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“The Performances of Victorian Morality in Caryl  
Churchill’s *Cloud Nine* as a Means for Social Change”

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### ABSTRACT

This undergraduate dissertation examines how *Cloud Nine*, a play written in 1978 by the British playwright Caryl Churchill, intends to make its audiences realise how Victorian morality is still manifested in their reality, so they can get rid of its constraints. Such realisation is the first step to overcome its influence and it is achieved through the employment of certain theatrical techniques borrowed from the German playwright Bertolt Brecht, which alienate the audience from the actions on stage. The play develops in two different historical contexts, the Victorian period and the nineteen-seventies. Both contexts are analysed, first, to understand the origins of Victorian morality and how it is reflected in the first act of the play, and second, to appreciate how such morality is torn apart in the second act thanks to different contextual influences.

**KEY WORDS:** *Cloud Nine*, Caryl Churchill, Victorian morality, feminist theatre, Brechtian techniques.

### RESUMEN

Este trabajo de fin de grado analiza cómo *Cloud Nine*, obra de teatro escrita en 1978 por la inglesa Caryl Churchill, intenta que sus audiencias reconozcan las manifestaciones de la moralidad victoriana en su realidad, para que así puedan liberarse de las limitaciones que esta les impone. Reconocerlas es el primer paso para superar su influencia; esto se consigue a través de la utilización de ciertas técnicas teatrales que, siguiendo el ejemplo del dramaturgo alemán Bertolt Brecht, alienan a la audiencia de la acción en el escenario. Esta obra se desarrolla en dos contextos históricos distintos: el periodo victoriano y la década de los setenta. Ambos contextos se analizan, primero, para entender los orígenes de la moralidad victoriana y cómo esta se refleja en el primer acto de la obra, y segundo, para poder apreciar cómo esta moralidad se destruye en el segundo acto gracias a diferentes influencias contextuales.

**PALABRAS CLAVE:** *Cloud Nine*, Caryl Churchill, moralidad victoriana, teatro feminista, técnicas brechtianas.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

This undergraduate dissertation examines *Cloud Nine*, a play written by the British playwright Caryl Churchill in 1978. This play reflects on the Victorian origins of some of the conventions that still constrain the author's contemporary society, like stereotypical gender roles or the more conservative attitudes regarding alternative sexualities or lifestyles which escape heteronormativity. Therefore, this dissertation analyses how the influence of such Victorian morality is performed in the play, and how this is intended to impact the audience.

A key feature for achieving such impact is the lack of chronology, which has also determined the structure of this undergraduate dissertation. The play is divided in two acts that take place in different settings and time periods: Victorian Africa, and the London of the seventies. But, despite the distance of one hundred years, both have the same characters, who only age twenty-five years from the first to the second act.

This paper is divided in four sections. First, it explores the background of the play, which provides information on the author and the particular way in which *Cloud Nine* was conceived. Next, the second and third sections deal with the two historical contexts featured in the play: the Victorian period in the first act, and the seventies in the second. These sections are intended to give a further insight on the workings of Victorian morality from a historical perspective. That is, the first contextual analysis will allow us to understand the reasons that motivate such morality and how it affected the lives of the Victorians, and the second analyses both the influence the historical context has on the creation of the play and how this influence is intertwined with the overrun of the Victorian mentality in the second Act. This intends to provide a full appreciation of the performances of Victorian morality in *Cloud Nine*. However, the most important part of this dissertation is the fourth: the analysis of the play. This section explores how the two previous contexts are represented in the play and how this is not a mere depiction, but a way of raising awareness on the continuing influence of the Victorian morality in Churchill's contemporary society. To make the audience realise such influence, the playwright employs a series of theatrical techniques associated with the theatre of Bertolt Brecht, but unlike the German dramatist, Churchill

uses them from a feminist standpoint. This is what Enric Monforte Rabascall and Amelia Howe Kritzer, who have studied *Cloud Nine* among other Churchill's plays, focus their analyses on. In tune with their studies, this dissertation discusses how these techniques pretend to dismantle the manifestations of patriarchy in traditional theatre, and how Churchill's work is influenced by socialist or materialist feminist ideology, which is closely related to the uncovering of the systems of oppression dominating society that are, at the same time, closely intertwined with Victorian morality.

## 2. CARYL CHURCHILL AND THE WRITING OF *CLOUD NINE*

Caryl Churchill was born in London in 1938 and studied English literature in Oxford University. Her first play, *Downstairs*, was written and performed in 1958, while the playwright was still at college. Since then, she has continued writing plays for stage, radio and television, such as *Vinegar Tom* (1976), *Cloud Nine* (1978), *Top Girls* (1982), or *Serious Money* (1987), just to name a few. Among her more than thirty plays, *Cloud Nine* is one of Caryl Churchill's best-known works; it can even be said that it was her first international success, being well received not only in her hometown London, but in New York as well, where the play was performed continuously for two years (Monforte Rabascall 59).

Before *Cloud Nine*, Churchill was already familiarised with the world of theatre and performance, having started to define the recurrent themes in her work, which are displayed in different contexts and situations for the spectator to reflect upon them. These recurrent themes are the systems of oppression that dominate her contemporary society (Monforte Rabascall 16), which are, generally speaking, patriarchy and capitalism, deeply joined between themselves. Thus, Churchill is considered to be both a socialist and a feminist writer, ideologies reflected in her works not only in terms of content, but in the techniques she employs. This topic will be further developed later in relation to *Cloud Nine*'s analysis, since the play makes a special emphasis on these systems of oppression, displaying them in ways which may be surprising for an audience used to a more traditional conception of theatre.

As Churchill herself states in the introduction of the play, *Cloud Nine* was written in a collaborative workshop for the Joint Stock Theatre Group in 1978. The participants of this workshop included Churchill, who would later write the play down based upon the experience of the workshop; the director, Max Stafford-Clark; and actors of the Joint Stock Theatre Group. The starting point, or original idea of the workshop was "about sexual politics" ("Introduction"). In the initial phase of the workshop, the participants discussed their personal experiences related to the subject, providing different perspectives, thanks to the various sexual orientations and social classes of the participants. To further analyse the

topic, they “explored stereotypes and role reversals in games and improvisations, read books and talked to another people” (“Introduction”). After the three weeks that lasted the workshop, Churchill began to write the play for a period that lasted another twelve weeks, where, as the playwright states “I returned to an idea that had been touched briefly in the workshop (...) the parallel between colonial and sexual oppression“ (“Introduction”), a general statement around which the play takes shape, but that is further developed through its implications in the life of a group of people, both in Victorian times and in her contemporary London.



### 3. UNDERSTANDING VICTORIAN MORALITY

First, it is of key importance for this undergraduate dissertation to depict the social reality which constitutes the origin of the social conventions which taint our contemporary world and serve as setting for *Cloud Nine*'s Act One.

The denomination "Victorian Era" refers to the years in which Queen Victorian reigned, which almost comprehend the whole nineteenth century, from 1837 to 1901. The Queen impersonated the womanly values which Victorians draw into women in general, but she also projected a strong and powerful image, related to the expansion of the British Empire achieved during her reign (Frawley 409).

Despite this paradoxical representation of the Queen, the idealization of women as sexless and pure is a defining feature of the period. It is a widely spread conception that women were limited to the domestic sphere and reduced to their roles as mothers and wives. At the Victorian household, the women were responsible of managing domestic chores and of guiding the moral correctness of their family by their own example.

Additionally, women were instructed in a type of prescriptive literature which focused on the duties and morality women ought to hold (Frawley 415). One of these conduct books is *The Women of England: Their Social Duties and Domestic Habits* by Sarah Ellis Stickney, where the author aspires to provide women with advice for the practice of morality (Stickney, *Preface*). Stickney shows herself deeply convinced of women's moral superiority and even more, of women's duty to perform such morality, not only for the sake of their families, but for the nation's sake. She directly addresses women when saying that: "a nation's moral wealth is in your keeping" (13), which links the idea of a morally correct family cell to the well-being of the Empire. Moreover, Stickney believes that this moral is something inherent to English women's hearts (29), and that women in general, due to their sex, are predisposed to be an "inexhaustible fountain (...) of its own blessedness" (16). This type of literature evidently contributed to the idealization of women as morally superior beings, without a glimpse of selfishness, a conception which is materialised in the "Angel in the House", a common topic in the period that stresses the differences between men and women or the private and public spheres.

These expectations and considerations over women were reflected in literary pieces as well. Carol Christ explores how this feminine ideal influenced men's perception of themselves from the analysis of two poems dealing with the topic, one by Coventry Patmore and other by Alfred Lord Tennyson. From the analysis she concludes that the idealization of women as pure, virtuous and passive is a reaction against the values that were imposed or expected from men, such as being strong-willed, assertive, and sexually dominant (Christ 162). Moreover, those were times of quick changes where Victorians faced a religious and economic crisis which threatened the stability of the British morality (Christ 146); thus Victorian men would have found such situation stressful and in return, would have centred these values that were being lost in women.

However, by idealizing women, men found themselves facing their own defects and obligations towards them and towards society. One of these "defects" is sexual desire. Once again, in opposition with women's chastity, men were subjected to natural impulses. This made men consider women "both a perpetual reproach and a perpetual temptation" (Christ 162), a reproach from their own viciousness compared with women's purity, and a temptation because of their desires. Therefore, expectations over "masculine conduct and duty were no less constrictive or likely to provoke an anxious response" (Frawley 485).

This idea of women lacking sexual impulses and desires was a widespread conviction. This misconception was backed by most doctors, which held that women "have no sexual drive or need of sexual gratification" (Smith 187). Of course, there was also the extended belief of women's physiological weakness and fragility, backed as well by the mainstream medical doctrine of the period. In response, the medicine professionals who did not adhere to these beliefs were considered to be radical. Smith, in "Sexuality in Britain, 1800-1900" takes a look at these professionals who recognised women's sexual impulses as natural, adding a new perspective on preconceptions over Victorians, but still keeping in mind that they were a minority in a society which preferred to believe in their moral standards of righteousness. It is particularly interesting a reference Smith includes of Reverend Ashington Bullen, which from his clerical status "linked sexual pollution with the wrecking of the family, and thence inevitably with social chaos and the fall of the Empire"

(197-198). This statement, once again, recalls the Empire and every individual's obligation of adhering to moral standards for their sake.

In the last decades of the nineteenth century, the Empire was at its peak in terms of its territorial expansion due to the developments in transport and communication technologies associated with industrialization (Frawley 421). The sudden expansion on the colonies in the three final decades of the century is known today as "New Imperialism", an urge to colonise motivated by "economic interests, (...) strategic reasons" and the "pursuit of international prestige" (McDougall). The commercial and economic power of Britain increased and created a sense of "imperial confidence", which nurtured both a "dubious moral superiority" and "a kind of attendant anxiety about the ability of the nation to sustain its power" (Frawley 423).

This "moral superiority" was partly sustained by recent scientific advances, the same advances which shook the basis of religious faith, namely, Darwin's studies on natural selection. Darwin's theories were modified as a justification not only for the evolution of the species, but for the supposed superiority of certain races or social groups over others in what came to be known as Social Darwinism (McDougall). The precursor of this ideology was the philosopher Herbert Spencer who, under the premise of the "survival of the fittest", justified colonization and racism.

Therefore, the economic power and territorial expansion of the British were a symptom of their superiority. For some Victorians, this superiority came with a responsibility towards the colonised cultures. This duty consisted, basically, on imposing their Western values, including their religion, culture and morality. The result is disregarding the colonised culture, or rather disdaining it as savage or uncivilised.

The sustainment of Imperialism was a responsibility carried by every individual. Here it is worth mentioning again Stickney's *The Women of England*, since she states that there is a "connection (...) between the *women* of England and the *moral* character maintained by their country in the scale of nations" (38). Stickney considers the effects over the population of the fast-changing times the Victorians lived and assumes that it is in men's nature to strive for wealth, so they find themselves in a state of constant competition due to the increasing expansion of the nation thanks to the revolution in communications (59).

Therefore, in this situation of aggressive competence for wealth, reflected on the growth of the Empire, “the influence of women in counteracting the growing evils of society is about to be more needed than ever” (55).

The purpose of this was to maintain “the strong foundation of England’s moral worth” starting in every household and later disseminating it to “the community at large” (60). Therefore, her reflections show that there was a sense of collective morality, based on the families, which was the justification for the alleged superior morality of the nation and main support of the Empire, or, in other words, that individuals and the Empire are somehow co-dependent.

Those members of the society who did not take part in the institution of the family did not adhere to the predominant morality of the period and thus were considered a deviation. This categorization applied mainly to the women who had gotten out of the domestic sphere; as Vicinus puts it: “The woman who broke the family circle, be she prostitute, adulterer or divorcée, threatened society’s very fabric” (*Suffer and Be Still*, Prologue).

However, the situation of married women was not less oppressive, even if they had not surpassed the boundaries of their social sphere. Until the Divorce and Matrimonial Act in 1857, women were in an incredibly vulnerable position, as Frawley explains: the act “(...) protected women against assault, cruelty and desertion and created a civil divorce court” (415-416). Still, women were not allowed to own the money they earned until the first Married Women’s Property Acts was passed in 1870 (Frawley 434). The adoption of these two Acts shows that women were not only morally subjected to patriarchal forces, but legally and economically.

Such disadvantageous situation may have set the basis for the rising awareness of organizations and individuals (Vicinus, *Suffer and Be Still*, Prologue), like the Ladies National Association (Frawley 484), which contributed to a larger movement for the liberation of women.

At the centre of these initial feminist steps was the figure of the New Woman, defined by Frawley as “a recognisable literary figure and a social reality” (446). The New Woman anticipated many feminist values, since she fought for the equality between men and

women. This figure envisioned that women would participate in the public sphere, working and gaining their own wages, abandoning the standards or conceptions that were imposed to them.

The situation of women was improving slowly but steadily, which is something that cannot be said of the situation of homosexuals. Homosexuals are another of these groups within Victorian society that constituted a threat to the Empire by contradicting its morality, not only in terms of sexuality, but because it was considered a condition completely opposed to masculinity. In fact, homosexuality was classified as a “capital offence” until the 1860s and was criminalised again in the 1885 Labouchere Amendment to the Criminal Law Amendment Act (Frawley 486). Although homosexuals were not exposed to the same kind of indoctrination as women, they were more radically marginalised, even cast out from society, since being a homosexual meant being a criminal and a “pathologically deviated” individual (Frawley 486). Meanwhile, lesbians were completely ignored and, therefore, disregarded by the law. This made them more than a social taboo; it made them invisible, which is as well as a form of oppression.

To sum up, despite the demonstrations of a more progressive thought among certain sections of the population, Victorian society was dominated by the prescriptions imposed to its members which dictated how they ought to behave and which were their duties. The adherence to such principles was key to earn social respectability and, of course, to show allegiance to the Empire; in turn, those who did not adhere were condemned to marginalization and oppression. These attitudes are going to be illustrated, manipulated and even parodied in *Cloud Nine*'s Act One so that the audiences would realise until which extent they are, a hundred years later, still influenced by them.

#### 4. *CLOUD NINE* AND THE NINETEEN-SEVENTIES

This section deals with the context of *Cloud Nine*'s Act Two, which is also the context in which the play was written. Such context must be analysed from different perspectives, all of them relevant for the understanding of the play, since there are many aspects of the 1970s that take part in its creation: the political and economic circumstances of the seventies that led to Thatcherism; the progressive decline of the Empire which altered the old notion of 'Britishness'; the progression of feminism, closely related to women and gay's liberation; and, lastly, the end of theatrical censorship and the literary influences of the play.

After the Second World War, British society was rather committed to welfare-capitalism, looking at a possible future exempt from inequality, in which the social gap could be eliminated through policies supporting the poorest and creating a social consensus between the Labour and the Conservative parties (Brannigan 607). Then, for the next two decades the economy stabilised and was rather prosperous, leaving behind the darker post-war years, and keeping still the focus on society's welfare. However, the situation changed when entering the seventies. Economic problems started at an international level in 1973 with the oil crises. This resulted in a monetary inflation affecting mainly the industrial sector and the prices, and lastly caused a high rate of unemployment in the country (Monforte Rabascall 43). In addition, as the end of the decade approached, the situation in Britain was further complicated by "The Troubles" in Northern Ireland and the "Winter of Discontent" (1978-1979), which is the name given to a series of industrial and public service strikes which occurred during that winter due to "the Labour government's attempt to limit wage demands" (Brannigan 610).

Those were years of hardships, concerning both the government and the population. Such insecurity, economically and politically, set the basis for the Tory's victory after two terms sitting in the opposition. Margaret Thatcher became Prime Minister in 1979. The Conservative Party strategically blamed the previous government for the disgraces of the decade and promoted the vision of Thatcher as a "rescuer" (Brannigan 610). This government exemplifies what is known as the "New Right"; it abandoned welfare

capitalism and social contract, changing the government's focus from welfare, which aimed to reduce social disparity, to a more "savage trend of radical capitalism" (Monforte Rabascall 44), privatisation and a rather nationalistic and individualistic ideology with a marked anti-immigration legislation (Brannigan 611).

According to Young, what is known today as "Thatcherism" was not only an ensemble of right-winged policies, but an "ethical outlook and personal style, including moral absolutism" and a "fierce nationalism". By her conservatism and patriotism, Thatcher represents an old-fashioned notion of Britishness, associated with the Victorian imperialistic pride, even though Britain had been progressively losing all its worldwide colonies. Key for this association is having won the Second World War, since defeating fascism "placed the British on the side of moral righteousness", which contrasts with the "bitter and grubby roles" Britain played in the colonial wars in which it would later engage (Brannigan 602). The British removed their presence from their main territories in Asia, Africa and the Caribbean, after several conflicts (Brannigan 603). In fact, as a further attempt to maintain the identity of the British intertwined with Imperialism, Thatcher tried to retake the Falkland Islands in 1982. All this makes her to be considered "the last gasp of British Imperialism" (Brannigan 611).

The identification of Britishness with the Empire was being questioned not only by the process of decolonisation, but by the immigration the island was receiving from the former colonies (Brannigan 623). Emigration was accentuated by the British Nationality Act of 1948, which considered the inhabitants of the colonies as British citizens (613). This disturbed the notion of Britishness internally, since it altered society's fabric. Hence Thatcher's legislation focuses on anti-immigration policies, which tried to retain the notion of Britishness linked to its original and Victorian connotations of whiteness restricted to the inhabitants of the British Isles.

The associations between Thatcherism and Victorian values are not only restricted to her attempts to retain the notion of Britishness intact. She justifies the morality of the extremely capitalist policies her government performed by looking back to such values. According to Sinfield, Thatcher is "evoking a time when aggressive competition co-existed with tradition, family, religion, respectability and deference" (quoted in Monforte Rabascall

296), justifying herself and the individualism of the New Right ideology against their detractors. Furthermore, Thatcher condemns the sixties “for spoiling British manners”, because of the decade’s sexual revolution, and idealises the fifties, which were characterised by the strong importance of morality in public life qualifying them as “clean and orderly” (quoted in Monforte Rabascall 296).

Thus, Thatcher’s conservatism contrasts with the decades that preceded her government. The seventies saw the emergence of the movement for the Liberation of Women, of homosexuals and the second feminist wave. Both the Women’s Liberation Movement and the Gay Liberation Movement were partially motivated by the student uprising in Paris in 1968 (Monforte Rabascall 52), since both share an atmosphere of defiance towards social orders and the establishment. They were influenced as well by the second wave of feminism, which has a more elaborate and philosophical ideology. The second wave is closely related to the definition of the systems of oppression and to the acknowledgement of the need of self-empowerment and mutual support among oppressed groups (Krolokke and Sorensen 10). It is also characterised by the ideological diversification of feminism in different currents with different priorities.

Remarkably, this wave identifies the notion of patriarchy (Brannigan 638) and defines and analyses it through the different systems of oppression by which it manifests in society. Monforte Rabascall states that: “Patriarchy, based on a very strict system of binarisms by which its ideology its shaped, has established (...) the definition of woman as “Other” from man”, placing women in a marginal position (20).

However, patriarchy is not only related to the oppression of women. The system of binaries above mentioned affects other “Others” which are also oppressed by the power structures of patriarchy: blacks, homosexuals and the working classes, being these groups opposed to the white, heterosexual and middle-class male. This is the basic tenet of one of the branches of feminism that developed during the 1960s and 1970s: socialist or materialist feminism, of special relevance for the understanding of *Cloud Nine*.

Socialist feminism has a rather political approach since it aims to confront patriarchal systems of oppression, namely sexism, racism, capitalism and colonialism, through political action rejecting the differentiations between men and women imposed by



patriarchal society and deconstructing of notions of “gender and sexuality” (Monforte Rabascall, 30).

In addition, the variety of currents that emerged inside the feminist ideology shows the growing awareness about the situation of women. Other aspects proving the expansion of feminist thought are the increasing number of feminist publications due to the development of the feminist theory, the Women’s Liberation Movement itself and the legislation of the 1970s (Monforte Rabascall 42), that aimed to increase the liberty of women and improve their position in society, so they were equal to men in their public and private lives.

Not only women searched for equality and freedom organising themselves to achieve both, but homosexuals did so as well. Along with the Women’s Liberation, another social-change movement flourished: the Gay’s Liberation Movement, intrinsically linked to the Gay Liberation Front. Homosexuality was considered a criminal activity until 1957, when the Wolfenden Report suggested reconsidering this situation (Brannigan 637). Despite this positive sign, homosexuals still did not enjoy social acceptance and were frequently physically harassed in Britain.

The oppressive situation homosexuals experienced is described in the *Gay Liberation Front: Manifesto*, written in 1971. The manifesto denounces their situation and analyses how and why homosexuals are relegated to “the position and treatment of sub-humans” (*Gay Liberation Front: Manifesto*). The manifesto looks at each of the societal institutions that contribute to their marginalisation, namely the patriarchal family, the media, the educative system and the church. These institutions promote heteronormativity and label alternative sexualities as deviated, imposing their morality and encouraging sexism. In fact, sexism and the traditional gender roles are at the core of oppression; homosexual’s inability to fit into these standards is what promotes their differentiation and consequent discrimination. Therefore, the abolition of sexism, along with the abolition of the normative (patriarchal) family cell, is the ultimate solution for liberation, both for homosexuals and women. Recognizing the external influence of these constraints is a crucial step to overcome self-oppression, which is another issue the manifesto draws the attention to. It is stated that “we must *root out* the idea that homosexuality is bad, sick or immoral, and

develop a gay *pride*.” Lastly, the manifesto calls for the union of women and homosexuals to eliminate sexism and its co-dependent systems of oppression through an active political action.

There is one last factor necessary for a complete overview of the decade: the cultural and literary influences of *Cloud Nine*, focusing on the state of drama at the time.

After the war and its terrible effects, drama progressively increased its political message (Brannigan 630), showing its nonconformity with society. According to Goodman, this generation of dramatists relied on social realism to express their discontent with society, from a working class-perspective, with the objective of raising suspicion “towards capitalist economic and political systems” (quoted in Monforte Rabascall 55). This movement developed along with the Royal Court in London and it is mainly represented by the generation of “Angry Young Men”. Churchill inherits this concern about the situation of the working classes, oppressed under capitalism, incorporating it in her plays.

Despite the conservatism of the fifties, it is in this decade when “the emergence of a youth culture (...) gave rise to dreams of political change” (Brannigan 631), and the sixties’ revolutionary attitude contributed to enforce political drama, but it would not show all its potential and fight more explicitly for change until the censorship which controlled the genre was abolished in 1968.

The Women and Gay Liberation Movements, that materialised the changing attitudes of the sixties, and the development of feminism contributed to the appearance “of a number of companies -some of them openly agitprop groups- (...) concerned with subverting social values at the level of gender and sexuality” (Monforte Rabascall 51). It is among these companies, which could be classified as “fringe”, that we can fit more appropriately *Cloud Nine*. This fringe scene is characterised by approaching political themes and the staging of plays in unusual ways (Monforte Rabascall 58). *Cloud Nine*, for example, was conceived in a workshop. By this, Churchill aims to gather many different perspectives and promotes inclusiveness, which is exemplified in the lack of hierarchies in the production of the play: all the participants received the same wage for their work (Monforte Rabascall 59). In addition, the theatrical techniques employed in *Cloud Nine*, such as cross-casting, are also related to the fringe scene and to a feminist practice of theatre.

Consequently, Churchill's work is influenced both by the tradition of social realism and the fringe scene of the sixties, and also by its context: an economically decadent decade which would soon experience a shift to conservatism materialised in Thatcherism, emphasising the contrast with the progresses in the consideration of homosexuals and women, and the deepening of the feminist theory.

## 5. ANALYSING THE STRATEGIES FOR SOCIAL CHANGE IN *CLOUD NINE*

The last and central section of this undergraduate dissertation considers *Cloud Nine* in relation to the historical contexts previously examined. The purpose of this is to analyse how Victorian morality is reflected in the dialogues and characters of the play, both in the Victorian period and the London of the nineteen-seventies. The analysis explores the issues discussed in the two previous sections of this dissertation, namely the situation and treatment of women and the feminist notions the playwright displays; how other oppressed minorities, homosexuals and blacks, are portrayed; the role of men, the notion of the family cell and, of course, the Empire. These aspects are key for a complete understanding of the play and, by considering how they are represented, it is possible to observe how Churchill, applying certain theatrical techniques, tries to make her audiences recognise the systems of oppression and how they are influenced by them.

As a feminist play, its purpose is to unravel the manifestations of patriarchy, which already begin at the structural level by following the Aristotelian conventions: chronological linearity (a story with a beginning, middle and end), a single moment of climax, and a male-centred plot. These conventions have characterised theatre for centuries, maintaining women as objects, instead of subjects of such plays, “perpetuating myths of female identity” (Code 171). Therefore, in order to use theatrical performances for its own purposes, feminist theatre has to subvert such conventions.

*Cloud Nine* is a clear example of this, since it does not follow a logical chronology between its two acts, neither a pattern of beginning, middle and end. The first Act and the second develop in two different historical periods but share the same characters and both acts lack a moment of climax and a structured chronology of events. Thus, none of the acts follow an Aristotelian dramatic structure.

However, there are other means by which the play breaks with patriarchy. Feminist theatre frequently makes use of theatrical techniques borrowed from the German playwright Bertolt Brecht, who also employed them with a similar purpose: unravelling the

oppression of capitalism in favour of socialism (Herrmann 134), with the aim of raising a political consciousness and critical thinking among the audiences.

One of these techniques is historicisation, which consists in including a historical setting in the play, “to reach a better understanding of the present through an analysis of the past” (Monforte Rabascall 62). As it has been said, Act One is set in Victorian Africa, as Churchill herself states in the introduction of the play. By this, the audience can visualise the Victorian origin of concepts like gender roles, normative sexualities or the influence of the Empire.

Another technique is cross casting, which alters the race or the gender of certain characters, and is used in feminist theatre to “destabilise categories of sex, gender and sexuality” (Code 112), although in *Cloud Nine* it has further implications in relation to colonialism. Cross-casting was used by Bertolt Brecht to create the “A-effect”, or alienation effect. The purpose is “to ‘denaturalize’ social formations in order to make their arbitrary constructions more visible” (Herrmann 141). Unlike Aristotle, who sought to imitate life in his plays and to provoke the emergence of deep emotions in his audiences, Brecht wanted to emphasize the illusory nature of theatre. Brecht did not want his plays to be mistaken with reality, and he neither wanted the audiences to feel emotionally engaged with the play: he wanted his audiences to feel alienated from what they were seeing so that they could reflect on the play from a distance, stimulating critical thinking among the spectators by emphasizing the artificiality of theatre, which is what Churchill intends as well.

#### **a. The performances of Victorian morality in Act One.**

The first act begins with the whole family (Clive, Betty, Edward, Victoria, Maud, Ellen and Joshua) singing. The lyrics reflect a strong feeling of pride in relation to the Empire and emphasise its territorial power: “Come gather, sons of England, come gather in your pride”, “From North and South and East and West / Come one and all for England” (1), which alienates the audience from the start.

When the song finishes, Clive introduces both himself and his family. The fact that it is he who introduces the rest of the characters shows his position as the centre of family. He says, “I am father to the natives here, / And father to my family so dear” (1), thus exerting

his dominance both over his family and the Africans, “as a sexual and imperial patriarch” (Monforte Rabascall 86). Next, Clive introduces the rest of the characters, which gives a huge insight to know how the characters are perceived in this Victorian context, not only by Clive, but by themselves. Clive says, “My wife is all I dreamt a wife should be, / And everything she is she owes to me” (1), but Betty, the wife, is played by a man. This way, as Churchill states in the introduction of the play, Betty’s desires of fulfilling men’s expectations are manifested, and her speech confirms it: “I am a man’s creation as you see, / And what men want is what I want to be” (1). The fact that she is played by a man makes this self-description comical and ironic, since in her attempts to fit men’s expectations, she seems to have become one, but it could also insinuate a loss of her identity as a woman. The way in which she defines herself is a very accurate description of the expectations women faced at Victorian times - “The whole aim of my life / Is to be what he looks for in a wife” (1). Betty’s cross-casting, in addition, “makes gender visible by separating feminine gender from the female body” (Kritzer 113), revealing the artificiality of such constructions.

The next character to be introduced by Clive is Joshua, the black servant, who is played by a white man. This casting choice has practically the same implications as in Betty’s case. Maintaining the humorous tone, Clive says “You’d hardly notice the fellow’s black” (1), and being interpreted by a white shows that this is Joshua’s desire. As Betty previously did, Joshua’s beliefs are stated by himself explicitly: “My master is my light. / I only live for him. As you can see, / What white men want is what I want to be” (2). Thus, both Joshua and Betty are parallel characters in the sense that they are both victims of white men’s expectations, and in their efforts to fulfil them they have erased some key aspects of their identities, internalizing colonial and patriarchal values, respectively.

Clive makes a third introduction, this time of his son Edward, the last character of Act One who undergoes cross-casting, since the boy is played by a woman. Although Edward is subjected to a series of expectations imposed again by Clive, he struggles to fulfil them, unlike Betty and Joshua who have deeply internalised such expectations. Edward experiences the obligations of fitting the standards of manly behaviour. Clive states, “I’m doing all I can / To teach him to grow up to be a man”, and Edward responds,

enlighteningly, “What father wants I’d dearly like to be. / I find it rather hard as you can see” (2). Thus, Edward’s cross-casting acts differently to Betty and Joshua’s insomuch as it shows a nature opposed to Clive’s expectations of how his son should be.

The story begins with a conversation between Betty and Clive, in which the latter tells her that their old friend, Harry Bagley is coming to visit them. She is called “my little dove” (3), and he praises her by saying “You’re so delicate and sensitive” (3), reinforcing the stereotypical depiction of the Angel in the House. Betty feels isolated, lacking social contact, but showing the good disposition of the Angel and acknowledging her duties towards the Empire, she states, “We’re not in this country to enjoy ourselves. If I lack society that is my form of service” (4), which recalls Sarah Stickney’s prescriptions over the duty of women towards the Empire. To further enhance her delicacy, Clive asks Betty about her day –“No hysteria?” (4)– again emphasising stereotypes of women, but this time pointing to their alleged physiological fragility.

Additionally, Betty manifests the submission she is expected to perform. For instance, when Ellen, the governess, asks Betty if she should bring the children, Betty, instead of giving her a direct answer, repeats the question to Clive, who is in charge of making decisions, despite how trivial they might be. Betty is frequently an intermediary between Clive, the authority, and Ellen, who finally performs the tasks related to the maintenance of the household, like taking care of the children. This hierarchy can be seen on a stage direction, which reads as follows: “CLIVE *tosses* VICTORIA to BETTY, *who gives her to* ELLEN” (8).

Despite the apparent concern for his wife, Clive seems to prioritise homosocial bonds, which are defined by Monforte Rabascall as “male friendship as a fundamental part of patriarchy (...) hand in hand with sexist and homophobic behaviour” (90). This kind of behaviour is seen in the first scene, when Betty tells Clive that Joshua has been disrespectful to her, and that Joshua owes her an apology. Clive gives him a little reprimand which can be read sarcastically since after it, he winks at Joshua secretly. By trivialising Betty’s concerns, he shows a disdainful attitude towards her in benefit of these homosocial bonds.

Harry Bagley and Caroline Saunders arrive at the Verandah almost at the same time. She is a widow who lives in a farm nearby that has been attacked by the native rebels, so she escapes searching for refuge. However, this does not mean that she follows the Victorian stereotypes of female defencelessness. Although Clive feels reassured in his role as patriarchal leader of the family unit by her need of aid, he also glimpses that Mrs Saunders extraordinary attitude could question such role, and he says: “It is a pleasure. It is an honour. It is positively your duty to seek my help. I would be hurt, I would be insulted by any show of independence” (10).

As it is proved throughout the play, Mrs Saunders contradicts the values of the Angel of the House. Instead, her character is rather close to the idea of the New Woman, not only because she lives without a husband, all on her own in a relatively dangerous environment, but because of her attitude. While the other women are kept apart from the issue of the rebellion, she is engaged in the situation. The other women acknowledge such distinction. For instance, Maud says: “Let Mrs Saunders be a warning to you, Betty. She is alone in the world” (30). As all the other possible behavioural deviations, there is a certain masked threat in the implications of being different, as Maud’s speech suggests. Therefore, Mrs Saunders performs her distinctiveness entering the public sphere by interfering in what the other women consider men’s business, which is seen in her interest in knowing how the rebellion is evolving, and this is an issue the men are trying to hide from the women.

At a moment where Betty and Harry are left alone, they engage in a rather flirtatious conversation where the audience meets a new facet of Betty’s personality, since after Harry praises her –“You are safety and light and peace and home” (14)– she answers, “But I want to be dangerous” (14). This shows that Betty’s moral is not flawless, which gives a new depth to her character. On the other hand, Harry’s next intervention does align with the generalised thought of the period which dismisses women as prone to manifest their sexuality: “I don’t like dangerous women”, consequently rejecting possible deviations from the standard. Still, he tries to hug her, but Betty is not ready to perform such transgression yet, and she leaves the scene hurriedly. Meanwhile, Joshua has witnessed the whole scene, and suddenly, the tone of the story, which until now has been somehow naïve, is completely disrupted by Harry asking Joshua, “Shall we go in a barn and fuck? It’s not an



order” (15), to which Joshua agrees. This is an advance to the display of sexuality and relationships that results in risible and scatological situations in the following scenes, but also a demonstration of Joshua’s imperative need of pleasing or approaching the white men.

Another way in which Joshua manifests his colonial mentality is by rejecting what the whites consider “his people”. Joshua attempts to disassociate himself from them by saying that they are not his people and that they are “bad” (32), which shows his desires to be identified with the whites. He tries to manifest his allegiance to Western values, which entails rejecting his culture. After telling Edward an African myth, Joshua states that “It’s a bad story. Adam and Eve is true” (36). The myth is about a mother goddess, which confirms Joshua’s rejection to both women and Africa in his adherence to patriarchy and colonialism (Kritzer 11). His hatred of women is seen in his treatment of Betty, for instance. This misogynistic behaviour is an attempt to put into practice more evidently the patriarchal values he perceives living with the family. He seems to stick to these principles even when his parents are killed by British soldiers: “My mother and father were bad people (...) (To Clive) You are my father and mother” (42). Clive, who seems very affected by this, gives Joshua the day off and immediately asks him to bring him a drink.

In the next scene it is revealed that Mrs Saunders and Clive are secretly having an affair. Adultery shows Clive’s hypocrisy since it is opposed to the familiar values he promotes. Later in the play, when Clive tells Betty that he knows (through Joshua) about her and Harry, he reaffirms his hypocrisy by justifying her actions as being due to the weaknesses of the female sex (33). Clive considers this a deviation as well, not from sexual standards, but rather from the moral principles of the Empire, thus saying that he forgives her for the sake of their duties to the household (34).

The next scene is an outdoor picnic where Edward’s sexist education is displayed. Clive opens a bottle of champagne and Edward wants to try some. His grandmother Maud would not let him, but Clive disregards Maud’s authority and orders her to give the boy half a glass (18). After witnessing this kind of behaviour, Edward imitates them. When Ellen and Betty start to play catch, he says that they are not good at the game and that they are spoiling it (18), so the two women, after such remark, sit down while the men play. Prescriptions on manly behaviour are implicit in these sexist attitudes, but Edward will

receive more evident recommendations when he is told that “a boy has no business having feelings” (19).

In the case of Victoria, Edward’s sister, she is addressed in ways which enhance the attributes of the Angel in the House she must become, such as “my sweet little Vicky” (7) or, “what a pretty” (7), but she is being played by a dummy, so her reaction to such cues cannot be known. However, her character exemplifies how she is inculcated feminine standards. Furthermore, the irresponsiveness of the dummy reflects the passiveness that was expected from girls at the period.

The instilment of gender roles to children was part of the duties of the family cell since the children were expected to become wives and husbands to perpetuate the institution of the family, as it is a key symbol of righteousness inside the ideology of the Empire.

Back in the picnic scene, Betty and Harry are left alone. Here, Harry declares his love, but at the same time he maintains his idealization of Betty –“I need you to be Clive’s wife” (23)– which shows his affinity to the ideology of the Empire and an internal debate between his desires and his duty. However, his attraction to Betty is not the only aspect of his sexuality with which he struggles when trying to stick to the morality he praises. As Betty leaves the scene, Edward enters, and by their dialogue it is established that there has been a sexual relationship between both. However, despite Edward’s insistence, Harry is fighting his impulses again –“It’s a sin, and a crime and it’s also wrong” (25)– as he manifests explicitly the Victorian perception of homosexuality. Harry’s need for adherence to Victorian morality provokes an anxious response on him. He sees himself as the Empire’s “black sheep” (20) since he knows that homosexuality is a direct threat to the moral of the Empire.

Thus, although the characters exalt Victorian morality they are not coherent with their words since they engage in extramarital affairs and escape heteronormativity. But Harry and Edward are not the only characters struggling with their sexuality in such a context: Ellen is as well. Next, it is discovered that she is a lesbian since she declares her love to Betty, kissing her. It is a crucial moment for the governess, but Betty does not take this seriously and the conversation continues as if nothing had happened (27). The fact that

Ellen is being ignored mirrors the Victorian perspective towards lesbians, who were entirely disregarded. The fact that their sexuality was not acknowledged made them invisible, and such invisibility differentiates them from male homosexuals because they were considered neither a threat to morality, nor a deviation, but the lack of recognition is a way of oppression as well.

However, there are more direct ways of repressing homosexuality. Although Clive initially idealises Harry and considers him a good representation of the attitudes he is trying to promote in his son, his opinion will change quickly when he finds out he is gay. Harry misunderstands Clive's idealization of the bonds between men, and his mistrust towards women, which he considers "dark" (40) and a threat, which display Clive's homosocial tendencies for love. Harry grabs Clive, which horrifies him, and this contrasts with Betty's reaction when Ellen kisses her. There is no denial in Clive's reaction, but an identification of a threat towards the Empire by saying, "Rome fell, Harry, and this sin can destroy an empire" (40). After Clive's initial shock, he tries to "fix" somehow the situation, trying to reconstruct the initial idea he had of Harry. The solution Clive thinks of is marriage, an idea that Harry initially despises, but at the same time he feels the need for fixing this disruption of morality and for manifesting his adherence to the Empire. Clive thinks of Mrs Saunders as a possible pretender to Harry, but she rejects his proposition, preferring to maintain her independent way of living and decides to return to England to run a farm. Ellen, as Harry, previously rejected Betty's idea of her getting married by manifesting openly her contempt for the idea of having a husband and her aversion to children (38). Therefore, their rejection of marriage mirrors their refusal to stick to the standards. They reject the formation of a family, which implies the neglect of their duties towards the Empire and the disagreement with the predominant ideology. However, such duty is imposed to Ellen and Harry by the intrinsic need for adherence they have been taught as members of Victorian society, so in the end they decide to marry.

Scene Five shows the wedding between Ellen and Harry. At the very end of the act, Clive is giving a speech for the couple in which he celebrates the wedding and the end of the rebellion, announcing a brighter future, but Joshua brings out a gun. Only Edward sees this, but he does not intervene to alert the others. The act ends when Clive is about to be

murdered, just before the climax of the story is reached. The reason for this sudden outbreak of violence is uncertain: it may be because Joshua realises how, despite all his dedication, he has never been considered an equal, or because he reacts to the unjustified death of his parents. What is more easily understood is Edward's passiveness towards the murder of his father, since he may be watching a way out from the imposing moral values Clive represents.

These are some of the instances in *Cloud Nine* which reflect, more or less explicitly, Victorian morality, which despite its comical tone parallel the issues developed in the contextualization of the Victorian period in previous sections. In this first act it can be seen how gender roles are being instilled in the youngest characters and how are they performed by the adults, as a means of adhering to socially and morally accepted standards. It can also be seen how homosexuals and blacks were oppressed because of their differences, but there is also an element of dissonance, represented by Mrs Saunders, who reflects alternative mentalities in the Victorian era and advances the more open-minded society that is represented in the second act.

### **b. Overcoming Victorian morality in Act Two**

The second act maintains some of the characters from the first: Betty, who has separated from her husband and is now played by a woman; Vicky, who is no longer a dummy but a full-grown woman, and Edward, who is now played by a man. The rest of the characters are introduced for the first time: Cathy, a little girl who is played by a man; Lin, Cathy's mother and a lesbian; Martin, Vicky's husband; and Gerry, Edward's lover. Now there is only one example of cross-casting, Cathy, since the characters that were previously played by their opposite sex, Betty and Edward, are now starting to accept themselves. However, Cathy is played by a man, according to Churchill "to show more clearly the issues involved in learning what is considered correct behaviour for a girl", being as well a reversal of the character of Edward in Act One ("Introduction").

The narrative linearity has been broken by the change of setting and century, but there are more subtle changes between the two acts, including a looser structure, which Churchill

relates to a “less authoritarian feeling” in this act because of the higher presence of women and homosexuals (“Introduction”). Their presence will contribute to the performative disruption of the Victorian morality which is also an intrinsic element of the society of the 1970s, with the liberation movements of women and homosexuals.

The second act starts as well with a song, but this does not praise the Empire, neither is sung in unison by the characters. It is Cathy who sings, a childish song with farcical lyrics: “Yum yum bubblegum / Stick it up your mother’s bum” (48), maintaining the comical undertones of the play since, as mentioned before, the audience is watching a man dressed as a girl. This contributes to the increased relaxation of the act, which is also created by the fact that this scene develops in a children’s play centre in a London park. Cathy, Lin and Victoria are present. Also Tommy, Victoria’s son, is supposed to be there, but he is an off-stage character, who is sometimes addressed but never appears on stage.

The two women are talking, while Cathy plays with a gun. Here it is seen how the gender impositions on children are changing in the second act since her mother Lin does not reprimand her for playing with typically masculine toys, but encourages her saying “Don’t hit him, Cathy, kill him. Point the gun, kiou, kiou, kiou” (51). Encouraging the girl’s aggressiveness is also a way of distancing her from patriarchal oppression, but despite this, Cathy will not be able to fully escape gender role prescriptions, since she will be manipulated by them from the outside, as Lin tells Victoria that she will not wear jeans to school anymore because other girls called her a boy (61). As a result of social pressure, Cathy will imitate such behaviours and will try to impose them to her mother telling her to wear skirts and tights (62). So, even if she is not receiving any prescriptions inside the household, as Edward did in the first act, Cathy is not completely free from the notion of gender roles since they are still present in society.

Victoria and Lin will also explicitly distance themselves from the Victorian patriarchal morality, displaying some feminist principles. Victoria shows a more developed feminist thought, in opposition to Lin, who talking about her husband says, “I left mine two years ago. He let me keep Cathy and I’m grateful for that” (51), to which Victoria answers that she should not be grateful. But Victoria proves her feminist consciousness again by remembering a time when she had to stop Lin from getting a job in a boutique, since that

would have implied “collaborating with sexist consumerism” (66). Although Victoria’s feminist consciousness is much more developed than Lin’s, this does not mean that she is submitting to stereotypes of female conduct; on the contrary, she states her rejection towards men by claiming “I hate men (...) I just hate the bastards” (52), and her language performs a differentiation from the now old-fashioned Victorian ideals of delicacy and fragility. Therefore, both show certain adherence to feminist principles, either theoretically or practically, or at least some familiarity which would not even be thinkable in the first act.

After this, Betty and Edward join the scene. Betty has separated from Clive and is starting to live by her own after years of defining herself in relation to her husband and to the ideal of the pleasing housewife. Initially, Betty feels defenceless in her newly found independence and admits that “I’ll never be able to manage. If I can’t even walk down the street by myself. Everything looks so fierce” (60). Her fear is something that has been instilled in her and is implicit in the stereotypical feminine fragility. Betty has been taught that she needs a husband to take care of her, so when she finds herself alone, the feeling of defencelessness arises. However, she will progressively realise that this new situation can free her from the strains of the Victorian morality she has internalised.

Although she is trying to change such behaviours, she still manifests them. For instance, she does so by highlighting the importance of a woman’s beauty as part of her means to please men or expressing her rejection to women in general by indicating that “They don’t have such interesting conversations as men. (...) They spoil things with their emotions” (64). In addition, Betty manifests a colonial mentality which praises Britishness in opposition to other cultures, and which echoes the definition of Britishness that Thatcherism will promote by rejecting immigration and looking back nostalgically to the Victorian period. When Cathy tells her that she knows a girl who got her ears pierced at three, Betty answers that she does not expect her to be English (55). Thus, Betty underlies the remains of the Victorian morality in the present time, as Thatcher will do. Both are praising the past one way or another causing the perpetuation of Victorian morals and imperialism.

Betty is not the only character who struggles to overcome the Victorian principles she has been taught. Martin, Victoria’s husband, does so as well. Martin’s attitude towards his

relationship with Victoria shows a certain continuity with Clive's behaviour in Act One, in the sense that he subtly tries to control their relationship (Kritzer 124). This is seen in the way he tries to manipulate Victoria, who has to decide between moving to Manchester for a job opportunity or remaining in London, under the façade of supportiveness: "Whatever you want to do, I'll be delighted. If you could just let me know what it is I'm to be delighted about" (61). There is a contradiction in his character since he feels menaced by Victoria's independence, but at the same time he attempts to adhere to a more progressive heterosexual masculinity, detached from patriarchal ideology (Monforte Rabascall 103-104). This is seen in statements like "I'm not like whatever percentage of American men have become impotent as a direct result of women's liberation, which I am totally in favour of, more I sometimes think than you are yourself" (63).

Edward too has difficulties defining his life and relationships free from the prescription he has received all his life, and the still corseted society of the nineteen-seventies does not ease this process. At the beginning of the act, he has not publicly accepted his homosexuality because when Lin asks him whether he is gay or not, he tells her not to mention it again since he might lose his job (53). Thus, his need of hiding his sexuality in public shows that despite the increasing social awareness on the rights of women and homosexuals, society is not ready to completely accept homosexuality. This prevents Edward from doing so himself and strengthens self-oppression, a notion that the Gay Manifesto identifies as one of the problems homosexuals faced due to patriarchal oppression (Gay Liberation Front). Another issue the Gay Manifesto identifies as oppressing homosexuals is gender roles. In fact, Edward tries to create a relationship with his partner, Gerry, which would follow the patterns of a heterosexual relationship, that is, consisting of a wife and a husband performing their assigned roles. Gerry will reject any similarity to such patterns by saying, "I'm not the husband so you can't be the wife" (71), and Edward feels he is being oppressed once again: "Everyone's always tried to stop me being feminine and now you are too" (70). He has been oppressed for not fitting into the standards of manly behaviour, and now he is similarly being criticised by relating to feminine gender roles, showing that he feels the necessity of adhering to a determined notion of gender, whether it is the traditionally accepted for his sex or not.

However, the other two homosexual characters in the play, Gerry and Lin, have a much more liberated attitude towards their sexuality than Edward. Gerry represents a sexuality completely opposed to the Victorian. Although the characters in the first act engaged in adultery and prohibited relations, Gerry lacks the hypocrisy and guiltiness which characterized their actions. In the second scene, Gerry, after being reprimanded by Edward on his lifestyle, engages in a monologue after Edward leaves the scene. Such monologue displays his open and individualistic sexuality, which rejects the bonds of monogamy since he narrates how he maintained sexual relations with a stranger in the train from Victoria to Clapham, and he expresses a certain tiredness towards the stranger's need of justifying the encounter as a victim of the conventions: "He said I hope you don't think I do this all the time. I said I hope you do it from now on" (59).

However, not all the characters suffer the effects of social conventions. Lin states her homosexuality straightaway and manifests her desires openly when she asks Victoria if she would have sex with her (57). Victoria's reaction to both statements is far distanced from Betty's reaction to Ellen's homosexuality in the first act. Victoria accepts it and takes it as something completely natural by saying "Does it count as adultery with a woman?" (57). In the context of the 70s, although there is still a repression of homosexuality, the situation from the Victorian period has evolved enormously: lesbians are no longer "erased", and homosexuals in general can manifest their sexuality more openly, as long as they are capable of embracing and accepting themselves.

The third scene shows Victoria, Lin and Edward in the park at night. They are drunk, trying to invoke an ancient fertility goddess. The three characters praise this matriarchal entity to somehow liberate themselves from patriarchal oppression, to live free of such constraints. This shows as well that they are aware of their own limitations due to the remains of Victorian society. The goddess they invoke will not appear. Instead, a ghost, the spirit of Lin's brother, a soldier who died in The Troubles in Northern Ireland, will do. He interrupts their ritual to explain his experiences in the army in a short speech full of curses: "Fucking bored out of my fucking head. That or shit scared. For five minutes I'd be glad I wasn't bored, then I was fucking scared" (76). By doing so, he disrupts any idealistic notion of the Empire that may have remained and any nationalistic notion of heroism that



may have been associated with his death. Therefore his speech, through its language and the experiences it narrates, depicts the decadence of the Empire by the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Monforte Rabascall 111), manifested in the progressive loss of territories and the colonial wars Britain entered.

However, there are still signs of the Victorian praise of the Empire as a representation of all the moral values society must hold since Lin is indirectly blamed by her father for her brother's death (67). The reason behind this is that her father is making the old Victorian associations between moral deviations and the wrecking of the Empire, since Lin separated from her husband and started living her sexuality freely. By this, she rejected two key notions of the Victorian family cell: heteronormativity and its most evident manifestation, marriage.

Nonetheless, despite the social impositions and restrictions the characters face in this act, they seem to find a way of living which rejects the normative family cell, and thus Victorianism: Victoria, her son Tommy and Edward move to live with Lin and Cathy. Moreover, the three adults "sleep together" (81), thus completely disrupting any notion of monogamy, since it is a three-way relationship, or social acceptability, by establishing a sexual relationship between the two siblings. This relationship is not only incestuous, but heterosexual and homosexual, "an example of taboo breaking" which "takes its participants near the boundaries of contemporary tolerance" (Krtizer 123) and tests the tolerance of the audience. In addition, their union recalls the collective union among oppressed groups the Gay Manifesto claimed, which was necessary to overcome oppression. Following the tenets of this Manifesto, with their relationship they reject the patriarchal family, heteronormativity, and the so called deviated sexualities (Gay Liberation Front).

Edward, who was particularly affected by gender binaries, will also find a way to overcome oppression in their alternative family. In it, he will fulfil the role traditionally assigned to women by doing the housework, but he will reject the idea of being defined as wife, or as anything:

"GERRY: Whose wife are you now then?"

EDWARD: Nobody's. I don't think like that any more. I live with some women" (81)

This fragment reveals that he has stopped defining himself in relation to gender stereotypes. Moreover, to underline his change of mentality, Edward declares that he is a lesbian, “thus overruling completely gender distinctions” (Monforte Rabascall 108) and allowing him to reinitiate his relationship with Gerry now completely free of constraints, and not regarding Gerry’s sexuality as a threat for the relation.

Betty is also able to start living on her own, without a husband to whom relate. She finds a job and discovers the satisfaction of being economically independent. Her autonomy will further increase by liberating herself sexually as well. This is seen when she talks about masturbation: “Afterwards I thought I’d betrayed Clive. My mother would kill me. But I felt triumphant because I was a separate person from them” (83). According to Kritzer, this leads her to “new patterns of relating” (126) as she has recognised herself as a ‘separate person’, both from patriarchal relations, represented by Clive, and moral prescriptions, associated with her mother. This new personal freedom is performed in several ways: she suggests to Victoria that she could move with them and buy a house for all, thus accepting unconventional lifestyles, and she makes a romantic approach to Gerry, overcoming feminine idealizations and surpassing boundaries which would have been unacceptable for the Angel in the House she used to be.

However, her past still resonates when Clive enters the scene, representing the remains of her Victorian morality, and tells her: “You are not that sort of woman, Betty. I can’t believe you are. (...) And Africa is to be communist I suppose. I used to be proud to be British. There was a high ideal” (87). His reference to Africa acknowledges for the last time the relation between Victorian morality and Imperialism. From Clive’s perspective, since Betty has embraced her sexuality, Africa is to be communist. But even though the old morality may resonate in Betty, she has surpassed it by acknowledging it in the first place, and by starting to live under new principles, as the other characters will do too. This reconciliation with herself is represented by the entering on stage of Betty from Act One; “*BETTY and BETTY embrace*” (87).

## 6. FINAL CONCLUSION

This undergraduate dissertation explores how in *Cloud Nine* Caryl Churchill is trying to reflect and criticise the Victorian morality she and her generation inherited. In the first place, the historical contexts in which the two acts of *Cloud Nine* take place were reviewed. The Victorian context was analysed to examine how social prescriptions were perceived, how they functioned and how they were perpetuated from generation to generation; why being an ideal housewife, or husband, was so important and carried along an implicit respectability, which has been proved to be closely intertwined with the generalised patriotism of the period. The sense of allegiance to the Empire was crucial for the Victorians, and it implied a series of moral obligations. Those who were unable to perform the duties expected from them –homosexuals, prostitutes, women who did not fulfil their roles in the family cell– experienced marginalization or the oppression that implies concealing oneself. Nonetheless, the “deviations” of the Victorian period become the exponents of progress in the nineteen-seventies. In this decade Victorian values retain their influence, in the figure of Margaret Thatcher, for instance, but at the same time society was starting to change with the Women and Gay Liberation movements and the development of feminism, which identified the governing systems of oppression which so heavily determine behaviours and relationships. Thus, in the nineteen-seventies there are aspects of the Victorian morality still being performed, but at the same time they are more strongly rejected than ever.

The patterns of behaviour and sexuality restricted to this inherited morality arose in the workshop in which the play was conceived, and they were later performed in their original context in Act One, in a feminist employment of the Brechtian technique of historicisation so that the audience could observe a Victorian environment but alienating them from what they were seeing on stage. The audience is not supposed to regard this act just as a historical piece. The function of this historical setting is to make the audience notice the strangeness of the characters’ actions and dialogues and the strangeness of the situations and behaviours. This is the objective of the theatrical techniques employed,

remarkably cross-casting but also the scatological humour which characterises the play. Following Brecht, the audience should distance itself, so they may recognise in themselves the traces of the Victorian morality and values seen on stage.

Meanwhile, in Act Two, the audience faces a more familiar context in which they could even situate themselves, and several characters representing different forms of resistance to the systems of oppression in which Victorian morality lays. This resistance can be seen in their attempts to escape such oppression, or in their difficulties to change the manifestation of such oppression in their way of relating to the world. Their struggle to overcome such principles is finally fruitful. The characters recognise the influence the imposed standards have in their lives and are able to find ways of overcoming them. These ways of overcoming conventions imply accepting oneself and not fearing to live counterflow. After all, this is what the audience is expected to do as well: to acknowledge how they are manipulated by moral standards, so that they can reject them.

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