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Gender, Power, and Social Structure in Caryl Churchill's *Top Girls*

ABSTRACT

This study, conducted within the framework of Caryl Churchill's "Top Girls," aims to explore the intricate dynamics of gender, power, and social structures. It hypothesises that Churchill employs unconventional narrative techniques to challenge traditional gender norms and power structures within the play. It involves a comprehensive textual analysis of "Top Girls," utilising feminist literary criticism to unpack the nuanced layers of gendered experiences and power dynamics depicted. The theoretical foundation draws on feminist theories, particularly intersectionality, to examine how multiple layers of identity intersect and impact the characters' social positions. The primary aim is to elucidate how Churchill's play contributes to the broader discourse on gender and power in dramatic literature, with a focus on the evolving roles of women in society. Two central questions guide the investigation: How does Caryl Churchill employ narrative structures to challenge traditional gender roles in "Top Girls"? In what ways does the play address and critique power dynamics within the social structures that shape the lives of its female characters?

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النوع الاجتماعي والسلطة والبنية الاجتماعية في "نساء القمة" لكاريل تشرشل

الخلاصة:

تهدف هذه الدراسة، التي أجريت في إطار مسرحية "نساء القمة" لكاريل تشرشل، إلى استكشاف الديناميكيات المعقدة للجنس والسلطة والهياكل الاجتماعية. تفترض أن تشرشل يستخدم تقنيات سردية غير تقليدية لتحدي المعايير الجنسانية التقليدية وهياكل السلطة داخل المسرحية. وهو يتضمن تحليلاً نصياً شاملاً لـ "نساء القمة"، باستخدام النقد الأدبي النسوي لتفكيك الطبقات الدقيقة للتجارب بين الجنسين وديناميكيات السلطة المصورة. يعتمد الأساس النظري على النظريات النسوية، وخاصة التقاطعية، لدراسة كيفية تقاطع طبقات الهوية المتعددة وتأثيرها على المواقف الاجتماعية للأشخاص. الهدف الأساسي هو توضيح كيف تساهم مسرحية تشرشل في الخطاب الأوسع حول النوع الاجتماعي والسلطة في الأدب الدرامي، مع التركيز على الأدوار المتطورة للمرأة في المجتمع. هناك سؤالان مركزيان يوجهان التحقيق: كيف يستخدم كاريل تشرشل الهياكل السردية لتحدي الأدوار التقليدية للجنسين في مسرحية "نساء القمة"؟ ما هي الطرق التي تعالج بها المسرحية وتنتقد ديناميكيات السلطة داخل الهياكل الاجتماعية التي تشكل حياة شخصياتها النسائية؟

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Introduction

British playwright Caryl Churchill, born on September 3, 1938, is renowned for dramatising the abuses of power, using non-naturalistic approaches, and exploring feminist and sexual politics. It has received praise for films like *Cloud 9* (1979), *Top Girls* (1982), and *Faraway*(2000). She has been dubbed one of Britain's best poets and an inventor for the modern stage. Caryl Churchill, a highly innovative British female playwright, has been a prolific radio, television, and theatre writer since the 1960s. Her early works, including "The Ants" (1962), "Lovesick" (1966), and "Identical Twins" (1968), primarily addressed thematic and formal concerns, characterised by a linear exploration of time and space. However, Churchill, known for her continuous evolution as a playwright, entered a new phase when she began writing for the Joint Stock Company, a male theatre company, and Monstrous Regiment, a feminist theatre company in Britain. Churchill embraced experimental approaches during this period, "playing with the conventions of form, time, narrative, structure, language, and dialogue," deliberately focusing on feminist issues (Ashton 5).

Since then, most of Caryl Churchill's works focus on political and social issues related to gender, examining them from a feminist perspective. This shift is evident in plays such as "Owners" (1972), "Vinegar Tom" (1976), "Cloud Nine" (1979), "Top Girls" (1982), and "Fen" (1983). In these works, Churchill critiques established gender identities, roles, and sexuality shaped by the dominant ideology. She highlights how women are often marginalised, politically disadvantaged, and subjected to victimisation within this framework. Churchill's deep commitment to these feminist concerns has led many feminists representing various perspectives to consider her a notable representative(Djundjung 160).

In "Top Girls ", Churchill delves into themes of gender, power, and social structure. The play examines the role of women in society and the challenges they face in a male-dominated world. The play's structure is divided into two parts: The first Act

portrays a successful career woman named Marlene and her celebration with historical and fictional women from different periods. Through these characters, Churchill explores the sacrifices and compromises women have made throughout history to achieve success and the conflicts between personal and professional fulfilment. In terms of power dynamics, Churchill highlights women's struggles in male-dominated workplaces and the compromises they must make to climb the corporate ladder. The play questions whether success for women in a patriarchal society requires them to adopt masculine traits and suppress their femininity or not.

Methodology

This research adopts a qualitative approach to collect source materials and seek information about Carly Churchill's *Top Girls* by applying the Feminism theory. This social and political theory advocates for equality of the sexes, aiming to challenge and dismantle the systemic oppression and discrimination women face. It seeks to address issues such as gender-based violence, reproductive rights, wage gaps, and gender stereotypes. Feminism recognises that gender equality benefits everyone and strives to create a society where individuals are not limited or judged based on gender. So, in a nutshell, Feminism is all about smashing the patriarchy and promoting equal rights and opportunities for all genders; as Simone de Beauvoir insists, women must see themselves as autonomous beings. Women, she maintains, must reject the societal construct that men are the subject or the absolute and women are the Other. Embedded in this erroneous statement is the assumption that males have the power to control the dominant discourse and the power to define cultural terms and roles. Accordingly, women must define themselves, articulate their social constructs of being women, and reject being labelled as Others. This research focuses on themes of gender, power, and social structure in *Top Girls*.

In society, there are set expectations for women based on gender roles and stereotypes. These expectations include being submissive, obedient, dependent, and staying at home to raise

children without having the right to work, learn, or be independent. To challenge these roles and find success, women sometimes had to adopt qualities traditionally associated with men. In response to increasing oppression and societal changes, women began expressing their thoughts and needs through a feminist movement.

Feminist theory aims to analyse the factors influencing women's lives and question cultural ideas about being a woman. Feminists reject the idea that inequalities between men and women are natural or unavoidable, insisting that these inequalities should be challenged (Jackson and Jones 1).

Socialist Feminism mainly focuses on social classes. It looks at the historical and material conditions of oppression related to class, race, and gender

and calls for a radical transformation of the social structure (Aston 8). This type of Feminism acknowledges the differences between social classes, recognising that they are not equal in terms of rights and freedom, and they experience varying levels of oppression. Working-class women, for example, face more oppression and exploitation compared to middle-class women. They often receive lower pay for their work, making it challenging to afford basic living expenses and limiting their opportunities to be free and exercise their rights.

Simone de Beauvoir, a prominent existentialist philosopher and feminist, explored the complexities of women's societal experiences, particularly in her groundbreaking work "The Second Sex." While her focus was more existentialist than explicitly socialist, her writings laid the foundation for feminist theories that later incorporated socialist perspectives. De Beauvoir addressed the social construction of gender roles and how women have been historically oppressed. Her examination of the concept of "The Other" and her assertion that "one is not born, but rather becomes, a woman" highlighted the societal expectations imposed on women and the need for women to break free from these constraints (Zalta,2023).

Though not explicitly aligning with socialist Feminism, de Beauvoir's ideas paved the way for feminist thinkers to consider the intersections of class, race, and gender in analysing women's oppression. Her work contributed to a broader understanding of the factors influencing women's societal experiences. To establish a direct link between socialist Feminism and Simone de Beauvoir, it would be helpful to explore how later feminist theorists integrated her ideas into discussions on social classes and the material conditions of oppression. While de Beauvoir did not explicitly delve into economic structures and class struggles, her work influenced subsequent feminist thought to connect gender oppression with broader social and economic inequalities (Zalta,2023).

Discussion

At the play's outset, Marlene eagerly awaits friends at a restaurant to celebrate her job agency's promotion with a dinner party. The guests, representing real, fictional, and mythological women who triumphed over adversity, engage in lively conversation about their lives. Lady Nijo shares her encounter with the former Japanese Emperor, reframing it as her destiny rather than a perceived rape. The women discuss religion in Pope Joan's context, interrupted by the waitress serving courses. Unlike others, Marlene avoids discussing her deceased lovers but, like her guests, reflects on the children they conceived and lost. Nijo, due to royal blood, faced secrecy for her child, while Pope Joan's revelation as a mother led to her stoning for heresy(Evans,2000).

Griselda learns of her husband's cruel test involving the death of their children. In Act I, Scene 2, Marlene interviews Jeanine, a girl with uncertain career aspirations. In Act II, Scene I, Angie and Kit's play turns tense, revealing Angie's immaturity. In Scene II, office gossip is discussed, and Marlene confronts workplace challenges. Angie seeks Marlene's help after Howard's heart attack. The final act, set a year earlier, unfolds in Joyce's kitchen, revealing Angie as Marlene's daughter. Joyce questions

Angie's future, leading to a strained confrontation. Angie calls Marlene "mother" as the play concludes(Ibid).

Gender, Power, and Social Structure in Caryl Churchill's *Top Girls*

Churchill uses her characters to give women a voice. She challenges traditional gender roles and uses theatrical techniques to make her points. She manipulates gender role reversal in *Owners*, combines different periods in *Vinegar Tom*, and uses cross-gender casting in *Cloud Nine*. These techniques help her communicate her views on the issues discussed in her plays(Aston, 1997).

One of Caryl Churchill's well-known plays is *Top Girls*, which gained popularity for its all-female cast and exploration of various aspects of women's lives across different periods. In this play, Churchill experiments with the structure and dialogues. What makes "Top Girls" unique is how it breaks the traditional linear structure, disrupting the chronological order of time and place. Churchill employs techniques like overlapping and continuous dialogues.

The deconstruction of traditional storytelling is evident in how Churchill organises the acts and scenes, particularly in the opening scene. Here, six female characters from different historical and imaginary backgrounds celebrate Marlene's promotion to managing director. This non-linear structure aims to bring together these characters and highlight the challenges each faces within a predominantly patriarchal system. Breaking away from a linear timeline depicts each character's struggles and sheds light on the broader theme of women's exploitation throughout history. These characters' personal experiences symbolise women's challenges, providing a perspective to evaluate Marlene's contemporary success (Aston,1997).

The play illustrates how women, in their struggle against male oppression throughout history, have achieved a level of power and freedom that they now use to control others of their gender without empathy. The main character, Marlene, goes to

extreme lengths by adopting masculine qualities to climb the ladder of success, but this comes at the cost of sacrificing her child, family, and love(Muhi,2018). The play also highlights the plight of silenced women who are oppressed and dependent and have given up the chance to be independent and free.

Males as a group have and do benefit the most from patriarchy, from the assumption that they are superior to females and should rule over them. In return for all the goodies men receive from patriarchy, they are required to dominate women, to exploit and oppress them, using violence if they must to keep patriarchy intact. (Hooks p.xi)

Caryl Churchill purposefully selected the women in Marlene's gathering, each representing a facet of the modern woman. Marlene believes that reaching her position makes her equal to these women. From a broader perspective, each woman reflects some aspect of modern womanhood and shares stories of how they fought for their true selves, challenging societal norms and oppressive forces. They refused to conform to traditional gender roles, rejecting the idea that a woman's goals should be limited to marriage and motherhood, as socially accepted at the time (Ramazanoglu 20).

The play presents that the women in *Top Girls* are akin to de Beauvoir's concept of women forging their identity in a male-dominated world. The women in the play are actively shaping their destinies and resisting societal expectations. However, it is interesting that Patient Griselda is portrayed as the only submissive guest, accepting oppression from her husband and justifying it with obedience (*Top Girls* 134). It contrasts with de Beauvoir's emphasis on women breaking free from subservience and defining their existence independently.

This play responds to Britain's Capitalist system, mainly when Margaret Thatcher, known as the "Iron Woman," was the Prime Minister. Initially, people believed Thatcher's leadership would benefit women, but over time, her policies seemed to favour only the middle and upper classes, leaving the working

class in challenging circumstances. Despite Thatcher's conservative politics, she did not make significant strides for women. Caryl Churchill wrote this play as a reaction to Thatcher's time in office. (Almaarroof and Mahmood 54-62) (Almaarroof and Zaid 6874–6883)(Rowbotham 427) criticises Thatcher's views on Feminism and women's rights.

In the play's third act, Churchill powerfully conveyed her perspective on Thatcher's politics through a notable disagreement between two characters, Joyce and Marlene. Joyce, a working-class single mother, opposed Thatcher due to her firsthand experience with the hardships faced by the working class. Meanwhile, Marlene supported Thatcher because she gained from her policies, even while critiquing her capitalist values. Marlene said, "She is a tough lady, Maggie, I would give her a job" (Churchill 229).

This disagreement encapsulates broader themes of gender and power dynamics. Joyce's opposition to Thatcher reflects the challenges faced by working-class women and how political decisions can disproportionately affect them. Despite acknowledging Thatcher's toughness, Marlene's support suggests a nuanced relationship between gender and power, where personal benefits may influence individual perspectives within the complex landscape of societal structures. The various views of Joyce and Marlene highlight how gender, class, and personal experiences intersect in shaping political opinions and responses to those in power. In essence, *Top Girls* portrays a diverse array of women who, in their struggles and stories, echo de Beauvoir's call for women to transcend societal constraints and assert their autonomy in defining their roles and identities. "Oh God, why are we all so miserable?" (Churchill 125)The passage talks about how women have faced gender-based oppression over time and have struggled against traditional norms and expectations set by a patriarchal society.

In their quest for success and freedom, women challenge the usual gender roles, showing an ongoing fight for gender equality. The mention of sacrifices suggests that women must give up

parts of their lives to advance in their careers and finances. The women in the play are dealing with a society where adopting values typically linked to men is seen as necessary for progress and success. They are sacrificing for economic and professional growth, which points to societal expectations that might require women to follow certain norms to be acknowledged and successful. The passage emphasises women's intricate societal challenges, where they navigate expectations and make decisions that may go against traditional roles.

Churchill addresses issues like class distinctions, sacrifice, adopting masculine qualities, and women's empowerment in leadership roles. Social Feminism, in this sense, advocates for women to unite to attain their rights and freedom. However, despite this call for unity, women have started to separate from each other based on factors like race, culture, and class. According to (Ramazanoglu 17), working-class women face economic exploitation that bourgeois women do not experience. It means that working-class women, in general, endure more oppression than their middle-class counterparts. Middle-class women often have greater freedom and power to advocate for their rights, and they generally benefit from the labour of working-class women, especially those economically disadvantaged.

In the play's opening act, Marlene, the newly promoted managing director, celebrates her success with a dinner party in London. The guests she invites are not ordinary friends but remarkable women from different times and places: Isabella Bird, a Victorian traveller; Lady Nijo, a Japanese courtesan turned nun; Dull Gret, the pheasant woman from Brueghel's painting; Pope Joan; and Patient Griselda from Canterbury Tales.

Caryl Churchill intentionally selected these women, each representing a facet of the modern woman. Marlene, in her elevated position, sees herself as equal to them. Each guest reflects an aspect of the modern woman's struggle, challenging societal norms, oppressive forces, and gender roles. They refused to conform to the limited expectations for women, which

traditionally revolved around marriage and motherhood as the only socially acceptable achievements (Muhi, 2018)

Patient Griselda, the only submissive guest, accepted oppression from her husband, justifying it by saying she had to obey him. The guests also shared stories about the significant roles of men in their lives, whether as fathers, husbands, or lovers. This selection and celebration of diverse women highlight the play's exploration of gender, power dynamics, and societal structures. The women challenge traditional expectations and showcase the complexities of their relationships with men within a broader social context(Ibid).

Both Isabella and Joan employed distinct strategies in resisting oppression. Isabella opted for a visible form of resistance, asserting her femininity while defying societal expectations. She emphasised her commitment to travelling as a lady. She rejected any attempts to portray her otherwise, as seen in the statement, "I always travelled as a lady, and I repudiated strongly any suggestions in the press that I was other than feminine" (Churchill 110).

In contrast, Joan took a more radical approach to combat oppression. She deliberately rejected traditional feminine traits, dressing as a boy and pursuing her educational aspirations. Joan's dedication to knowledge led her to neglect her well-being to the point of ignorance about her pregnancy. Tragically, this oversight resulted in her giving birth during a public ceremony, causing a scandal as people, assuming she was a man, stoned her to death.

The discussion at the dinner party delved into the topic of children, revealing the shared experience of the guests in losing their children in various ways. Lady Nijo, for instance, had four children, and Pope Joan, despite having a child, suffered the tragic fate of being stoned to death along with her child. Patient Griselda, a working-class woman, endured the separation from her two kids, orchestrated by her middle-class husband to test her loyalty, disregarding her maternal emotions. Griselda explained

that her husband, Walter, found it challenging to believe in her love and obedience, feeling the need to prove it (Churchill 22).

These women faced profound challenges related to motherhood, reflecting the complexities and hardships of being a woman in the patriarchal society depicted in the play. However, Dull Gret, a revolutionary woman who wore armour and led an army of women to hell to avenge the death of her son and infant, took a proactive stance. In contrast to the other guests, she actively fought against the forces of evil (Muhi, 2018).

Act two introduces Gret, a working-class waitress serving the guests. Gret silently carries out her duties, symbolising the working class among these high-status guests. Despite Marlene's working-class background, she behaves as if she is superior to the waitress, utilising her labour to fulfil tasks. Marlene's use of others for her benefit, without genuine concern for them, emerges as a recurring aspect of her character throughout the play. This dynamic reflects power imbalances, gender roles, and social structures in the narrative(Ibid).

Also, she presents the power aspect through Marlene, stating that despite her aversion to her abusive father, Marlene values power and control. Leaving her home at thirteen becomes her way of exerting control and power to shape her future. By resisting the male-dominated power structures within her family, particularly her father's authority, and challenging societal expectations associated with her class, Marlene takes control of her destiny by distancing herself from external influences. This act of running away represents her resistance to the power and control exerted by men in her family and society, allowing her to assert her independence and shape her path (Djundjung 166).

Marlene perceives her father as a representative of men in general, and she rejects the idea of conforming to a domestic role. She is determined not to be submissive to a man. From the age of thirteen, Marlene has actively sought ways to avoid the fate of being a working-class woman because she harbours a

strong dislike for the working class and its lifestyle, which she finds objectionable (Churchill 139).

While Marlene consciously chooses not to raise her baby, recognising that motherhood would hinder her career, Joan faces a different situation. In the ninth century, a time when women were relegated to second-class status, Joan was denied her right to education by the prevailing patriarchal system, notably represented by the Church. Driven by a deep desire for knowledge, Joan boldly disguises a man to gain entry into the Church. This manoeuvre allows her to rise to the highest echelons of the system, eventually becoming a cardinal and then the Pope (Djundjung 166).

Another character who presents a power aspect is Joan, whose ascent to the position of Pope is a triumph over the very system that discriminated against her based on her gender. By holding this influential role, she achieves a remarkable reversal of the patriarchal norms, now having authority and control over the male sex. As Pope, Joan defies the discriminatory system and gains the power to manipulate and redefine truth, a revelation she shares with Marlene (167). In this way, Joan's narrative underscores the transformative potential of power as she challenges and reshapes the oppressive structures that initially denied her rights:

JOAN. I had thought the Pope would know everything. I thought God would speak to me directly. But of course, he knew I was a woman. . . . And I realised I did know the truth. Because whatever the Pope says, that is true. . . . Yes, I enjoyed being Pope. I consecrated bishops and let people kiss my feet. I received the King of England when he came to submit to the Church. Unfortunately, there were earthquakes, and some villages reported it had drained blood; in France, there was a plague of giant grasshoppers, but I do not think that could have been my fault, do you?.. The grasshoppers fell on the English Channel and

were washed up on shore, and their bodies rotted and poisoned the air, and everyone in those parts died (Churchill 68-69).

In a way, Joan successfully challenges and undermines the system by fully immersing herself in it and becoming an integral part. Her revelation that the truth comes not from a divine source but from the Pope himself, a man, has the potential to dismantle the prevailing belief of her time, which regarded the Pope as the earthly embodiment of Christ. Joan questions whether the Pope indeed possesses divine power, as she, in her role as Pope, has never experienced direct communication with God. This suspicion is compounded by her consideration that God might be refusing to communicate with her because of her gender (Djundjung 168).

Joan, however, leans more towards the latter suspicion, especially when she links a natural disaster during her papacy to her defiance of the patriarchal church system. It seems as if even nature is protesting against her being Pope, suggesting that the Church, an institution considered sacred and impartial, is a construct designed to benefit men and uphold male dominance. The question of whether male domination is natural remains unanswered for Joan, but the prevailing beliefs of her era have instilled in her the notion of the inferiority of her gender and the superiority of males. She contemplates whether the natural disasters, possibly mere coincidences, are somehow linked to her perceived 'unnatural' position (Ibid).

Joan's success faces a severe setback when she becomes pregnant by one of her chamberlains. Accustomed to disguising herself as a man since the age of twelve and surrounded by a male-dominated environment, Joan has limited knowledge about her own body and reproductive capacity as a woman. She chooses to ignore her pregnancy, mistakenly attributing her physical changes to the luxuries of her life as a Pope. This ignorance proves to be fatal for Joan and puts her hard-earned success in jeopardy:

MARLENE. Didn't you think of getting rid of it ?
JOAN. Wouldn't that be a worse sin than having it?/But a Pope with a child was about as bad as possible. . . . But I wouldn't know how to get rid of it .MARLENE. Other Popes had children surely .JOAN. They didn't give birth to them .
NIJO. Well you were a woman .JOAN. Exactly, and I shouldn't have been a woman. Women , children and lunatics can't be Pope. . . . And the baby just slid out onto the road. . . . They took me by the feet and dragged me out of town and stoned me to death (Churchill 69–71)

Griselda receives a reward of golden clothing for being obedient, highlighting how she is treated more like an object with her feelings disregarded. This reflects the patriarchal system's strategy of maintaining power by promoting women's submissiveness as a desirable and virtuous quality while legalising male dominance in marriage. On another note, Griselda's reward for obedience can be viewed as her triumph in resisting the power attempting to break her. She stays resilient until she attains what is valuable to her, even though it comes at the cost of sacrificing her children and enduring psychological and personal hardships. So, while marriage often symbolises male power, it is not uncontested. The power of feminine submissiveness also challenges it (Djundjung 169).

Griselda is given a golden outfit as a prize for obeying. It shows she is treated more like an object, and her feelings do not matter. Rewarding her for being submissive is how the patriarchal system stays powerful. It says that women being submissive is good and virtuous, allowing men to dominate in marriage. On another note, Griselda's reward for obeying can be seen as her success in resisting the power that tries to control her. She stays strong until she gets what is important to her, even if it means sacrificing her children and enduring emotional and personal difficulties. So, marriage is a place where male power rules, but it is not unchallenged. The power of women being submissive also pushes back against it(169).

Joan and Isabella share the ability to speak Latin, traditionally associated with men, as an indicator of their education. Their stories underscore women's challenges in navigating societal expectations, each choosing a different path to confront gender norms, assert their identities, and resist oppressive structures. Patient Griselda, another guest at the dinner party, embodies the stereotypical qualities expected of women in her era. She wholeheartedly obeyed her husband, the marquis, without any objections. Instead of accusing him, she justified his actions by asserting that "a wife must obey her husband" (Churchill 129). Griselda admitted that obeying him was not difficult for her. Despite her husband taking away their two children and denying her the fundamental right of motherhood, Griselda defended him, attributing his actions to a test of her love and loyalty.

Griselda, belonging to the working class, married a man from the middle class. Despite the class difference, their behaviours remained unchanged after marriage. Griselda continued to serve like a loyal servant, receiving little love or compassion. Her obedience and loyalty were expressions of love toward her husband. However, he continued to exploit his power to control her, mirroring the broader societal dynamic where the middle-class exercises control over the working class. The statement "Except Griselda, they (the guests) have all assumed a masculine standpoint to act against patriarchal oppression or, in some cases, to assert their own identity" (Dere 63) suggests a connection to power structures, social hierarchy, and gender dynamics within the broader context of the play.

Conclusion

Top Girls addresses enduring issues women face, both when the play was written and in the present day. The central theme revolves around the control exerted by women who attain power and success over those who are disadvantaged or lack opportunities. Marlene, as the character at the pinnacle, symbolises this control, denying others the chance to improve their circumstances.

Class distinctions are portrayed in the play, with women defined by their societal positions. Middle-class women enjoy more freedom, contrasting with the struggles of working-class women facing economic hardships. The economic challenges for the working class were exacerbated by the policies of Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, who focused on supporting the middle class, contributing to the oppression of working-class women. The play satirises Margaret Thatcher's leadership, highlighting missed opportunities for positive change for women. Despite being in a position to transform women's situations, Thatcher's adoption of masculine qualities reflects a lack of concern for women's issues. Various methods of resistance against oppression are depicted through the characters. Pope Joan, who was denied education due to her gender, transformed her identity to access learning. Lady Nijo, feeling constrained, rejects her position in the palace and becomes a nun. Additionally, the play presents women like Patient Griselda and Mrs. Kidd, who accept their lives as oppressed without actively resisting. In essence, *Top Girls* offers a nuanced exploration of power dynamics, gender roles, and societal structures, shedding light on the persistent challenges faced by women across different classes.

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