

Exploring Traditional and Modern Gender Norms in Caryl Churchill's Owners through a Transformative Gender Perspective

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ABSTRACT

Caryl Churchill's "Owners" is a highly successful play, marking her debut in stage drama when it premiered at the Theatre Upstairs of the Royal Court in 1972. The play serves as a satirical exploration of Londoners' social lives, featuring two couples representing diverse social backgrounds. Marion and Clegg are property owners, while Lisa and Alec portray impoverished tenants dependent on Marion and Clegg's actions. Written during the transition between the first and second wave of feminism, the play introduces various female characters from traditional and modern perspectives. Marion, the central character, embodies extreme feminism, breaking away from traditional female norms and adopting a masculine demeanour. In contrast, Lisa, another female character, adheres to the traditional role of a domestic housewife, caring for her husband and children, making her and her newborn baby victims of Marion's schemes. The play also introduces three male characters who defy traditional male gender norms. This article delves into how gender norms have evolved through different waves of feminism, starting with an introduction to the playwright, Caryl Churchill. The focus then shifts to Marion's extreme female masculinity before exploring the unique male identities of the three male characters compared to traditional masculine standards, leading to a concluding section.

Keywords: *Owners, Caryl Churchill, Gender Transformation, Gender Roles, Extreme Feminism, Traditional Feminism, Masculinity*

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ÖZET

Caryl Churchill'ın "Owners" adlı oyunu, 1972'de Royal Court Tiyatrosu'nun Theatre Upstairs sahnesinde ilk kez sahnelendiğinde sahne dramalarına ilk adımını atan son derece başarılı bir eserdir. Oyun, Londralıların sosyal yaşamlarını hicveden bir keşif olarak hizmet eder ve farklı sosyal geçmişleri temsil eden iki çifti içerir. Marion ve Clegg gayrimenkul sahipleridir, Lisa ve Alec ise Marion ve Clegg'in eylemlerine bağımlı olan yoksul kiracıları canlandırır. Birinci ve ikinci dalga feminizmin geçiş döneminde yazılan oyun, geleneksel ve modern bakış açılarından çeşitli kadın karakterlerini tanıtır. Marion, merkezi karakter olarak aşırı feminizmi temsil eder, geleneksel kadın normlarından ayrılır ve maskülen bir tavır benimser. Buna karşılık, Lisa adlı diğer bir kadın karakter, kocasına ve çocuklarına bakma gibi geleneksel bir ev hanımı rolünü benimser ve bu da onu Marion'ın entrikalarının kurbanı yapar. Oyun, geleneksel erkek cinsiyet normlarını ihlal eden üç erkek karakteri de tanıtır. Bu makale, farklı feminizm dalgaları aracılığıyla cinsiyet normlarının nasıl evrildiğini incelemektedir ve Caryl Churchill'ı tanıtan bir girişle başlamaktadır. Ardından odak, Marion'ın aşırı kadın maskülenliğine kayar ve ardından üç erkek karakterin geleneksel erkek normlarına göre benzersiz erkek kimliklerini incelemeye devam eder ve bir sonuç bölümüne yol açar.

Anahtar Kelimeler: *Owners, Caryl Churchill, Cinsiyet Dönüşümü, Cinsiyet Roller, Aşırı Feminizm, Geleneksel Feminizm, Maskülenlik*

INTRODUCTION

On Caryl Churchill as the Writer of Owners

People are not evil, and people are not good. They live how they can one day at a time. They come out of dust they go back to dust, dusty feet, no wings, and whose fault is that?

- Caryl Churchill

Caryl Churchill is a British playwright known for her play *Owners*. She was born in 1938 in London. Both of her parents were artists. Her father was a political cartoonist while her mother was a fashion model and actress. As a result of the Second World War, her family had to move to Canada when she was not more than ten years old. In Canada, she attended a girl's school to continue her studies. Later, between 1956 and 1960, she studied BA of English Literature and got Richard Hillary Memorial Prize from Oxford. After the prize, she continued her career in writing there. Until *Owners*, she had written several literary pieces for different institutions. In her early works, she explored several different themes including femininity, masculinity, gender roles, sexuality, social norms, and social problems. In 1972, she got popular thanks to her play *Owners*. Apart from being a playwright, she is a political writer as she has been interested in the issue of Palestine. She is the head of *Palestine Solidarity Campaign*, and in 2009, she wrote a small play showing the Israeli attack on Gaza region. Churchill did not have a comfortable life after she got married in London. She got kids and had to live in the suburbs of London since living there was more affordable for her newly formed family. That is why, she experienced several problems in her marriage and social life. As a result, she wrote *Owners* after experiencing an event which happened in her rented apartment where she was living at an old landlady's flat: 'I was in an old woman's flat when a young man offering her money to move came round – he was my first image of Worsely and one of the starting points of the play.' (Churchill, 1985, p. 4). Even, she wrote *Owners* in three days after she had a miscarriage. Furthermore, she was considered to be a socialist feminist activist and. That is why, in her plays, including *Owners*, she wants(ed) to give a solution to the problems of the society by showing the issues existed in the capitalist environment. In one of her speeches, she says the following words:

What kind of society I would like: decentralized, non-authoritarian, communist, non-sexist – a society in which people can be in touch with their feelings and control of their lives. But it always sounds both ridiculous and unattainable when you put it into words. (Aston, 1997, p 3)

In many of her plays, including *Owners*, she discusses gender norms and standards. However, mostly, she focuses on socialist femininity and how it affected the lives of women who lived in the last century. In *Owners*, readers see two different female characters: Marion and Lisa. Marion is a character that is totally the opposite of 'traditional' female personality since she acts as if she is a man. While, on the other hand, Lisa is a traditional domestic housewife with several children who takes care of her household, husband, and house chores. Thus, in the play, Churchill explores femininity and female identity from two different aspects. Moreover, we can see three male characters who are supposedly represent masculinity from different perspectives: the two husbands Clegg, Alec, and Marion's work partner Worsely. Each male character has his own masculinity including traditional masculinity and feminine masculinity.

Gender Roles and Their Transformation during Feminist Waves

In order to understand the gender roles and how they get transformed in the play, it is necessary to have a look at the history of feminism since the play predominantly focuses on different types of femininity in female and male characters lives. Feminism is a movement that demands equal right for both men and women. At the same time, it fights for the demolition of stereotypes about women and tries to show that women can do as much as men can do anything. It believes that patriarchal standards have demolished women rights over the centuries and women have been forced to obey rules and dominancy of oppression led by men. While fighting against discrimination, it demands(ed) women's education, health, right for vote and abortion, divorce and many more. Furthermore, it is necessary to mention that feminism has different types such as black feminism, postcolonial feminism, eastern feminism, etc. Each feminism claims that women of certain geography have their own problems and those problems are different than the problems that other women face in other part of the world in the same time frame. However, all these feminism types got influenced by the main western feminism that started in the late 18th century.

Feminism has different waves. Each wave is a new era of a different type of feminism. Until now, there has been three feminism waves. However, according to some feminist activists and critics, starting from 2012, feminism has entered its fourth wave. The first wave of feminism started in the late 19th and early 20th century in the Western World and the Russian Empire, and later in the Soviet Union. This wave mainly focused on women's right to vote. The term 'first wave feminism' was mentioned by Martha Lear for the first time in 1962 in one of her articles for the *New York Times*. This period was characterised as women's struggle to be in the political platforms alongside with social and economic equality for women. The first wave feminism continued until 1960s. Then, another form of feminism started: second wave feminism.

Like the first wave feminism, the second wave also started in the Western World and the Soviet Union as it was the continuousness of the first one and was built on the roots of the first wave feminism. Unlike the first wave, the second wave feminism focused on more issues that women experienced after 1960s. After achieving their rights for voting, property owning, divorce, etc, the feminist activists started to demand more rights for women including right for abortion, proper work in high positions and political spheres. Also, they focused on more detailed problems such as sexuality and gender roles, equality in domestic chores and children care, etc. Furthermore, second wave activist dragged people's attention to domestic violence against women. In the play *Owners* we can see many of such issues regarding gender and sexuality. According to some critics, the second wave ended in 1980s in America and Europe with the beginning of sexual freedom when the 'feminist sex wars' started. This period is popular for its excessive liberty of pornography and lesbianism in western female world. 'Feminist sex wars' refer to a period between 1970s and 1980s when feminist activists were divided into several groups based on their thoughts and perspectives regarding their sexuality and sexual performativity. Some feminists supported the idea of pornography and sexual monogamy while the rest did not like the idea of having many partners. Thus, the late second wave feminists and early third wave feminists got divided into two groups: anti-porn feminist and sex-positive feminist. Both groups argued on the topics such as lesbianism, pornography, transgenderism, etc.

Even though the play does not cover the third wave feminism, it is necessary to briefly shed light on both the third and the fourth waves. The third

wave started in the late 1980s and early 1990s in the Western Countries. The term 'third wave' was pointed out by Rebecca Walker in 1992. This wave dealt with more simpler topics than previous waves. The third wave, unlike the second feminist wave sex war activists, did not focus on such matters. Instead, they were more tolerant about the individuality and sexual orientation of women. Also, the third wave brought new movements with itself such as intersectionality², ecofeminism, vegetarian feminism, postmodern feminism, etc. At the same time, the third wave gave support to some underground, feminist, queer, and non-feminist cultures. With the help of internet, the third wave feminists claimed having more equality and demanded the abolishment of existed gender roles.

Currently, we are in the fourth wave feminism. Some critics state that the third wave feminism is still on the stage while the rest believe that the fourth wave has already been around since 2012. This wave of feminism got its roots from the third wave. Or, it could be said that the fourth wave turned into a new shape by the help of internet. The fourth wave deals with almost the same issues. However, most of the claims are done online. Here, the activist fight against sexual harassment and domestic violence of women. Activist, freely share their stories about any type of difficulties that they faced without any embarrassment. Also, they are more tolerant than previous activists in terms of gender and sexuality matters. At the same time, they focus on intersectionality of women, trans women rights, the rights of coloured women in society.

As it seems, feminism in the past and feminism now are quite different. Each feminist wave had its own issues to deal with. From time to time, gender roles have changed with the emergence of different feminist movements. The main concern of feminism and non-western feminism movements is to give equal rights to women. When, feminism showed its first seeds, it simply demanded equal rights between men and women. At the same time, women's clothing fashion and the language style changed. In the first and second waves, women preferred wearing like men and smoke cigarette.

² The concept of intersectionality is an analytical framework for comprehending how a person's multiple social and political identities interact to produce diverse forms of privilege and discrimination. The concept of intersectionality reveals several advantages and disadvantages. Gender, caste, sex, race, ethnicity, class, sexual orientation, religion, ability, weight, and outward appearance are a few examples of these variables.

The first and second waves of feminism, which mostly concentrated on the experiences of white, middle-class, cisgender women, were widened by intersectionality to encompass the various perspectives of women of color, the underprivileged, immigrant women, and other groups. In order to distinguish oneself from white feminism, intersectional feminism takes into account the many experiences and identities of women.

However, they had the lack of understanding the fact that wearing like men, smoking, and demanding equal rights did not make women more feminine or make them any different than men. In *Owners*, we can see that the main character Marion acts like a man, wears like a man, and behaves like a man. She is a good representation of gender transformation in the first and second waves of feminism. One could say that Marion is an example of extreme, excessive, and perhaps toxic feminism. However, about it, we will talk a bit later.

On the Summary of the Play

Owners was written in 1972. It has two acts, and the first act contains six scenes while the second one has eight scenes. Each scene starts in a different setting including Marion's house, Lisa and Alec's rented house, Clegg's butcher shop, and Marion and Warsely's real estate agency's office. Critics call *Owners* a socialist-feminist melodrama and black comedy.³ Churchill's main goal was to show the social situation of people in England in 1970s alongside gender roles and the way that they got transformed as that period had a lot of political, social, and cultural changes. At the same time, she does not forget to touch on the mental and psychological issues that people experienced after the First World War even though it had passed around 30 years since the war finished when she wrote *Owners*. Moreover, in the play, she talks about suicide attempts of Worsely, a male character [who probably represent the society's mental condition].

As the title suggests, there are two types of people: owners who own property and tenants who suffer economic crisis and live in poverty. There are two couples that could not be described happy enough: Clegg - Marion and Lisa- Alec. All the interpersonal relationships in the play are based on materialistic approach. The most dominant character of the play is Marion who once had mental problems and had to stay in a hospital as a result of her mental disorder. However, now she is a successful businesswoman. She has a real estate agency. She does her best and whatever she can to achieve her goals even though she might hurt others. At one point, in the play she cannot hide her emotions and shouts saying: "We men of destiny get what we're after" (Churchill, 1972, p. 41). As we can see, she is a very dangerously passionate character tries to fulfil her desires at any cost. Also, she is unable to provide a child to her husband Clegg. However, she

³ Black comedy (known as black humor or dark comedy) is a literary genre that deals with social and mental issues by using comedy.

believes that she has everything in order for to be happy. The only thing is she need is a baby. She believes that a child would complete the missing parts in her life. Thus, in her mind having a baby would bring the perfect image of a family even though they would not be happy.

Another important detail about Marion is that her butcher husband does not really love her. He is angry and uncomfortable with her. Churchill shows Clegg as an angry lummoxy husband who secretly desires to kill his own wife as she does not provide him with a child: "Weedkiller in Marion's soup. In a garlic soup. Would it taste?" (Churchill, 1972, p. 44) he asks Worsely in Clegg's own kitchen. The way that Churchill describes the relationship between Clegg and Marion and how Clegg longs to kill his wife could be a reference to the death of Joe Orton⁴ who was a literary figure in the 20th century in English literature. Clegg even imagines shooting Marion with a gun. And when he has sympathy for her, he does it only because he wants to have a violent sex with Marion. At the same time, Marion's colleague Worsely seems to have some affection for her. However, Churchill shows him as a very tricky character who confuses readers with his behaviours. Frist of all, he does have some feminine personality. Even though he does not say much about his sexuality, readers might guess that he is traditional straight man. Yet, he seems pacifist and a man who prefers men to women but does not talk about it.

Other two important characters in the play are Lisa and her careless husband Alec. In the play, there is a reference where the audience learn that seven years ago there was an emotional relationship between Alec and Marion: MARION: You were mine then and you always will be. ALEC: I've changed. Skin and all in seven years. (Churchill, 1972, p. 41). And then, for whatever reason we are not told but Marion and Alec got separated. Because they got broke up, Marion got very furious and now she is doing whatever she can in order to hurt Lisa, Alec's wife. Also, she has not forgotten her love for Alec, and she wants him back: 'ALEC: I'm not what you want. MARION: You are what I want. I want you badly now. (Churchill, 1972, p. 41). On the other hand, Alec's wife Lisa is a traditional housewife with two boys and at the beginning of the play she is pregnant for six months. Later, she gives birth to a boy and this boy is taken by Marion as Marion believes that having a child would solve everything and she would have her perfect family. However, none of it happens. The baby

⁴ Joe Orton was killed by his own wife.

boy, who was brought to this Earth by Lisa and forced to live with Marion, brings more misery to both sides which results future conflicts that ends up with the death of Alec and a different person's baby in fire done by Worsely with Marion's desire:

MARION: Worsely, could you do something for me? Something to hurt Alec.

WORSELY: Like what?

MARION: Think of something.

WORSELY: Fatal?

MARION: I wouldn't mind. [Pause.]

WORSELY: Like set the house on fire? [Pause.]

MARION: What a good idea. What a very nice thought. ((Churchill, 1972, p. 73))

Discussion

On the Extreme Masculine Femeinity in Marion's Personality

In order to talk about gender roles and the way that they transform in the play, it is necessary to focus on the characters and how they behave throughout the plot. At first, it is important to focus on the female characters of the play. There are two female characters: Marion and Lisa. While Churchill prefers to choose Lisa to be a traditional domestic housewife, she prefers to illustrate Marion as a modern, passionate, man-like woman. Marion is the representation of extreme feminism. At the same time, she behaves and acts like a man. Unlike Lisa, she does not care about anyone and anything. She is cold and only follows her dreams. However, all her dreams are material based. She sees people as her property. As if she owns people. She believes that she can have a made-up family by having someone's baby. Even, she tries to convince Alec and Lisa that their baby is just a baby and it not different than anyone else's baby. Even, at end of the play, she does not blink once when Worsely goes to burn Alec and Lisa's house. Furthermore, her relationship with her husband is quite strange. She acts as if she controls Clegg and as if he is her property. Even, she offers other women to her husband which is unimaginable to any other women, seeing their husbands with another woman. However, for Marion, that is not a problem. Clegg can do as he pleases. He can sleep with any woman and at the end of the day, Marion would not say anything. Thus, she is a woman

that acts more like a traditional careless man who only focuses on money and sees everything as his own property.

Marion has a real estate agency where she buys properties and sells them. When she wins in the auctions, she celebrates outside. At the beginning of the play, when Clegg and Worsely talk about suicide in Clegg's butcher shop, Marion suddenly enters and says that she made a deal with a customer, and they will go out and celebrate the occasion:

We shall celebrate. It stinks in here, Clegg. Does it always? No wonder you've no customers...I know very well it's a sad moment, I can't be a failure just to help. We will all go out together and celebrate. Commemorate. Make an occasion. (Churchill, 1972, p. 22)

She is happy since she made a good deal with a potential buyer. Without thinking a moment, she judges her husband and mocks her husband that he has no customers. And later compares her happiness with Clegg's failure and states that she should not lose just because her husband loses in his business. Such type of behaviour shows her carelessness and her selfishness towards others, even to her supposedly closest person, husband. Later, she adds that they should celebrate as she had a successful deal. However, imagining her in the shop and using the word *commemorate* instead of the word *celebrate* gives us an image of a man who would celebrate a military or a historic occasion since the word *commemorate* is mostly used in historical events' celebration⁵. This speech of hers is the first image that represents her extreme feminist personality and masculinity.

Her men-like behaviour depicts itself when we see her at the beginning of scene three in a strip club with her husband Clegg and work partner Worsely. As the scene describes, they all have had a lot of drinks. However, the most ironical twist happens when we learn that Clegg is looking at the stripper while the other two do not. (Churchill, 1972, p. 29). This gives us an odd image of a wife and husband relationship at first. It is difficult to imagine a normal wife to take her husband to a strip club and have him watch strippers dancing on the stage. Churchill describes Marion and Worsely being busy with their business talk while Clegg looking at the girls' movements. Later, Marion asks Clegg if he would like to have a girl, and continue saying that he wants, she would get one for him (Churchill, 1972, p. 30). Usually, such speech would happen among men. However,

⁵ To read more about the word: <https://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/commemorate-a-battle>

here audience get confused seeing a female character talking with her husband and asking him about his desire for another women. And, as if it is not enough, she offers another woman to her husband. Such image destroys the traditional concept of femininity and the gender roles that it has been representing for hundreds of years. Then, they start talking about the other two couple's, Lisa and Alec's rented place. And here, again the same situation happens, and the cycle continues. Marion, strangely, states that her husband Clegg liked Lisa once in the past. (Churchill, 1972, p. 32).

We see that in the past before all the events happened in the play, there had been a relationship between Lisa's husband Alec and Marion. Still, Marion is so keen on keeping Alec on her own side while she is married to Clegg. That is why she punishes Alec and his family by buying their rented house. While talking to Alec, she describes her personality and the way she was brought up:

But I want to hold on. Everything I was taught — be clean, be quick, be top, be best, you may not succeed, Marion, but what matters is to try your hardest. To push on. Onward Christian soldiers, marching as to war. That was my favourite song when I was seven. Fight the good fight. Where is your fight? (Churchill, 1972, p. 40)

As she explains, we understand she is too keen on holding what she wants and what is taught to be hers. She never accepts the concept of failure. As in the previous scene where she compered herself with her success with her husband's meat business and mocked his failure. Here, in the lines above, the same thing happens. She describes why she does not accept failure and why she wants to go further and only further. It is always good to want and have the best. However, in Marion's case, it is a bit strange as she calls herself 'men'. Also, she does not forget to sing the song *Onwards Christian Soldiers*.⁶ By referring to the song, one could imagine that the person who talks is a man, but not a woman. That is what Marion does, she acts as if she is a man, as if she is a soldier fighting for the Crown and for Christ. For her, all her goals are to be fought as a soldier fight for his land. Interestingly, in his review paper, *The Feminist Church* James Nuechterlein⁷

⁶ English hymn "Onward, Christian Soldiers" was written in the 19th century. Sabine Baring-Gould wrote the lyrics in 1865, and Arthur Sullivan wrote the music in 1871. After the wife of his friend Ernest Clay Ker Seymer, at whose country house he wrote the tune, Sullivan gave the song the name "St Gertrude." The hymn became the Salvation Army's preferred processional. The hymn became Sullivan's most well-known work. The idea of the hymn is derived from allusions in the *New Testament* that describe Christians as soldiers for Christ, such as II Timothy: "Thou therefore endure hardness, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ."

⁷ At Indiana's Valparaiso University, James Nuechterlein teaches American studies and political philosophy. He

talks about the song *Onwards Christian Soldiers* alongside several other religious songs and hymns. He speaks about the song and says that when he was a child, he had to sing this song at the church and on Sunday schools (Nuechterlein, 1999, p.1). As we it is seen in the quotation above, it was the same case for Marion. She had to listen to the same song and grow with it. However, an ironical fact is that James Nuechterlein talks about Christianity being a feminine religion, thus, the song being feminine as well. He says that Christians have done a lot to destroy Christianity without being aware of what they are doing. Later, in the same review paper, he continues that while men escape from being present in the church, women tend to go to church more. The reason behind men liking church less is because of the fact that they feel insecure about their masculinity. In a traditional masculine concept, men would go out and fight or do the most difficult tasks. However, if a man goes to a church and ask for god's help, then this man would be considered [is considered] weak and feminine. However, for women, it is not the same case. They have always visited the church and even lived in it. While men went on fights, on their ways, they would enter churches and these churches, they would see women worshipers or nuns. Thus, Church and religion is feminine and the men who go to church are feminine. As a results, songs like *Onward Christian Soldiers* are feminine. (Nuechterlein, 1999, p.1-5). However, Marion does not know that if though she wants to compare herself to men and wants to act like men while singing *Onward Christian Soldiers*, she is being more feminine than being masculine. Yet, she does not realize it. Eventually, we can say that this act of hers is another reference to her extreme femininity which struggles with masculine desires, and yet, fail to perform fully.

In the same speech above she continues by giving examples from the most predominant scientists such as Columbus, Da Vinci, Scott of the Antarctic alongside Neil Armstrong and, perhaps, Yuri Gagarin⁸ who laned on Moon [she does not mention the astronauts' names]. She says: 'Onward. Fight. How did man get to the moon? Not by sitting staring at an orange. Columbus, Leonardo de Vinci, Scott of the Antarctic.' (Churchill, 1972, p. 40). As it is seen, she does not stop with her masculine illustrations while

also serves as editor of *The Cresset*, the school's journal of ideas and opinions.

⁸ The first person to travel into space was Yuri Gagarin, a Soviet pilot, and cosmonaut who lived from 9 March 1934 until 27 March 1968. On April 12, 1961, Gagarin made one orbit of the Earth in the Vostok 1 spacecraft. He received numerous decorations and honors, including the Hero of the Soviet Union, the highest honor bestowed by his country, for reaching this significant Space Race milestone. He also became an international celebrity.

leaving all the important female figures of the history. Furthermore, she continues in page 41: 'Empires have been lost for love. Worlds well lost. We men of destiny get what we're after even if we're destroyed by it. And everyone else with us. We split the atom. Onward. Love me.' (Churchill, 1972, p. 41). Marion forgets that she, herself, is a woman, she is a female figure. Again, she calls herself 'man' by saying 'we men of destiny'.

Marion's manly behaviour shows itself when Marion argues with Lisa about the baby as Lisa wants it back:

[...] you won't get the baby. I will keep what's mine. [...] Because I'm a woman, is it? I'm meant to be kind. I'm meant to understand a woman's feelings wanting her baby back. I don't. I won't. I can be as terrible as anyone. Soldiers have stuck swords through innocents. I can massacre too. [...] Why shouldn't I be Genghis Khan? (Churchill, 1972, p. 72)

Here, Marion breaks the traditional stereotypes about women being weak and fragile. She states that everyone would expect her to be soft and understanding. However, she is not though the person who wants her help is of her own sex. Furthermore, she continues and compares herself to Genghis Khan saying that she can be as bloody and cruel as the greatest and bloodiest worrier ever. She cannot be soft and gentle just because she is a woman. She confirms that she can be as bad as any man although she is not a man.

Another example of Marion's lack of femineity is related to the Alec and Lisa's new-born baby. Marion is not able to provide children since she is infertile as Clegg describes: 'And another satisfaction of my shame is the proof that it's she who is infertile.' (Churchill, 1972, p. 20). Because of her infertility, Marion and Clegg adopt Alec and Lisa's baby. At first, Marion believes that having the baby would solve all the gaps. However, things do not go as she expected because she lacks motherly affection for the baby. She does not care if the baby is hungry or needs of anything. However, it is only Worsely who understand that the real misery that the baby faces: 'If he [the baby] gets kidnapped any time and you have to go and identify him you can take me. Marion wouldn't know' (Churchill, 1972, p. 48) says Worsely when speaking with Clegg. Here, we can see that Marion is not able to look after the baby. She is not even able to recognize the baby's physical appearance. Another example of Marion's stone hearted behaviour regarding the matter of the baby is seen when Lisa cries in Marion's office:

Marion's office. MARION and LISA. MARION is walking about eating. LISA, no longer pregnant, hair a mess, face a wreck, baggy old dress, is sitting in a chair, crying.

LISA: I can't stop crying.

MARION: What about?

LISA: I don't know.

MARION: Then it doesn't matter. So long as you're not sad about anything. I should just cry.

LISA: It's the pills they give me.

MARION: There's plenty of tissues. (Churchill, 1972, p. 50)

The way that Churchill describes Marion is very evil. Speaking from traditional feminine perspective, Marion as a woman is supposed to understand the feeling of Lisa. However, she eats while Lisa is crying and trying to seek for her help. Instead, she simply offers her tissues as Lisa does not stop weeping. Later, when she talks with Alec, she says the following words: 'Wouldn't a different baby be just the same? Do you really mean you prefer your own baby?' (Churchill, 1972, p. 71). Reading this line above, we can see that she has no sense of motherhood. She does not understand the difference between one's own baby and others. She thinks that all babies are the same. This way of thinking would be because of the fact that she has never given birth to any child, and she does not have a real sense of motherhood like Lisa. At the end of the play, another sign of Marion's dysfunctionality as a mother shows itself when she forgets to feed the baby (Churchill, 1972, p. 74). Furthermore, Marion does not realize when Worsely takes the baby to Lisa and Marion only realizes after Worsely tells her (Churchill, 1972, p. 74).

On the Femininity in Male Characters

As it is obvious, Marion is a revolutionary female character who disobeys all the gender roles and concepts, the male characters of the play are also different than traditional masculinity that we are used to see. Churchill uses three unique and odd male characters with unique and odd personality in each. The most unusual male character of the play could be seen as Worsley. He does not hide the fact that he has committed suicide many times and he would like to commit it again. Speaking from a traditional masculine perspective, we hardly see a man who would say that he would

like to commit suicide, or he has thought about it before. Such kind of behaviour would be/is accepted as weakness and cowardness. Only the weak one would commit suicide. The strong one would stay and fight. Just like Marion. Yet, we see that Worsely does not have any intention of living and once he finds the opportunity, he will kill himself. However, if the person who commit suicide is a woman, people would not talk about her death a lot since they would accept that she was female, she was weak, she had not power to fight. Thus, the concept of suicide is feminine and strong males do not prefer to commit suicide as they do want to continue and fight for their goals. Although it takes a huge courage to commit suicide, and one can say that Worsley sees it from this perspective too, society would see only the cowardness in it, not bravery. Also, finally, it would be useful to state the fact that perhaps Churchill wanted to show the society's mental condition in 1970s and drag audiences' attention to the self-harms and suicides in the late 20th century.

Further we go to the play, we can see unmasculine or untraditional male identity of Worsely. As Marion, Worsely, and Clegg are in the strip club, everyone enjoys and looks at the strippers, Worsely does not seem to be very interested in looking at the dancers. He continues to ask questions about their business and Marion's past with Lisa and Alec. (Churchill, 1972, p. 30-32). This untraditional behaviour of Worsely would give us the hint about his hidden queer identity. Perhaps, Churchill wants to drag audience's attention to a gay man who pretends to be straight. Later, as we continue through the play, Lisa's description of Worsely is attractive. Lisa, while talking with Marion about Worsely, describes him as 'queer'. (Churchill, 1972, p. 34).

Lisa: He don't seem to notice Worsely at all. You know what he's like.
MARION: Not really.

LISA: You don't, do you. Not now. You'd see a change. He's very queer.
Oh Marion he is. (Churchill, 1972, p. 34).

Now, if we look at the dictionary, we can see that *queer* has many meanings. However, traditional meaning of the word is 'odd', 'strange', or 'something that is not right'.⁹ However, starting from the mid-20th century, in America and then later in Europe, the word queer started to be welcomed

⁹ To read more: <https://www.etymonline.com/word/queer>

by homosexual people. Thus, the word queer became an umbrella term to cover gay, lesbian, and transgender people who saw themselves in non-traditional homonormative frame. And 1970s was the period that same sex relationships were common and young generation would not hide it if they were sexually attracted to their own sex members.¹⁰ Thus, Churchill leaves us two options in this speech between Marion and Lisa. Either Lisa refers to the traditional meaning of the word queer (meaning Worsely is a strange person) or she gives the audience a hint about Worsely's sexuality (meaning that he is gay or bisexual). Furthermore, Worsely is the only character in the play that understand the misery that the baby faces. He is more emotional than any other character in the play. He does not hide his feelings and thoughts regarding the baby's situation and Marion's craziness regarding the baby. Also, he is the one who takes the baby to his mother. Thus, we seem him being more different and softer than other male figures in the play. This fact could possibly bring us to the theory that gender norms could shape one's appearance and acts and Worsely, giving queer indications, is an example of a man that is different than usual males in many ways. (R. Thora Bjorn & Nicholas O. Rule, 2020).

Alec also acts strange and untraditional that does not match to the accepted heteronormative. In the second scene of the play, Alec and Lisa come from outside and they discover that their house was robbed, and Lisa's wedding ring was stolen. Lisa tries almost begs Alec to call the police, but Alec does not seem to care that his wife lost her wedding ring. He does not want to go to the police while Lisa is ready to go to the police. (Churchill, 1972, p. 23). Also, we learn that Alec has not been working for months. Traditionally speaking, we would expect Alec to go and run for the police. Also, he would be the breadwinner of the family. However, he seems like a very passive character who does not want to do anything as well as does not care about the protection of his family. Besides, wedding ring gives us a sign that Alec and Lisa's marriage is not very important for Alec. If he truly cared about their marriage, he would have run out to look for the thieves.

Marion's husband Clegg, who works as a butcher and wants his unborn son to be a butcher too, has his own view of women. At the beginning of act two, Clegg and Worsley talk about Clegg's 25 years of butchering history:

¹⁰ To read more: <https://www.britannica.com/topic/queer-sexual-politics>

CLEGG: I have been a butcher twenty-five years. And my father was before me. [...] But you still don't see a lady butcher. Apart from the physical weakness a lady has a squeamishness which is very proper in the fair sex but shameful in a man. [...] My mother literally worshipped him. I've seen her on her knees. [...]. She knew how to give a man the right support. He had his chair. The tea was hot on the table when he came in. (Churchill, 1972, p. 19).

Clegg's speech depicts us his and as well as society's rooted gender roles for women back then in Clegg's father and in Clegg's own lifetime. At the same time, Clegg's shows us shameful standards for men of that time. However, even though women were being discriminated, still women were the advocates of men. In Clegg's mother's case, we can see that she was a wife that did everything she could in order to please her husband. She served him and at the same time she taught her kids to respect and serve their father. Here, we can see the traditional patriarchy that has been controlling women over the centuries. Clegg's speech (Churchill, 1972, p. 19) is the pure example of men dominative society and rooted gender roles in a society. However, what is funny and ironical is that Clegg's wife does the opposite as she does not respect any gender roles. Instead, she reframes gender roles. Marion asks Clegg to shut the shop, and so he does. (Churchill, 1972, p. 22). Later, Churchill illustrates Clegg as a houseman whereas traditionally Marion is supposed to be a housewife. Being a houseman would be shameful for Clegg if we go back to his speech with Worsley. (Churchill, 1972, p. 19). However, he himself becomes the de-facto victim of his gender stereotypes:

CLEGG: I thought I would drop in. I got a bit bored indoors. Sambo is excellent company for a dog. He does what he is told as if he is human. I pretended to be cross, just to see, and he lay down with eyes sad just like a member of the family... (Churchill, 1972, p. 35).

As we it is seen, Clegg is forced to stay at home and do nothing but playing with a dog while Marion works in her office.

Conclusion

One of Caryl Churchill's most popular plays is *Owners* as it was her first professionally staged play. In 1972, Theatre Upstairs of the Royal Court's Theatre hosted the inaugural performance of the play. The play is regarded as satire that portrays the social life of Londoners. The play features two couples. Each couple in London exemplifies a particular type of social background. While Lisa and Alec symbolize the underprivileged renters

who rely on Marion and Clegg's efforts, Marion and Clegg are the owners of real estate properties. In addition, three male characters in the play disobey conventional male gender conventions. Since the play was created at a time when the first and second waves of feminism were merging. The play's protagonist, Marion, is shown as an extreme feminist who typifies the first and second waves of feminism's most radical adherents. Marion defies every stereotype of what it means to be a woman and acts like a man, much like in the feminist waves. Lisa, a different female character in the play, is portrayed as a classic domestic housewife at the same time. Lisa and her infant son are the targets of Marion's schemes. Perhaps, the writer wanted to say that neither Lisa, nor Marion's femineity is acceptable. Both of them have too much of everything. While Marion is extreme and to some level toxic feminine, who thinks that acting like a man would make her stronger, Lisa, on the other hand is a character that only does housework and dedicate her entire life to her husband and kids. Lisa has not life of her own. Thus, Churchill wanted to bring the attention of audience to a point that femininity should include the combination of both Lisa and Marion. A real feminine character should not be like Marion or Lisa but rather something in between.

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