way in which mothers have changed over the the last century. Doris, the 'sturdy super-gran'⁵¹ is shown as being the reserved hard-working woman of the early part of this century. She and her husband, Jack, came from the working-class and by working hard Jack made his fortune. Her attitude toward Margaret is outwardly unemotional, and Margaret-as-a-child deals with this by transferring her feelings to her doll, Suky, 'Ssh Suky ssh! – No, I won't hold you. You ought to go to sleep now, by yourself. You don't need your Mummy to kiss you. You're eight years old'(p. 6). Doris has a very practical nature, a trait which she tries to impress upon Margaret. When Margaret panics because she thinks that Doris is going to throw away some piano music, Doris replies, 'Of course not. They'll go to St. Mark's Jumble', which is probably the same thing to Margaret. Then, as Margaret plays the piano 'swaying with passion, like the fat lady in the Hallé Orchestra', Doris replies 'We'll have less passion and more perseverance, please'. Finally, as Margaret plays with the bolster, pretending it's a bomb, Doris says firmly, 'It's a bolster'(p. 4).

Doris's relationship with each succeeding generation is different. In the same scene in which she has Margaret continue playing the piano partly through an air raid alert, she is shown twenty years later with Jackie, recalling the memories that have just been shown, as Jackie hides under the piano, 'seeing what it's like'. She neatly delineates the the difference between her relationship with Margaret and Margaret's relationship with Doris:

JACKIE. She's my Mummy.

DORIS. I'm her Mummy.

JACKIE. Yes but she calls you 'mother'. That's different.(p. 6)

Jackie's affection for Doris and Doris's response also show how different their relationship is, from a mother/daughter relationship; 'JACKIE hugs DORIS. DORIS *hesitates for a second, then bends and embraces JACKIE*'(p. 7).

Jackie has broken a Utility cup and Doris responds with, 'We'll go in the garden and break two jam jars presently... Everything goes in threes. If you break one thing, more is sure to follow'(p. 6). The contrast to this attitude is reinforced as Doris re-enters at the end of the scene, once again in 1941, with a cup of cocoa for Margaret, who has fallen asleep; 'Well then. you'll just have to drink it cold in the morning. Can't waste good sugar and cocoa'(p. 7).

The relationship between Rosie and Doris progresses even further. When Rosie finds out that Doris is in fact her great-grandmother she takes to calling her Doris, and even tells her she loves her, the first and last time anyone in the play speaks those words. That last scene is also the first time that anyone sits down comfortably with each other.

Although the relationships between grandmother and granddaughter are different from that of mother and daughter, we do see a change from the previous generation in the way that Margaret relates to Jackie. She is still less emotional than Jackie later proves to be, but there is a difference between her and Doris. Margaret confronts Jackie over her sexual activity and she tries to talk freely with her, 'I know I'm going to sound like an old fuddy duddy... but... It's a serious step you've taken, you've no idea-'(p. 10). However, it is too late, 'JACKIE. Well I did say I wanted to have a talk with you, actually, and you said "Tell me while we go round the garden centre", don't you remember?'(p. 10). Margaret repeats

this tactic later in the play, when the four are going through Jack and Doris's house after Jack's death. Jackie wants to talk to her about Rosie and Margaret replies, 'we can while we finish these shelves, can't we' (p. 28). Margaret and Jackie's relationship is probably the most fraught in the play, perhaps because they are caught in the first real generation gap of this century, Jackie growing up in the sixties and attempting to 'see if our theories worked' (p. 14), while Margaret still takes home cold tea to save for the next day.

Jackie's relationship with Rosie is problematic because Rosie thinks Jackie is her sister until nearly the end of the play. Jackie does, however, make a brief attempt at motherhood. 'I remember the books that came out that winter – how to succeed as a single working mother – fairytales!' (p. 48) revealing the changing societal view of women with children, which has failed to integrate childcare into the workplace and merely assigned women with the role of superwoman. Jackie and Rosie's relationship, like the grandmother/ granddaughter relationship show the contrast between the specifically mother/ daughter relationship with its power struggles, jealousies and secrets.

There is violence in the mother/daughter relationships in *My Mother Said*, as well. The most obvious indication of this is Jackie's wish in the child scenes to kill Mummy, a sentiment that is shared by the other girls but to a lesser degree. Rosie is the most cooperative and at the end of the play she says to Jackie, 'I used to hate you, only I never knew why' (p. 48).

The more subtle forms of violence must come through the production and some directors choose not to exhibit it, 'Mike Attenborough's production never went that far, his was very thorough and conscientious, but I think he couldn't bear to acknowledge how vile can be to each other'. This is one reason why Keatley feels it is tremendously important for women 'to direct and write and make theatre... all those nasty bits of us don't tend to get portrayed so much by men who almost don't want to know that's in women, it goes against what women should be'. It is possible that this is a British blindness, as Ken Olin, (of *Thirtysomething*), who directed *My Mother Said* in America, immediately picked up on the fact that 'there is a lot of darkness in these women and in them as children as well and that that must be there' ⁵².

There are no male characters on-stage in either *Top Girls* or *My Mother Said*. This is not unusual in postwar drama and often plays do not portray relationships between men and women at all; 'increasingly this has come to be referred to rather than portrayed: it is as hard to find plays by women that can deal adequately with male characters as it is to find adequate female characters in plays by male dramatists' ⁵³. However, due to the nature of these two plays, portraying male characters is not a necessity.

Some London reviewers found fault with *My Mother Said* because of its lack of men:

For reasons that are no doubt impeccably feminist, Miss Keatley has also banished all the male characters from the stage. Fathers and husbands are talked about but never seen, creating a curiously lopsided impression. It is as though she is favouring her audience with only one half of the story. ⁵⁴

It was also noted that none of the men mentioned are particularly admirable, 'the men remain an off-stage, amorphous, insensitive lot who return the loving care lavished on them by these women with indifference and disloyalty' ⁵⁵. Keatley actually thought of having one man play all the roles, but 'that would immediately give him a kind of importance over the other

characters', a distinction she did not want the male characters to have. More importantly she wanted 'to show how women are when they are alone together. . . they talk in a different way than when even one man is in the room, even a boy. So I didn't want to destroy this world by putting a male presence in it'. She responds to critiques of the behaviour of the male characters with, 'I would say that the way I portray men in *My Mother Said* or the way the men behave is not extreme at all and it's certainly not done with a vengeance. . . I'm just producing what I think are very recognizable, very frequent patterns in the generations'⁵⁶.

There are basically three important men in the play; Jack, Doris's husband; Ken, Margaret's husband; and Graham, Rosie's father. There is also Simon with whom Jackie had a relationship, but he wanted children, a request Jackie found herself unable to fulfill because of Rosie. Jack comes closest to being on-stage; we hear him mowing the lawn when Margaret comes to pick Jackie up, and Doris speaks to him. He and Ken are tangible presences, Ken waits in the car when Jackie gives Rosie to Margaret. These men each have a negative impact on the women's lives. Jack is deliberately cruel to Doris during his last illness, 'I tried so hard, even in those last few years. . . something nourishing and not difficult to chew. . . The tray pushed aside on your bed. You did that deliberately, didn't you?' (p. 38). Ken leaves Margaret, 'But Ken married a wife, not a working mother' (p. 40). And Graham is a married man who, as is often the case, promises to leave his wife when Jackie becomes pregnant, 'but I knew he wouldn't'. He also does not keep in touch with Jackie about their daughter; Jackie is uncertain as to his whereabouts when she tells Rosie about him, 'I think they live in Leeds now, I saw his name in the Guardian last year, an article about his photographs' (p. 48). These men are definitely influential in the lives of the women, and the social changes of the century can be traced through the relationships. Doris feels 'lucky' that Jack did not beat her, as her father did her mother, and although Ken eventually leaves Margaret because 'he didn't want to share me' (p. 40), she does go out to work again.

Only one London critic made a point of the fact that *Top Girls* is barren of men. Harold Atkins writes, 'various accounts of relationships with men, mostly unsatisfactory, perpetuate this clever and eccentric play, which unobtrusively presents a feminist idea that the male sex is rather in the way, but, almost accidentally, reveals that women are just as happy without them'⁵⁷. This critic, however, has fallen into the same trap as some of the characters; 'Ironically, by the exclusion of active male characters, *Top Girls* manages to escape the pitfall of sexism, that is, allowing the audience to mistake class struggle which is the basis of the dramatic plot for a "battle of the sexes"; which is exactly the mistake Marlene, Win, Nell, Mrs. Kidd, and Angie make, Joyce being exceptional'⁵⁸.

The men discussed in *Top Girls* do not fare much better than the men in *My Mother Said I Never Should*. There is Griselda's husband, Walter, 'MARLENE. I don't think Walter likes women' (p. 22) and Nijo's father, and the Emperor of Japan, the former who gave his daughter to the Emperor to be his concubine, and the latter who 'One night. . . even sent me out to a man who had been pursuing me. He lay awake on the other side of the screens and listened' (p. 11). Nijo's other lovers, Ariake and Akebono are respectively a priest and married. Joan's youthful lover dies discussing theology with her, and the father of her child is a chamberlain, who presumably does nothing as Joan is stoned to death. Isabella marries Dr. John Bishop who dies shortly thereafter, and turns down Rocky Mountain Jim because he 'was a man any woman might love but none could marry' (p. 9).

Marlene does not think much of the men she grew up with, 'What was I going to do? Marry a dairyman who'd come home pissed? / Don't you fucking this fucking that fucking

bitch... fucking tell me what to fucking do fucking'(p. 79). Indeed, the one who marries Joyce, Frank, 'was always carrying on, wasn't he? And if I wanted to go out in the evening he'd go mad, even if it was nothing, a class, I was only going to go to an evening class. So he had this girlfriend, only twenty-two poor cow, and I said go on, off you go, hoppit. I don't think he even likes her'(p. 82). Those that Marlene sees in London, 'there's fellas who like to be seen with a high-flying lady. Shows they've got something really good in their pants. But they can't take the day to day. They're waiting for me to turn into the little woman'(p. 83).

Then there is Howard Kidd, the man over whom Marlene scores her promotion at work. Howard is apparently devastated by this move and is taking it out on his wife, 'He really is a shit, Howard'(p. 59). He ends up having a heart attack, 'Lucky he didn't get the job if that's what his health's like'(p. 66).

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The men in *Top Girls* prove to be weak and unnecessary to the women, with the exception of Mrs. Kidd, who 'put him first every inch of the way'(p. 58). This depiction of men as weak but unfortunately not ineffectual serves to redress the notion that women are always "the weaker sex". In addition, the presence of men in this play would detract from the focus on the achievement of women and what that achievement means.

The use of language in *Top Girls* and *My Mother Said I Never Should* is quite distinctive. *Top Girls* contains the Churchillian trademark of overlapping speech and *My Mother Said* concentrates on the unsaid, the subtext to which Keatley refers as 'invisible violence'.

The opening act of *Top Girls* originally began as a series of monologues and 'intercutting them became the task of writing the scene'⁵⁹. Although some authors lend a significance to the juxtapositions of dialogue⁶⁰, Max Stafford-Clark insists the structure evolved through purely dramatic processes; Caryl Churchill's 'ear is really excellent. It wasn't an overlay of meaning, it was simply just the bubbling conversation of the dinner table where things overlap, so there's no particular significance about the places it overlaps'⁶¹. This technique not only adds an element of realism to the production, it could suggest '(depending on the nature of the production) the ways in which women can chatter on and on without necessarily listening to one another'⁶². The text suggests that the women do listen to each other, 'with every question and interruption being answered', but the audience who has not read the text does not know this, and they are 'left to pick out key points from this apparently absurd context'⁶³. Deborah Findlay found that the audience is not as overwhelmed as it might seem:

I don't find them so difficult now... but they were completely mind-boggling when we first did the play. They create an energy and it's amazing how people in the audience do pick up what they want to, even though you'd think it was impossible.⁶⁴

In the 1991 Court production, there are quite a few moments in which each character can be heard clearly and often things are said during these moments which have great impact. One instance of this is as Pope Joan is telling her story. The other women for the most part listen, with the occasional question, or related anecdote of their own, and when Joan blithely says 'they took me by the feet and dragged me out of town and stoned me to death'(p. 17), after the crescendo of raucous laughter and enjoyment, the silence which descends on the table is palpable.

Although Churchill's method of overlapping dialogue is distinctive and memorable,

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other linguistic aspects of her writing lend just as much to the play, but can only be brought out in a well thought-out performance. The accents and tones of speech of the "real" characters are a surprise in performance and very effective. Deborah Findlay's speech as Joyce is very flat and defiant, an effect of the fact that 'there are only four notes in the dialect of Suffolk where Joyce grew up and still lives'⁶⁵. Her intonation of certain lines in Act III adds a life to the text not inherent in a reading. She asks Marlene about the men in her life and she speaks the line, 'No one special?' (p. 83) in a teasing, affectionate way which adds a depth to their relationship as well as to the scene. Lesley Sharp's Angie is an effective portrayal of a slow adolescent, clumsy in both speech and movement, whose best line is 'I'm not [being rude], am I, Auntie? What else don't you know?' (p. 74), delivered with a touching sincerity which makes her all the more likeable.

In *My Mother Said*, Keatley concentrates on the subtext necessitated by the 'particularly English economy with the truth'⁶⁶. The best example of this is in Act II, in which all four generations weave in and out of a room in Jack and Doris's house after Jack's death, readying it for auction. With its references to the past and secrets revealed, the scene leads up to a climax, when Rosie discovers the rabbit dress Jackie kept when she gave Rosie up. Jackie walks in and says, 'Not your rabbit dress,' making it necessary for her to explain to Rosie that she bought it for her. Just at that moment Margaret enters, and seeing the faces and the babyclothes, she reacts to Rosie's playfulness, 'Guess what Mum, you'll never guess!' with 'terror'. Jackie rushes in to reassure her mother that Rosie did not find out about their deception, 'It's okay everyone. Mummy, it's okay'. Rosie, not understanding the subtext, loses her patience and explodes in frustration, yet unable to pinpoint why:

DORIS. I think I've had enough for today.

JACKIE. Yes, it's getting late, isn't it.

ROSIE. It's half past five, you wallies!

MARGARET. Rosie, don't shout.

JACKIE. Mummy, are you all right?

DORIS. I expect she's been overdoing it.

MARGARET. Rosie put those babyclothes in the bag for Oxfam.

ROSIE. Oh, Mum, don't be BORING.

JACKIE. Rosie! She's just sitting down.

ROSIE. I CAN SEE SHE'S SITTING DOWN!

DORIS. You're tired, dear.

ROSIE. I'm NOT TIRED!

JACKIE. You are!

ROSIE. Not you too!(p. 36)

In Keatley's play, the 'spaces between the words'⁶⁷ are often more important than the words themselves.

Caryl Churchill's manipulation of structure and chronological time does not begin with *Top Girls*. In *Traps*, for example, Churchill repeats moments in time, characters make different choices and relationships constantly shift back and forth with no acknowledgement.

In her preface, she describes the play as 'an impossible object, or a painting by Escher'⁶⁸. Yet her choice of structure for *Top Girls* is in some ways much more traditional and linear than the structure of *My Mother Said*.

Churchill begins with the extended fantasy, the second act moves on to scenes set the Sunday and Monday after the dinner party, and Act III is set one year earlier. This structure caused problems for some reviewers; 'there are muddles, and there are gaps where clarity could be achieved by more straight forward story-telling'⁶⁹, 'structurally, it is extremely ambitious, and I cannot help feeling that Max Stafford-Clark's direction accentuates the difficulties'⁷⁰, but overall the audience seems to understand the time jumps.

There are many resonances and ironies which are brought out through her shift of chronological time. For example, in the last act, Marlene's dismissal of Joyce's description of Angie as 'stupid, lazy and frightened'; 'you run her down too much. She'll be alright' (p. 86) rings hollow and their entire argument 'takes on an even more plaintive note, since Churchill has already shown her audience the dim prospects for Angie's future'⁷¹, in Act II, when Marlene dismisses Angie, 'She's a bit thick. She's a bit funny... She's not going to make it' (p. 66), chronologically the last line of the play. 'This disruption of chronology is intentionally unsettling in that it refuses to allow the spectator to fantasize a sentimental ending for Angie and for people like her'⁷².

The play 'moves backwards', beginning in a place of consumption (a restaurant) and moving to a place of production (kitchen); the celebration of a promotion is followed by a drunken reunion one year earlier. Thus 'the progress of... Marlene proves to be illusory, and, in the end, she is no more morally advanced than the other characters and seems unusually dependent upon the sacrifices of others'⁷³. Or as Deborah Findlay puts it,

from that great big dinner scene with the big space at the back, the last scene comes down to a small kitchen scene with just the two of us at the table. It's a sort of actual focusing down throughout the evening which I think helps us [and the audience] hold the concentration.⁷⁴

Act I and Act III do seem to mirror each other, both are thematically concerned with sisterhood, figurative and literal, and both present women who are in some ways locked into 'us and them' (p. 86). Yet in Act I, the xenophobic attitudes are held back to some degree by the amicable nature of the gathering, while in Act III the differences between Joyce and Marlene are clearly highlighted by their row.

In *My Mother Said I Never Should*, Keatley neatly juxtaposes scenes of the past and present with scenes out-of-time wherein all the characters are children together. The first act contains scenes from throughout the characters's lives and acts as an introduction, developing the psychology of the characters and showing the audience important moments of their lives. It is this act that supports Keatley's assertion that 'our experiences and our family's emotional history is all inside us simultaneously'. Keatley 'wanted the use of time to enact the process of memory'⁷⁵. Using this vision of memory, the "real time" scenes of Act I link together: Scene 2 starts with Doris putting Margaret to bed under the piano during World War II, then switches to Jackie visiting her Granny and playing under the piano in 1961, then back to 1940 at the end of the scene. Scene 3 is a child scene about sexuality and babies leading to Scene 4, in which Margaret ineffectually tries to give Jackie advice about sex. Scene 5 goes back to Jackie's visit with Doris in 1961 and it is revealed that Margaret had gone away after having

a miscarriage which leads to Scene 6, in which Jackie gives Rosie to Margaret, followed by Margaret discussing her future husband, Ken, with Doris in Scene 7 and explaining to her mother, 'I'm not going to have a family, babies and all that. Ken and I have decided...'(p. 16). Scene 8 is a child scene between Jackie and Rosie in which they make the blood vow and Scene 9 shows Margaret on the telephone with Doris after picking up Rosie, but not mentioning her. The last scene of the act shows Rosie on her eighth birthday. Jackie visits and realizes that Rosie doesn't need her. The rest of the play is chronological (with the exception of the child scenes) and the dynamic is created by the maintenance of Rosie's ignorance.

Thus, Keatley uses structure to complete the psychological portraits of her characters, calling attention to certain events in their lives which add a layer of meaning to other events, and allowing the audience to feel as if it is seeing through the eyes of all the characters as their memories are called up.

Each play discussed here presents a vision of women's lives in the specific cultural context of this century and each offers an ambiguous feeling toward the future.

For the most part, *Top Girls* offers a bleak view of the future of women, with Marlene, the image of the 'new woman'⁷⁶ who would compete with her female colleagues just as ruthlessly as any male, and not have anything to do with the 'stupid or lazy or frightened'(p. 86). The fact that nine years after it was written, Marlene is no longer an archetype, and the havoc that Thatcherism threatens to wreak on the economy in the play has become a reality makes the play even more powerful now.

Certainly Angie's fate is questionable; Lesley Sharp suggests that she will eventually commit suicide⁷⁷, and Joyce feels that 'she's one of those girls might never leave home'(p. 43). Marlene 'would have thrived in the eighties'⁷⁸, a distressing thought for a feminist liberal audience. Notwithstanding the hypothetical fate of the characters, the play itself does not encourage a positive attitude toward the future.

The last word that is spoken is Angie's 'Frightening'(p. 87), the final image that of a scared fifteen-year-old reaching out to her beloved aunt, who is sitting on a chair, merely holding Angie's hand. 'The audience is left with a sense of despair, and while this is only one of the notes sounded in *Top Girls*, it does not provide the positive inspiration that many spectators crave.'⁷⁹

In Act II, Joyce says, 'If your face fits at school, it's going to fit other places, too.'(p. 42-43). Angie does not fit. This idea is enforced by Angie's relationship with the setting. Angie is only shown to be at ease when she is outside, in the garden with Kit. Whenever she is indoors, she is clumsy and ill-at-ease.

Top Girls does however have its positive points, 'the political stance of *Top Girls*... is optimistic in that Churchill advocates change and suggests a way forward. Her optimism is slight, but all the more realistic for that, and all the more appropriate to the political climate of Britain in the 1980's'⁸⁰ It also presents hope for the future in the form of Kit, although this has its ambiguities. Kit's ambition is to become a nuclear physicist. Her preoccupation with nuclear war and 'when there's a war, where's the safest place?'(p. 38) makes this ambition a chilling one, yet it shows a sign of progress if Kit is able to covet a position which before recent years would have been considered a male-only occupation.

Kit's counterpart in *My Mother Said I Never Should* is Rosie, in that Rosie's concerns

echo Kit's: 'I worry about nuclear war, and not getting a job, and whether Mr Walsh the physics teacher fancies me'(p. 31). *My Mother Said* is, however, on the whole much more optimistic, although the ending is also ambiguous in its final message about the women.

There are several clues to indicate that Rosie has a better chance of 'going further' than the rest of her family. She is able to point out to Jackie, for instance, that she should stop saying 'I'm sorry Mummy', in such an automatic way; 'You should stop that sort of thing now, or you never will. You should hear Mum's "I'm sorry" voice on the phone to Gran.'(p. 31). In that same scene, Jackie and Doris watch Rosie practise her banner-waving through the French windows; the barrier indicating that they are trapped inside and Rosie is the only one with the capabilities for surmounting that barrier.

In the last scene Doris and Rosie are sitting in the sun at Doris's new house, the first time 'that anyone in the play sits down comfortably together and just relaxes'⁸¹. Their relationship is playful and affectionate. The last view of Rosie is of her alone on stage, having just solved the Solitaire game, a moment which seems to put her forward as the one to succeed in attaining what she wants. The very last image of the play, however, is of Doris, aged 23, telling her mother (the audience) about her proposal of marriage. Her last lines, 'Oh, Mother, I'm so happy, so happy! I suppose really and truly, this is the beginning of my life!'(p. 53), are ironic and also slightly tragic, given what the audience knows about her life with Jack. It can also imply that her life with Rosie is the start of a new life, or, conversely, that she has just died, given that she does not answer when Rosie calls.

In performance, the two plays use the visual aspects on theatre in different ways; *Top Girls* in a rather traditional way and *My Mother Said* in a more open way, utilizing all the elements to their potential.

The sets for the 1991 Court production of *Top Girls* are very traditional, fourth wall sets. The restaurant consists of the table and chairs downstage with a large space behind it and three walls. The office maintains these walls and has three platforms intersecting in a T-shape on which the desks are set, with all the office paraphernalia in red and white. The interviews take place downstage with chairs and a bulletin board positioned so as to differentiate it from the rest of the office. The scenes at Joyce's house are facilitated by the outside wall of the house being lowered upstage for the garden, and the inside lowered slightly downstage, cluttered with kitchen paraphernalia.

In the 1989 Court production of *My Mother Said* there is no fixed set, the only objects brought on stage are necessary. The most ingenious use of an object occurs between Scenes 6 and 7 in Act I, during which Margaret holds a bundle that is supposed to be a baby, which she then shakes out into a sheet for the next scene in which she folds washing with Doris.

The first act of *Top Girls* presents a variety of women clothed according to their times and cultures. In the 1991 Court production, each woman is framed in the doorway of the restaurant in the back wall before she enters, allowing her appearance to make an impact upon the audience, who become 'aware, perhaps only dimly, of the process of history the costumes represent'⁸¹.

The costumes in the latter two-thirds of the play serve as socio-economic signifiers for the characters. Marlene's clothes are chic and expensive, Joyce and Angie's old, worn and out-of-date.

Clothes, like all other objects in *My Mother Said*, have the potential to become actants.

When Rosie holds out her rabbit dress in Act II, it 'becomes like a knife'⁸². The 1920's dress pulled out in Act II is what Doris wears at the very end, and her refusal to acknowledge it in Act II adds an ironic aspect to her joy at the end.

An important area of difference between the two playwrights is their attitude toward their audiences. Caryl Churchill follows the Brechtian tradition of alienation to force participation. Charlotte Keatley's attitude is virtually the opposite, 'I don't think a play is complete until it's reached inside each member of the audience'⁸³.

Top Girls employs a number of techniques designed to distance the audience from the characters. One of these is the doubling of characters, which does not allow the audience to identify with any character played by an actress who is doubling. The first act, with its impossible premise that all these women could meet for dinner and the rapid overlapping dialogue forces the audience 'to struggle to understand at a deeper level than the apparently bizarre reality being presented'⁸⁴.

This opening scene also allows for a wide scope in interpretation, a condition which can backfire on the author. Churchill tells of a production in Cologne in which 'the women characters were played as miserable and quarrelsome and competitive at the dinner, and the women at the office were neurotic and incapable. The waitress slunk about in a cat suit like a bunnygirl and Win changed her clothes on stage in the office. It just turned into a complete travesty of what it was supposed to be'⁸⁵.

Churchill's refusal to spell out the values in her play can also lead to misinterpretation. In Greece, 'where fewer women go out to work, the attitude from some men seeing it was, apparently that the women in the play who'd gone out to work weren't very nice, weren't happy, and they abandoned their children. They felt the play was obviously saying women *shouldn't* go out to work'⁸⁶.

Keatley's attitude toward the theatre is that it 'should never exclude anyone', To her, 'it's incredibly complicated the way theatre works on people; it works on so many levels and the ones that we can't just string out in words are the areas I find most exciting.'⁸⁷.

The way in which *My Mother Said* is structured works to allow the audience into the deepest parts of the characters's memories and probably some of their own. Charlotte Keatley tells of a time when she went to see the play and a man in front of her began sobbing during Doris's monologue to Jack in their old house, 'I said, "Did something happen?" and he said, "No, it's the play"' ⁸⁸.

Both these plays can be considered feminist, yet their methods and political stances are vastly different.

Caryl Churchill's play tells its story through a socialist-feminist perspective, one which addresses both patriarchy and capitalism as oppressive ideologies. Churchill wrote the play in response to the women who believe that simply having 'a woman vice-president for Coca-Cola' is a great improvement for women. At the same time, Thatcher had just been elected, 'so I was thinking, "What does achievement mean for a woman in a society whose values might be quite unpleasant?"' ⁸⁹.

Top Girls has been cited as advocating anything from radical feminism to conservatism (as in Greece). These many interpretations are possible because the play does not advocate any one stance but asks the audience to question their values and preconceptions.

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Churchill deliberately does not tell her audience what to think so that they will see the questions and think through the answers for themselves. In order to facilitate this, she keeps the audience at a distance from the character's psychology, serving to highlight their socio-economic status. Thus, in a way, her characters become archetypes, in the best of circumstances allowing the audience to see the social structures inherent in the formation of these lives. However, in order to work, 'the play demands a degree of rapport or commitment between the audience and the subject'⁹⁰, allowing for the possibility that the only audience who will get the intended message will be "converted" already.

According to Charlotte Keatley, *My Mother Said I Never Should* was a 'needed play':

I wrote this play because I didn't know of any plays that really took on the mother/daughter relationship, put it center-stage and put these, what you call ordinary lives center-stage and said look, let's look at these, these are very complicated and they matter and they're changing and they're under pressure, these relationships. And although it's almost private, what goes on between these four women when men and everyone else is away, I see it as a big political play because the behaviour of mothers in each generation reflects a nation more than the decisions of governments.⁹¹

My Mother Said I Never Should is feminist in that it provides a good play that focuses on mother/daughter relationships, written by a woman, and it also provides an overview of the history of feminism in this century in the way it affected ordinary people. The four adult characters dramatize the different stages of women's lives through the years, as the choices and consequences of those choices widened. The children scenes as well present a picture of the different images of women of this century. The four generations meet at roughly equivalent stages en route to absorbing the societal concept of womanhood particular to their respective historical periods. Each generation presents the idea of

what is a woman, a mother, a wife. From the moment you're born, you're taught how to be that, aren't you, and you absorb the current image, whatever it is, that as a woman you should be a nice wife with a neat waist who makes scones, or a power-dressed woman who becomes a managing director, whatever it is. And of course as soon as you've got there and achieved that, they've changed the rules and changed the image.⁹²

To Keatley, feminism is about the equality of women. One area in which she can contribute to an equality is in playwrighting, by deliberately setting out to write about things which have not yet been dealt with.

Keatley's label of feminist is 'like a memo'. . . I [say] so at a meeting or in a place where I feel it is necessary to remind people that women still suffer from inequalities'⁹³. But first and foremost, Keatley is a playwright. She feels that women playwrights need to start writing 'more sophisticated and subtle scripts' because playwrighting 'is an art form as well' as a forum for sociological and political issues to be dramatized.

CONCLUSION

My Mother Said I Never Should by Charlotte Keatley and *Top Girls* by Caryl Churchill embody two separate directions in feminist theatre. These two plays have much in common, but through their manipulations of the tools of the theatre, the two women create two distinct visions of the feminist play.

Each playwright utilizes fantasy scenes, both serving to prepare the audience in some way for the play to come, but those in *My Mother Said* go further than that, also linking naturalistic scenes, adding depth to the psychological portrait of the characters and highlighting themes and elements of the play.

Certain themes are evoked in both plays; extraordinary versus ordinary women, the concept of "sisterhood", the choice between a family and a career, and motherhood. The extraordinary appearance and demeanor of the women in *Top Girls* are used to blind the audience to the nature of their achievements, which when questioned, put Marlene's success into perspective. The women in *My Mother Said* are ordinary and in a different way this makes the audience reassess their conception, that of what should be put on stage.

Top Girls deconstructs the concept of "sisterhood", toying with the double-meaning invoked by feminism's use of the term. The women in Act I, however much Marlene would like to believe, are not united by their gender because they are 'locked in separate discourses'¹ by their culturally-conditioned ideologies, and Marlene and Joyce are separated by their political ideologies. *My Mother Said I Never Should* maintains the literal meaning of sisterhood and uses a false one to highlight the differences between mother/daughter relationships and other familial relationships.

Both plays deal with the choice between career and family that women are forced to make and neither paints a positive picture. Both endorse the idea that women's choices are informed by the structure of society around them, and *Top Girls* suggests that the society must be changed.

Different aspects of motherhood are revealed in the two plays. *Top Girls* presents women who have abandoned their children to the caprices of patriarchy. *My Mother Said* charts the intimacies of the mother/daughter relationship and records its changes over the century.

Neither play has a male character on stage and in neither are they necessary. In *Top Girls*, the subject is the competition between women and women, and men would only cloud the issue. In *My Mother Said*, Keatley wanted to explore the nuances of the mother/daughter relationship without the presence of men.

The language of the plays is distinctive. Churchill's overlapping dialogue serves to distance the audience and prepare the ear. Keatley's use of language concentrates on the space between the words.

Both dramatists use a structure that deviates from the traditional linear narrative, but Keatley's intercutting of scenes to produce a memory effect generates many more layers of meaning than Churchill's.

Both plays are ambiguous toward the future. Because of her ambition to become a

nuclear physicist, Kit is *Top Girls*'s only positive character. Yet there is an ambiguity involved because of the reasons why she wishes to become a nuclear physicist. In *My Mother Said*, all the women move on a step further than the previous generation, albeit not entirely smoothly. Rosie's seems to have the most chance to get what she wants in life, but the audience's optimism is quelled by Doris's monologue, which with its hopes of sixty years past which have been dashed through the course of the play, lends a certain irony to Rosie's confidence.

The set for *Top Girls* is extremely traditional and cumbersome. The set changes are done to music with a semi-blackout but are disruptive nonetheless. *My Mother Said* has no fixed set, and the fluidity with which the scenes move adds to the development of the play as an illustration of memory. The costumes for *Top Girls* serve as socio-cultural-economic signifiers of the characters. The clothes in *My Mother Said* can serve as actants, as can any of the other objects in the play.

The playwrights differ sharply in their attitude toward the audience. Put simply, Churchill wishes to make hers think, and Keatley wishes to make hers feel.

The feminisms which the playwright's espouse also differ. Churchill comes from a socialist-feminist point of view, and Keatley's is less defined, more open to doing what needs to be done, rather than defining terms.

In her review of *My Mother Said*, Lyn Gardner wrote:

I suspect that this is a landmark play. The theatrical equivalent of breaking the four minute mile: like Caryl Churchill's *Top Girls* pointing the way for the next generation of women playwrights both in form and content.²

Keatley is indeed a member of the next generation of playwrights, those

who, unlike Gems and Churchill, have not had their lives shifted by the sudden jumps of the late 1960's and early 1970's. The women's movement was part of their adult horizon and they have reacted to it quite differently.³

Keatley's writing is subtler and less polemical than Churchill's. With *My Mother Said* she touches the possibility of a new kind of theatre that concentrates on the art of playwrighting while at the same time addressing feminist issues. *Top Girls* is an excellent play, ripe for analysis, and very carefully crafted, yet it does present the danger that the only audience who will receive the intended message is already sympathetic to the author's concerns.

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APPENDIX I

Interview with Charlotte Keatley, London, 12 April 1991

UK: I think it'd be easiest to start talking about the broad political issues and narrowing into the play. What does feminism mean to you?

CK: Someone asked me that yesterday and I felt completely stumped. I think it has a very personal definition now because it's become such a blurry issue. For me it's like a memo, if I say I'm a feminist, I do so at a meeting or in a place where I feel it's necessary to remind people that women still suffer from inequalities in work, in the DHSS, in the law, in playwrighting, everywhere, and that that hasn't gone away and what may to some people seem like a fashion of the sixties, seventies, early eighties, it's not, as far as I'm concerned, 'post-feminism' which I think is a completely unhelpful label, sounds like a correspondence course. I suppose in this way I do feel feminism has changed, it's no longer an aggressive force, which it obviously had to be at a certain point in the seventies to have effect, when of course the word feminism is over on hundred years old, so there have been moments where its been more aggressive, like in the last century, setting up trade unions and things and all that was a feminist movement and currently, I see it simply as a desire for equality, not that women are better or want to compete with men, those two things I feel are very important. I can understand separatism but that I wouldn't include as feminism. I think it's very important that feminism doesn't get trapped as it slightly did by the idea that women are morally superior in any way, somehow better, because I don't think we are. We've just been disadvantaged in society. To relate that to *My Mother Said I Never Should*, which in some ways is a play about the last hundred years of feminism and what it is and how women's lives have changed. Again I wanted to show women, all the hate and jealousy and aggression and cruelty and violence and confusion and misery, not a play that says look how wonderful women are and we're getting better all the time which is a gross simplification of some of these sixties, seventies agitprop plays which were the first wave of stuff by women.

UK: In what you said, how much of that is informed by socialism and class-conscious-ness?

CK: The thing that informed me most was, I grew up in London, when I was eighteen I left home to go to Manchester. To go to university but mostly because I was so attracted to the city having just visited it for the day, and I then spent the next ten years living in Manchester or Leeds, Glasgow, Edinburgh, I moved around a lot. But living in the North of England, I found a complete and utter change, a different country from the sort of average South London suburbs where I'd grown up. It's partly a class thing, I was living with people in streets which were working-class whereas I'm average British middle class and I was in a city which is generally poorer, and that class divide was accentuated through the eighties. People seemed to use language very differently. And above all women, the women I met of all ages and varied from sort of very badly off working class to sort of middle-class. It seemed to me substantially different from women I knew in London suburbs in all kinds of ways. A sense of humour seemed to be much broader, these women's lives were generally harder in the workload. They were much more traditional and I hardly ever met women who had a career outside the home. They had tea on the table and they looked after their kids and some of them would argue to me that a women's role was to do that, to have children. But at the same time, they are incredibly strong women, and I felt I was looking at this strange, this paradox, that these women's lives were completely tied and they very quickly, by the

age of twenty-five were living as their mother lived with not a lot of change. And at the same time out of a completely compromised situation they seemed to draw strength or to maintain strength and they're actually the people that run the families and in practical ways, I mean women in the street I've lived in most, they do all the DIY and paint their entire houses and they help each other out like this and they run the money. And sometimes you go around and these women are talking in their front room together in the evening, we're all talking and we're making sexy jokes or something and the husband's sitting there watching the telly, watching Anneka Rice, and they're sort of almost absent so in some ways there's more of a code about how you behave if you're female or male, but all these things were new.

And the language I think in Manchester, Leeds, across that band of the country there is something, and in Glasgow, actually, Liverpool, street language I find much more lively and more sort of condensed, poetic in the sort of shorthand people use, the words people choose to use and again especially the women, you get this extraordinary, eccentric, choice of vocabulary about a very ordinary thing and Alan Bennett and Victoria Wood have plundered the same territory and other people, too. A character like Doris is, none of these characters are drawn from any one person, they're sort of absorbed over ten years, dozens and dozens of women. The last time I walked into Boots in Manchester this complete stranger of a woman who was enormously fat, wearing pink plastic earrings, she turned to me, this is in June, she picked up a reduced-price Christmas present, and she opened it and started riffling through it in front of me and was saying 'Ooo, this'll do for a husband, wouldn't it?' And she never met me before and she's waving this comb around, instead of saying, 'Is that all in the box', she was saying, 'I want jam on this, I want jam on this', waving it round the shop and it's just wonderful. And this sort of immediate contact as well.

I think economically, fewer people have cars, especially the women. I've never had a car, for all sorts of reasons, financial mostly, because it closes you off. I was jumbled around amongst people and so what I'm trying to say is that I didn't, I've read almost no book about feminism or socialism, no books of theory. In fact I can't think of one. What I did was, you know in mathematics, you have pure and applied maths, just like I learned applied feminism and socialism. I have a sort of socialist conscience, always have had, and I suppose that one of the very basic impetuses that makes me write is injustice. I think, anger and those kind of forces make people write plays a lot, so the discrepancy in people's lives and that sort of thing. But it's very important to me that in writing plays I've learned my sense of feminism, socialism, class, society, politics, through watching it, observing it, absorbing it, because I feel we have to move on from the plays which I see as the generation before me, roughly seventies.

Well, let me break it down like this: in the sixties, you start having performance groups which are not even scripts, necessarily, very much about an issue and the seventies, those develop into touring companies like Joint Stock and things begin to be more scripted, and after that you get playwrights emerging and they're still, their motive is sort of political, though of course feminism, the 'personal is political' makes it. But someone like Caryl Churchill I think has done what is more a left-wing political one because of that, because of when you're born, and I'm very aware of that and myself being a generation younger. In the eighties we finally have playwrights emerging, do you see what I mean, and women playwrights in enormous numbers so we're writing much more sophisticated, subtle kind of scripts. I'm not saying it's a better or worse kind of theatre but I wanted *My Mother Said* not to be moralizing, not to be something slamming points in any way but to be as rounded

a picture as possible and full of all the contradictions and to be about these women I saw around me and very much admire who like I said, whose lives are very much compromised but that doesn't mean that they're negative or not worth something.

I'm always very aware of the context in which I'm writing from the moment I decide to write a play, what's needed, what has been said, what hasn't been said, and what's happening around us in society, and we had this boost to the image of career woman late seventies, early eighties, books like Shirley Conran's *Superwoman*, and *Top Girls* takes on and we had plays in which a woman was dug out of the past and celebrated as being this great explorer or whatever and it seemed to be we were getting hold of this sort of power woman was the way forward but my experience with all the women I lived around, they were what we call ordinary women, ghastly term, ordinary people, ordinary families, and the desire to marry, or have a partner, or be in love with a man, to have a child, and not necessarily have to go out there and fight for any sort of top, and I wanted to portray these kind of lives and say these are important in a work, just as much, and these are not unfeminist, it's much more complicated than that. Do you see. And to write it in such a way that it would be as beautifully written a play as I could possibly do. I spent about three years over all because, I just feel now we have women playwrights, you know, it is an art form as well, and these plays have to be written so that they will work anywhere, so that they add something to the way theatre is moving.

UK: [We did the play at college and we had to cut it to one hour.]

CK: That's interesting that you tried to cut it. I mean of course, I immediately think, My God, what are you doing to my play? but it would intrigue me to know what you found was essential. That play is like, as you've probably discovered, there are so many cross-references and as I went over and over it, rewriting it, it became like an enormous trifle, you know when you have layers of fruit and things and trying to sort of prize out a cherry and replace it with a bit of glacé something without disrupting the rest of the trifle, nightmare.

UK: Referring to the people you were talking about, the people who informed your political consciousness, what do you think theatre meant to them, do you write for them or do you write about them to show the rest of...

CK: Right, well certainly not the latter because that would be very patronizing to say look here's some real people. Unfortunately a lot of the London venues make you feel that. You go and see a play which mentions real people and everyone's very well-dressed and of that more wealthy class that can afford to go to most of the central London theatres. No, I always write for, I have a few people in mind who I'm writing for, like my neighbour in Manchester who's got three kids, or some people.

I did a community play in Warrington, I had a cast of eighty adults and children, I drew them from schools within the community over the year, wrote something, got them involved in the kind of play they wanted, and directed it and designed it. These are people who've never done theatre before. That was extremely important to me. This was one of the things I did before I wrote *My Mother Said*, no actually, I'd done a first draft by then, but what was brilliant about that was that I had to justify my theatre, every aspect, why do you rehearse, people who'd never done this before, why do we go out to the theatre. From that I formed the opinion that a piece of theatre is an entertainment which a community devises for itself using the people in the community drawing perhaps sideways on certain characters or events that have happened and you go to see it in the same area in which you live and work and

this piece of theatre will question or affirm how you live, what your values are in some way, whether it's set now or a thousand years ago. Maybe that sounds incredibly banal perhaps, but it's very important and that it should be a good night out and that a piece of theatre should never exclude anyone, which is extremely important to me so that's what I try and do when I think of people like that, these friends of mine, when I'm writing.

I prefer to try out, certainly to do a first production of plays outside London because I find a London audience very different, it costs more to go to the theatre, that eliminates certain people who travel further, it's no longer in a place where you live and work. The most important thing about the first production of *My Mother Said* at Contact Theatre in Manchester was it sold out and there were an enormous number of people who had never been to the theatre before in their lives and a friend of mine, a neighbour told me that when she went to the local surgery, in Gawton, she went to see the doctor about something with her tooth and ended up talking about *My Mother Said* and that is one of the most moving things I could possibly hear and that's why you write, or that's why I write, not for critics and things and because it seems to directly lodge in people's heads or hearts or whatever.

And I think, I wrote this play because I didn't know of any plays that really took on the mother/daughter relationship. put it centre-stage and put these, what you call ordinary lives centre-stage and said, let's look at these, these are very complicated and they matter and they're changing and they're under pressure, these relationships and although it's a sort of almost private, what goes on between these four women when the men and everyone else is away, I see it as a big political play because the behaviour of mothers in each generation reflects a nation more than the decisions of governments.

So that I'm aware, I'm sometimes aware, if I'm around at the theatre, like this play's on in Leeds playhouse at the moment and again there you have a more local audience and I've been doing some workshops again, I'm aware of the people, of all different ages, who this is affecting, this play is affecting, and I've seen this happening with other plays, by women, happens in many plays written in the eighties which tend to be done in the regions, not in London, which gives the London male critics the idea that there are no new playwrights in the eighties which is something they're fond of saying. Meanwhile, these plays are going on which are written by women who really have something to say, because women so recently started writing plays and the proof of this is that they sell out, or they do extremely well at the box offices, not, new plays aren't the economic disasters that people think. The people who say this don't often go to Liverpool or Glasgow or wherever it is. You can see how much they matter to the people in the audience. And after all, more women go to the theatre than men, and women choose what you go and see, and this play of mine, it always, it has an incredible effect by word-of-mouth. It just attracts people from nowhere and at the Royal Court when I wasn't a known name, and I think it's, it's that very simple thing, that a play has to be written because it expresses something that is needed, people need to see this subject, these feelings, or whatever.

UK: I was going to ask you if you think that, given the great moving power that theatre has, especially for the people out there, the people in Glasgow, do you think that you can then use the theatre to teach them things without hitting them over the head, or should you just try to make them feel, have a good night out?

CK: I think if you set out to teach people things it will not be what you think, if you do succeed in getting one or a few singular points across, it will just be very boring, more likely, other things will creep in, through the images and in between the words of your play which

are what it's really about, your own preoccupations and fears. I really like that theatre has a way of hijacking you, and I spend years working out intellectually whatever, with my head, exactly what I'm doing, structure, images, line-by-line, punctuation, but at the same time, I'm letting go, actually, before that, I'm letting my unconscious come up and images and all sorts of strange things go down on paper which I don't yet analyze. Because I think that's the most powerful area of theatre, that its not only a live experience, but a completely three-D sensory one in which things go up your spine and make your stomach turn over, or whatever and you see things which you can't explain in words, you feel things which you can't explain, I mean, I've had this, in a way, the kind of evening I like best is when I can't really sum up the play or say what it did or it might make me annoyed, it then ticks away for years, maybe ten years later, I really understand.

Theatre works on so many levels and the ones that we can't just sort of string out in words are the areas I find most exciting. I think that's the most far-reaching sort of connection between theatre and religion and magic and spells and dreams and I think that happens when you really let those parts of yourself come up like in the child scenes in *My Mother Said*, starting with four children who are out-of-time, who can be seen in other scenes to be four generations, but here we show in a different way the same connection happening. And they say, 'we want to kill our Mummy', those things you might feel when you're sitting in a room as an adult, I want to kill you, so you let that out and it interests me how readily audiences go with that as well. I wasn't at all sure in the first production of *My Mother Said* how the time structure and the children scenes and all the different changes would work and nobody had any problem, and that was not an audience who had been prepared to used to seeing fancy theatre particularly.

So the only time I tried writing from a political impulse is that we did a, ten writers each wrote a short piece for something called *Fear and Misery in the Third Term*, at Liverpool Playhouse a couple of years ago, a little scene about what Thatcher's government has done to Britain. I made myself do it for interest. But there are other writers who, I think Caryl Churchill would say quite the opposite, she would start with a very clear political argument and find the dramatic situations for that.

UK: It's interesting, but a few interviews I've read with Caryl Churchill even though they were several years ago, she always said that she's come to politics through her own life and doesn't really have the theories down. I don't know of that's changed since she said that.

CK: Yeah, that's pretty similar to what I'm saying. I think it has to be like that if you're going to write a piece of theatre that really works because otherwise you're patronizing your audience and that's appalling. . . .After all, I don't think a play's complete until it's reached inside each member of the audience, 'cos it will change each night according to that and *My Mother Said* is full of ambivalences and contradictions which is the most accurate way I can think of portraying reality as I see it and contradictions are one of the most dramatic things, one which you can best explore – I think drama is brilliant for exploring contradictions and possibilities, choices, so you cook up this world, you put it before people you say here are these women, they could do this, or this or this, ah no, they're going to do this, now watch, let's see what happens. And I would never want to say whether this is right or wrong. I never want to be moral in that sense. it's really for the audience to say. And I was very careful with this play that its never one woman's story more than the other three and I'm never trying to say, this way is better and you should do this with children or not. I'm just laying it before people and sometimes I get very extreme reactions, arguments. People in

America, some men saying, this is what's wrong with the world you have women like Jackie now and they just don't want to have children, you know, none of us can find women to have children. They were being quite appalling. They were being very angry at me as if I was Jackie in some way, sort of turning on me, and they didn't see that Rosie's father is sort of out of the picture, he doesn't take any responsibility at all. They didn't notice it. But that's great. The play was already stirring things up in them.

UK: Doesn't the possibility that, if you have a play that is very much on the visceral level that some people will go to the theatre and think, oh what a lovely story and then just go on without it really affecting them?

CK: No. Because it doesn't not affect them. I really, this is a terribly dodgy thing to say, but I don't think anyone goes to the theatre and is completely unaffected unless it's a bad play. But I don't think this is a bad play so if you just say, what a lovely story, well that's fine, if your play had been properly constructed, the story is absolutely central, illustrates or explores whatever the play is about, so by absorbing the story they have absorbed what happens when a woman gives away a child, or whatever it is. I can think of times when I've been to the theatre and thought hmm, or I didn't think much of that, or I didn't like it much and later I realize that I did, but some part of me was being quite defensive. So it's incredibly complicated the way theatre works on people.

I've only ever heard from two people, two men that it didn't work for them. I mean, that would always happen with things I write, but it's partly because the age span is so huge that people come to it with their own experience and people will say, on some nights it seems like the audience is really with Doris, or whatever, according to their age. Do you agree with that – my claim that you can't be unaffected if it's a good piece. I mean you could be bored and that's terrible.

UK: I'm not exactly sure. It depends on a lot of things, like why you're actually going in the first place, you know, if someone's dragging you or you don't want to go you just shut yourself off completely, there's that possibility that would happen to many people.

CK: Yeah, but if the play's any good it will immediately start to wriggle into you. It's a slightly difficult argument because I'm talking about good plays. I think it's along with that question about, can you teach people, back to what I was saying before about the kind of audience I write for, I don't want to sound patronizing, it's not. It's very important, I'm not sort of me writing for other people to try and enlighten them in some way. I feel that who I am and my personal life is completely irrelevant and a playwright is the eyes and ears and scavenger and someone who can put together images and sounds and words which other people can then recognize as being things they want to look at, explore, do you see what I mean. I don't feel that I know answers to anything at all, I blunder my way along and my skill is to produce above all sorts of situations and images more than, even more than lines which I too, am trying to work out by putting it in front of them. Well what is this, what does it mean for us. Humility, I suppose I'm saying, you have to have a real humility if you're going to write things properly and then you engage the audience in trying to make decisions too, and decide about things.

UK: The one interview that I have, that you did for *Plays and Players*, you said something about wanting to do the opposite of Brecht in theatre. . . I want to know why you don't think that disorientation or alienation, or whatever they want to call the effect of the Brechtian type doesn't work. The real reason I'm asking that is because a lot of the things in *Top Girls*,

especially the first scene, worked toward that, to make an audience confused first, and then make them think about what's going on rather than accepting everything at face value, so I was wondering what you think doesn't work about that or shouldn't work about that.

CK: First of all, using Brecht as a shorthand is a bit awful because what Brecht did with his own company, I think is much more subtle than we now make it, but like I say here about the magic and things, I'm much more interested in starting via intuition and being inside situations to the extent that I don't even fully know quite what effect it is creating on stage until I see it myself in the theatre. In rehearsals I'll be surprised by, in there is a fear of dark as well as of characters in a brightly lit room talking about it, that that's hovering above/below the words. That fascinates me. Caryl Churchill I think, I feel more different from Caryl Churchill than almost any other woman writer I can think of, I mean, she feels to me at the other end of the scale because in the way you described, she's much more outside the situations and characters and her skill is just that, setting things before you in a very precise way that you are then asked to question and examine. And I sometimes find her plays slightly disconcerting which I think is what she wants. Mike Attenborough said a very good line, When *My Mother Said* was on at the Royal Court, one of her plays was immediately afterwards and he said, 'well the thing about Caryl's plays is she doesn't want you to like her characters, you don't need to like them, empathize with them'. She's not asking you for that sort of personal engagement and I always am. Even in this new play with sixteen characters, there are some vile characters, but every one of them, I hope there are enough facets that in some way you engage, you at least understand what they're doing, and that is a completely different standpoint and I think the interesting thing about the way someone like Caryl works is it blows away those wooly arguments that women write emotional stuff, because she has a kind of almost resistance to you being emotionally involved. I'm sure it's interesting to compare *My Mother Said* and *Top Girls* because they're the kind of theatre that we're both trying to make is very different in that way. And like you said at the beginning, it's the way Caryl uses women and children is to make political-economic points. I mean that's too general, much more than I'm trying to do.

UK: I was reading the reviews that came out when this was at the Court and quite a few of the critics, mostly men, noticed that there were no men in the play and one of them went so far as to say that it seems as if you're only telling one half the story. I thought that was quite funny. But what exactly were your intentions when you left the men out?

CK: That's great. It's fascinating how they notice when it's that way around. I never write a play in which there are more men on stage than women because even now, most contemporary plays have two-thirds men and one-third women. I thought of having one man play all the men's roles but that would immediately give him a kind of importance over the other characters. but most of all, since I wanted to show how women are when they are alone together, in love and in hate and in everything else, I'm sure you'd agree that when women are in a room together or in a garden together, they talk in a different way than when even one man is there, even a boy, so I didn't want to destroy this world by putting a male presence into it. On the other hand, these women's lives are all linked with men whom they like or dislike and who are important to them and are sometimes only a few feet off-stage. I didn't want to imply this huge separatist thing. I think you know the range of what you could do with language and pauses and all the other things happening in language in the subtext. I find that the humour and sexiness and anger and cruelty and all that range is much more developed when women are alone together.

I think that happens in, there are enough plays by women now to begin to look at that. Is actually, is language used differently on stage by women. I think in some cases, yes, very differently. And certainly structure and time, I don't know if you were going to look at this at all, but I think in Caryl's work, and mine, and Sarah Daniels and Ann Devlin's, Christina Reed, possibly, were all very much interested in how time structures our lives or what is real time more than a lot of our male contemporaries. I don't fiddle with this, I don't want to analyze it too much because then you spoil it, in the same way the language, the way you use language, I'm sure it's different and that's exciting, it means that there are slightly different ways of writing plays which will come up then. But not that most of the critics can be bothered to really look at this. But it's there, it's happening and it's reaching audiences which is all that matters.

UK: Just to go back a bit to the men thing. I just remembered that the same critic, he did mention that all the images of men that are in the play are negative, that none of the men are particularly nice to the women, he was complaining about that.

CK: Because it never happens in life! It's very interesting to see that review. How many positive images of women are there in the canon of male plays? This is a slightly different answer but women in classic plays and even contemporary plays are so often either the good ones, the source of moral good in the play, or else they go mad/suicide/die/are punished for their sins, and there's very little in between, so I feel women have been portrayed in an incredibly limited kind of way. Sometimes very brilliantly, but only in very limited kinds of roles. And I would say that the way I portrayed men in *My Mother Said* or the way that men behave is not extreme at all and it's certainly not done with a vengeance, that'd be pointless. And if that man feels that the behaviour of all the men is despicable then perhaps he's seeing something he hasn't seen before. I'm just producing what I think are very recognizable, very frequent patterns in the generations. A man early in the century who marries Doris, Jack wants to move up the social scale and they want to work hard and they're very British, Protestant ethic and they hold in their emotions, they don't make a fuss when the war comes, all that rubbish well that's, there are men all over Britain like that, and women. I mean if there weren't the play wouldn't work.

I've never had any men alienated by the play. In fact I've had more letters from men than from women, interestingly enough, about how moved they are, especially at the Royal Court, and I began to wonder if men found it harder at the time to express how they felt and later wanted more privately to write to somebody. I don't know if it's a cliché, but it's still harder for men to express grief or huge emotions, untidy emotions in public than it is for women. It's a play that makes people cry as much as it makes them laugh. . . I remember a night at the Royal Court, just before the end, when Doris is doing her speech about Jack, 'I tried so hard, the tray pushed aside on the bed', this man in front of me started to cry, not quietly, but I mean by the time the lights came up for the interval, he was sobbing, just sobbing. His girlfriend was passing him Kleenex and I leaned over and said, 'Are you alright, here's some Kleenex', and I said, 'Did something happen?' and he said, 'No, it's the play'. And of course I felt this mixture of feeling awful that I had made him so upset but also incredibly moved so I don't think, I think there's an extra level which women get from this play, but I don't think it excludes men in any way. I've never had a problem with that and I wouldn't want that, either.

Like I said earlier, I wouldn't want a play to exclude any person, women are forever going to the theatre seeing plays by men about men, you know, the Shakespeare, Greek plays,

whatever it is. Obviously there are some great roles for women there too but very few that come, start from the female consciousness. So you know, why the hell shouldn't some men, but that's very interesting. I mean as a women generally in this country in our culture, we're used to seeing men enacting things which is a metaphor for life with a capital L and when women enact things such as in this play, it's not seen as about life with a capital L, it is about women, women's lives, let's put that in the women's corner, now that has got to change, it's appalling, quite extraordinary, that this country is actually very prejudiced like that. In America this play is seen as a mainstream play about life, which it is by a lot of people in this country, but it's, you know, there you go, a male critic can still try to diminish it.

UK: Where was it put on in America?

CK: It was just outside New York, sort of hopefully to move off-Broadway. But that's all sort of up in the air at the moment. It was at Vassar, New York Stage and Film Company use the stage at Vassar to rehearse, workshop, produce a variety of plays and people come from all over America, from film, TV, theatre. It's as if the Royal Court and the RSC people decamped to Cambridge in Britain.

It's nothing to do with the college. It's just that the theatre facilities are very good. *My Mother Said* was directed by Ken Olin. So we'd sit around, exhausted in local cafés working on the play and people would cue up for his autograph and say 'who's that woman with Ken?' And his wife Patty Wettig, who is an absolutely wonderful actress was Jackie and Estelle Parsons was Doris so you know you had pretty good people and then loads of people come up from New York to see it and make offers. It's fascinating, really brilliant experience working in America and sort of having a crash course in how film, TV, theatre works.

UK: When was this?

CK: This was last July. Anyway, I think it's going to go on in various places around America. But the language, the way people use language in America I found so different, I find that fascinating.

END SIDE ONE

UK: I want to ask you about the children's scenes. A lot of critics didn't like the whole idea of adults playing children, especially someone of Doris's age. And I don't understand why, they say it's embarrassing. I was just wondering why you put those in. I know you said something about it before, but if you'd just elaborate.

CK: When you say a lot of critics, I don't remember off-hand, the London reviews, which is a certain kind of white middle-aged male critic, some of them may have said so, but that's like three or four people. They're a minority, and they are anxious people. I used to be a theatre critic and I know them all. They're people who are anxious when they see things they can't immediately analyze or understand, they rarely spend the time to think why is this happening.

The child scenes are there because the child is inside us all and this play, one of the many things that it covers is that idea of what is a woman, a mother, a wife. From the moment you're born, as a little girl you're taught how to be that, aren't you, and you absorb the current image, whatever it is, that as a woman you should be a nice wife with a neat waist who makes scones, or a power-dressed woman who becomes a managing director, whatever it is. And of course, as soon as you've got there and achieved that, they've changed the rules and changed the image which is something you portray by going through a century

like this play. Because in this play there's a lot of anger and violence but it's portrayed much more subtly than men are allowed to do in our society and to me there are many scenes in *My Mother Said* of what I call 'invisible violence', that if it was men they would be fighting, physically, but you know what I mean, all that subtext, cruelty that women use, little words that are like daggers, and pauses and looks and silences and that's a subversion of the same very, much more physical, louder expression that we have as children, which is sort of crushed down in the process of making us good girls. So I wanted to show these women before they became good girls, or when they were in the process.

As you've probably noticed, the child scenes explore similar territory to the adult scenes; sometimes are juxtaposed with an adult scene about the very same thing, like between scene 2 and 4, the first child scene, we've left Margaret in real time as a small child worried about death and we then have a child scene about death and sex, then we go into Jackie and her mother and Jackie is talking about contraception and sex with her mother. So you compare, I mean this makes it sound much more schematic obviously than it is, but you compare different aspects of those same people expressing things, how as children we explore things and how once you're required to be an adult woman or teenager how differently you express things and what things you aren't saying, how that makes things more difficult as well. This play is exploring being true to yourself, I suppose, true to that child, the impulses you have there, a lot of which are discomfiting, fears and hopes and appetites which we suppress later on. And all these things, I feel are for men as much as for women, they're not exclusive to gender and that's one of the many ways by which I mean it's a play about how we all live, how we all function. And the child scenes as well, you've probably noticed, they have a kind of sequence, from this first opening up of the idea let's kill our Mummy, which shouldn't be, it's not Jackie's singular idea, she's the one who dares to say it, as it were, in a moment where children are playing, go on, you say it, and already they're frightened at the idea of it, but it's sort of daring and exciting, too. And that idea, that runs through the play, anyway, of how do you deal with that inheritance from your mother and grandmother and everything, and can you kick it away or not. So in the child scene there is a sort of story that follows through and to the end, to the scene which was cut at the Royal Court, but it's not usually cut, where Jackie and Margaret meet for the last time and they play King of the Golden River, and Margaret is dead...

Mike Attenborough felt that that was trying to make a happy ending out of something which is irreconcilable, but the actresses at the Royal Court wanted to do it, and everywhere else it's been done because it completes the story in a very important way, it's not about a happy ending because Margaret is dead, but it's about that link you have to your mother which is always there, even if you move to the other side of the world, even if you hate her, you'll find things, and I don't think any woman would disagree with this, she will come up inside you in some way and even if she's dead, she's still there; you hear her all the time, saying, 'Don't buy those bananas, they're not ripe', or 'I told you it'd be like this when you had a child', in big and small ways, so that's what that scene is about. And it's also about a kind of forgiveness in, not a plot sense, but as you get older and you're aware of all those influences from your family and your past, I think we get less angry and antagonistic, more aware of all the contradictions in their lives, too and all the messes and compromises we go through, and nothing is as simple as blaming your mother or hating her...

UK: I've always wondered about this, in the child scene where Rosie and Doris talk about the curse, what is the little heat-shaped drawing on the bathroom wall?

CK: Oh, it's just graffiti, you know how people do a heart with an arrow through and they put someone's name, Desmond or something, or maybe they don't and the thing of spells and trying to work out the adult world and she goes in and looks for the curse, not knowing what she's going to find, and when she sees that on the wall, she thinks it must be the curse, such as people daub on your doorway in medieval times, or whatever. It's a sign, and in a way she's right, that's a curse as much as anything else.

UK: Why do you have an aversion to sofas?

CK: I hate clutter in plays and this play doesn't need a set, it needs certain specific objects and costumes, which are chosen for giving a time and a place, and also, if you don't have anything else around them, those objects and clothes have an accumulative emotional power, such that by the time you pull a baby's dress out of a bag it becomes the equivalent of a knife or something dramatic and I suppose that comes out of working in performance art, visual theatre, which I had a company for a while, and I used as few words as possible, and mostly lights, sound, gesture and costume, timing, looks, pauses, all those other elements of theatre, which is very important because it means I draw on that vocabulary as much as words and you probably, you can see the kind of light in every scene, what's under their feet, all these things are important, I can't write a scene until I know exactly; are people in a garden, are people in a pink light, whatever it is, what they are feeling, wearing, but you don't need to represent those things because it will them be in their behaviour, in their dialogue, so by sofa I mean those plays which have a fixed set, where people sit down and make cups of tea, I didn't want to write a play, writing a play set in, about the domestic world of women, I was adamant there would be no kitchen, no cups of tea, no sitting at kitchen tables, any of that sort of stuff, so there isn't.

And what I noticed in America for the first time, you know, where it was thrown up by a very different acting style, which Ken Olin summed up as behavioural rather than emotional, or behavioural rather than word-based, we're actually interested in language here and developing it and being quite ornate with it, flourishes with it, like the woman in *Boots* that I described to you before, in a way which I didn't find so much in America, where to generalize, language seemed to be more shorthand, the quickest way of saying something, it's about speed, it's about getting on with it, and Ken Olin said that they are used to seeking out behavioural things as actors in order to tell you things, doing, this character would be doing this, would be making this cup of tea in this way so and he said, in this play, people only move when they're emotions, which he found fascinating and very different for them and it's true, if you take away every kind of prop and thing to hide behind on stage and you just have these women facing each other then the emotion comes up, there is no getting away from it, and the expression of the emotion or the lack of it very often increases the tension, and there are times when I watch this play, this is the effect I wanted, you want these women to cross the space to each other, for God's sake hug each other and talk to each other or something and they don't and it makes it much more powerful or agonizing or whatever when they do and it's only in the last scene with Doris and Rosie that anyone on the play sits down comfortably together and just relaxes. That's one of those many things you do unconsciously but I thought that's very interesting, it's like I mean, they should be capable of just sitting together.

UK: I want to ask, did the show change much from Manchester to London?

CK: In what sense?

UK: The way the production was put together, the ...

CK: Yeah, every production is going to be different because of the time and the place and its personalities. And I accept that, I write the script and I have it as exact as I could possibly do and I let it go. I worked on the Manchester and Royal Court productions. Manchester I did quite a lot of rewriting in rehearsal period and I still felt that one or two things weren't there, so after the actual production. so I did some work before the Royal Court, but not during the Royal Court rehearsal period because it was pretty well sussed by then. Brigid Lamour, who directed it in Manchester did a production which had much more of the extreme range of emotion, it had more of the violence that women have toward each other which Mike Attenborough's production never went that far, his was very thorough and conscientious, but I think he couldn't bear to acknowledge how vile women can be to each other and I find that very interesting, that's an important reason why women have to direct and write and make theatre is that, all those nasty bits of us don't tend to get portrayed so much by men who almost don't want to know that's in women, it goes against what women should be. Ken Olin spotted this very early on, I thought that was great. Exactly that, that there is a lot of real darkness in these women and in them as children as well and that that must be there.

I think I know that it was crucial on the first production that I worked with a woman director because to me a play is like a map of territory which only you can see at first, the playwright. And when you make your map accurate the actors and director and designer and audience will be able to see that territory too and go into it. At the point the map is sort of half-finished, you want a director who can see your territory and not their territory and a lot of directors will make your map, discover their territory that they're happier in and want to direct a play about. Brigid has almost like a second sight ability to see what it is you're trying to do before you've necessarily completely done it and of course a lot of that stuff, because she's a woman you don't have to explain, she knows what you're trying to do, all the invisible subtext things –

I'm very aware about that with this new play, that first time you make the journey through rehearsal for me it's crucial that it's with somebody I can trust and have a very intuitive relationship as well as an analytical, argumentative critical relationship. But now I feel this play can be directed by anyone, anywhere, what I feel is essential and wanted to happen, does happen. I mean that happens by spending a long long time grooming the script so that things like the female language even if it's directed by someone who doesn't see that, it will come out of the play when it's put on stage; it will sort of hover there.

UK: What are Mike Attenborough's working methods like, his rehearsal techniques?

CK: He's very conscientious and he's a great listener, he will ask you about your play. He's very nice that way to work with, he really wants to listen, to see if he's understood it right and that's quite rare, I think and he's not sort of aggressive and he's quite prepared for you to say, 'No, no, I didn't mean that at all', and personally I want to keep quiet as much as possible and see if the play makes evident what it is I'm trying to do, not necessarily when you first read it, but when you get up and walk it through, and then people will say, 'Oh I see, I see what's happening', and, 'That's how it should be, obviously'. No, it was really nice to work with him and he was acutely aware that he was working with a play that had a lot of female things in, which he couldn't claim to have internal experience of, so he would listen a lot to the actresses, too. And he wasn't trying to be so ghastly surrogate, understand women, I'm nearly a woman too. And he had a good sense of humour about that.

UK: Did he have any special rehearsal technique, like Max Stafford-Clark's 'actioning'?

CK: Well any director's techniques, if you try and shorthand them like Max's they sound silly, or a bit one-dimensional. It's so much about the chemistry between the personalities involved at that point in their lives, you know, someone's having a divorce, it's going to affect everyone in the room, even if they never tell you, so just what people eat, it's such a mixture of all those things, Max plays off the psychology of the particular people he's working with at that time and things like if it's summer and it's hot in the rehearsal room, all these things are just as important and I think all the best directors if they have some kind of technique, it completely adapts to whatever piece you're working on. Max has that framework as a way of talking about what's happening in a play.

Mike Attenborough has more of an exploratory approach. He takes a play and he tries to understand it, what's happening here, all of these people and Brigid, too have the approach to text which has been evolved I suppose through the last twenty-five years through, particularly through the Royal Court and the RSC, of really giving time to the words, and the spaces between the words, and first of all looking at that, and what is going on, what's in the rhythms of the words and I think about that very carefully, the musicality, virtually the overall sounds up and down, the spaces and that is their starting point rather than coming in and saying, 'Right, I've got a concept overall' which is what directors tend to do with classics, I find it very dispiriting that in my generation, I think there are plenty of playwrights despite what people say and there are very few directors who want to direct new plays, they want to make their careers by directing known texts where they can get a handle on it and announce to everyone else, this is what it's about.

UK: Did you have to use any special rehearsal techniques to get inside the child scenes?

CK: Well, again it's different every time. In mainstream theatre I'd like to see more awareness of your whole physique in acting and indeed of the kind of images you make on stage, to be really aware of how you, just when you lift one hand, standing in a certain place, how it affects the light and the whole shape of the stage. Having worked in, before I wrote plays, acted and directed and designed in this sort of visual theatre, seen work abroad, and in the fringe, where there's just so little money, you do all the roles yourself, you may be lighting the show as well, so you're aware of these things. I find it disappointing that at place like the Royal Court, which are brilliant on text, people's sense of how they're using their whole body is much poorer and just, I suppose, some actresses hesitate a moment before wanting to run around being a child, but they always enjoy it and actually the older the woman is, the more delightful it is to watch. And what I was saying a bit earlier about the purpose of the child's scenes, or one of them, putting the child's response side-by-side with the adult one, of course you triple the power by the fact that it is actually the same person, then going to play an adult, you see an old face doing young things. I all the time try to jumble around time and experience to highlight...

UK: Did you want to tell me anything else about America?

CK: No I think I summed up what I thought, I thought that one can be a woman in a very different sense in America and now I'm generalizing about a continent. I thought the women didn't like me for at least the first week, I thought that they thought I was a waste of time. And then I realized that you can be completely tough and up-front and businesslike without having to use charm and soften the edges the ways that in Britain you still have to do. If you are very tough, you'll get that punishing nanny, madam image that Mrs. Thatcher had.

You're pushed into being a sort of a gross caricature. So I wouldn't write a play like *My Mother Said* in America because a lot of the subtle ways in which we make our way as women are very different, but the play seems to work in America, it seems to work all over the world, I mean it's going on in Japan, I find that extraordinary that obviously two things; that when I sat down in a bedsit and wrote this play because I felt it was a needed play, that I was right many more times than I thought and also that there are incredibly universal patterns that come up again and again between mothers and daughters even in completely different cultures, so that works in America and at the same time, it's always seen as a very specific cultural setting which I suppose in a foreign place gives it a kind of colour, personality just like when we do Chekhov here.

UK: How old was Shirley Henderson when she was playing Rosie?

CK: How old did she look?

UK: She looked about sixteen.

CK: I think she was about twenty-two or twenty-three. You actually need a Rosie who's old enough in reality to have the emotional experience to really understand what she's playing while being able to look very young, it doesn't work if you have somebody that's too young, but people always think Rosies are much younger than they are, the part does that.

We haven't really talked about the structure I used, but structure is incredibly important to me because just the structure, if you get it right will enact what your play means so as structure of jumbling up time enacts the changes, throws up the contrasts and ironies. I never have to have people say, 'Oh it's twenty years on and you look older', or, 'Isn't life different now', because I jumble it around so the juxtaposition of two scenes makes that point and again, it's like instead of preaching, the audience do it, the audience work it out for themselves and the lines that end each scene and begin the next are very important if you look at how they work together. And playing with that dilemma that in life there is someone who is mother and she has that label whenever we talk to her however well or badly we get on with her. And so let's change that as showing her as mother and daughter and in the next scene, show her as daughter with her granny or something, you know, play around with it, the whole time, playing around with people's expectations.

I think expectations is a key word in this play, emotional expectations, what do you do with it, what choices you make there, and I also wanted the use of time to enact the process of memory, that as an adult now today, if I asked you the three most significant moments of your life they probably wouldn't, it's very unlikely you'd give me them in chronological order. Probably be something that happened two years ago, then eighteen years ago, then seven years ago. It's all simultaneously in that way. Our experience and our family's emotional history is all inside us simultaneously so that's what I'm trying to enact that's the order is simply a different way of story-telling, it's saying well I want you to know this first, and this, and then this, and gradually you build up the jigsaw and then in the last act go forward chronologically. You accumulate emotional power in that was because the more you know about this invented family, the greater the impact of just a word or a line in the play.

A lot of the repeated lines or echoes were not actually done deliberately, they're done instinctively, and later I noticed how much it happens, which is how it should be, it startles me, how much I know about women before I was born, and their internal relationships. This isn't a play drawn off from my family or directly off anyone I know, nor did I research, because you can't research how a mother and daughter spoke to each other in 1908 and it just

made me realize what I was feeling anyway, that as women we receive such an extraordinary amount of information. Like I was saying before, how you cut beans, what it will be like when you have a baby, all the time women are telling you these things in many ways and not just your own family so you feel this pressure of this is how you should be and the anger and the individualism and how I'm going to make it different, and it's there, you carry it, But I'm sure there's an equivalent for men, but I wouldn't know how it worked, but all this is important, this is an enormous part of your culture and your heritage if you're female, so this has to be shown in a play....

Mike Attenborough referred to the play as 'The emotional highlights of the twentieth century'....

People will say it's Jackie's story or Doris's according to their age and experience and preoccupations which fascinates me because I've really carefully balanced it, I don't think you can say it's anymore one woman's story than another because in that play I didn't want to write a central character or a lead....

A pattern in quite a lot of women's work, we draw on childhood and adolescence much more readily than men and aren't embarrassed to show that. And men [like the critic], he's embarrassed because he's tried to close down that less sophisticated person. But perhaps it goes with a readiness to expose vulnerable, messy feelings which women are more allowed to do than men.

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