Considered as one of the most representative plays of Churchill, *Cloud Nine* (1978) analyses sexual politics, gender-roles and repressive patriarchal ideology and their interconnectedness. The first act presents a rigid patriarchal sex and gender construction, and the second, almost a foil to the first, gives a picture of sexually liberated society where traditional sex and gender system has broken down. Establishing a parallel between colonialism and patriarchal society, the play explores the relationship between sexual repression and sexual imperialism on one end and economic repression and political imperialism on the other.

First staged in 1979, *Cloud Nine* reflected the general mood of questioning the traditional ideology of sexuality and gender not only in London but many other parts of the world as well. Written for Joint Stock Theatre Company and directed by Max Stafford Clarke, the play emerged from a three-week workshop on sexual politics with cast members of Joint Stock Company which included members with a variety of sexual orientations: a straight married couple, a straight divorced couple, two bi-sexual men, a gay couple, a lesbian and a lesbian-to-be. Churchill tells us in her introduction to this play:

The starting point for our research was to talk about ourselves and share our very different attitudes and experiences. We also explored stereotypes and role reversals in games and improvisations, read books and talked to other people. Though the play’s situations and characters were not developed in the workshop, it draws deeply on this material and I wouldn’t have written the same play without it. (245)
The title of the play too was picked up from the workshop itself in which the caretaker of the rehearsal rooms shared her experiences with other members, as Churchill explains:

And finally she came forward, voluntarily… to sit on a chair in front of everybody else and talk about her childhood and her life. She had come from a very large, poor family, had married at sixteen and had a very violent and unhappy marriage, with no pleasure from sex at all … and after thirty years she had remarried …. Finally she said “we may not do it as often as you young people, but when we have our organisms [sic], we’re on Cloud Nine”. (Kritzer 128)

The play reflects the impact of Kate Millett’s *Sexual Politics* (1970) which was released in Britain in 1977, just one year before Churchill wrote *Cloud Nine*. Millett defines the term *politics* as “power–structured relationships, arrangements whereby one group of persons is controlled by another”. She observes: “Groups who rule by birthright are fast disappearing, yet there remains one ancient and universal scheme for the domination of one birth group by another – the scheme that prevails in the area of sex” (32-33).

Millet draws our attention towards the phenomenon described as hierarchy, a relationship of dominance and subordination where males rule females by birthright priority, giving way to ‘interior colonisation’. This sexual domination across class and culture remains the most pervasive ideology of human society and provides its most fundamental concept of power (Millett 32-33). This power relationship is most manifest in patriarchal ideology and the family, the most basic and fundamental institution of patriarchy.

Another work which influenced Churchill was Michel Foucault’s first volume of *The History of Sexuality* (1978). Foucault argues that sexuality is historically specific and
sexual repression in the form of “taboo, non-existence and silence” (HS, 5) coincides “with the development of capitalism” and “becomes an integral part of the bourgeoisie order” (HS, 5). Foucault connects sex and power as he argues that sexuality is always situated within matrices of power and always produced or constructed within specific historical practices.

Churchill’s concern in Cloud Nine is to interrogate the power relationships focused in sexuality at different historical moments and social contexts and how repressive ideologies of racist and patriarchal set-up control the sexual and gender behaviour of an individual.

The first act of the play, set in colonial Africa, is a critique of the Victorian values of empire and family and exposes the oppressive patriarchal structure that imposes and defines the roles of women, homosexuals and blacks. In her introduction to this play Churchill states: “When I came to write the play, I returned to an idea that had been touched on briefly in the workshop – the parallel between colonial and sexual oppression, which Genet calls ‘the colonial or feminine mentality of interiorized repression’” (245).

The play opens with a song ‘Come, Gather Sons of England’ having strong overtones of imperialism and patriarchy. Clive, the representative of the empire is a typical paternalist-imperialist. Asserting his authoritative position, he introduces his wife, son, daughter and servant to the audience: “This is my family ..../We serve the Queen wherever we may roam/I am a father to the natives here,/And father to my family so dear” (251). Moreover, the cast list explains the other characters in relation to Clive:

Betty, his wife, played by a man

Joshua, his black servant, played by a white

Edward, his son, played by a woman
Victoria, his daughter, a dummy

Maud, his mother-in-law. (248) [emphasis added]

In her introduction to her book *The Second Sex*, Simone de Beauvoir asks, “What is a woman?” She states:

A man never begins by presenting himself as an individual of a certain sex; it goes without saying that he is a man. The terms, masculine and feminine, are used only as matters of fact …. In actuality, this relationship of the two sexes is not quite that of two electric poles, for the man represents both the positive and the neutral [as indicated by the common use of man to indicate human beings in general), whereas woman represents only the negative, defined by limiting criteria without reciprocity. (15)

Beauvoir argues that with interpersonal relationships between man and woman, the woman is the other against which man defines himself as a subject. In expressing men’s otherness, women are denied their own individuality. All the above-mentioned characters, described by Churchill in relation to Clive, demonstrate the ‘otherness’ as explained by Beauvoir and lose their individuality.

Under the pressure of Clive’s authority these characters of the play introduce themselves only in his terms, expressing no consciousness of their own identity and individuality. Betty’s introduction of herself is:

I live for Clive. The whole aim of my life
Is to be what he looks for in a wife.
I am a man’s creation as you see,
And what men want is what I want to be. (251)
Betty has no sense of self except that imposed on her by her husband in following words:

My wife is all I dreamt a wife should be

And everything she is she owes to me. (251)

Betty is essentially Clive’s invention. Ironically, her role is played by a man, as Churchill explains: “she wants to be what men want her to be…. Betty does not value herself as a woman” (245). In her struggle to live a life by male specified codes of behaviour, Betty has made herself a perpetual comic figure, a parody of Clive’s expectations from his wife.

The role of Clive and Betty’s daughter Victoria is played by a dummy emphasizing the insignificance of a daughter and the invisibility of women in a patriarchal society. This lack of importance is reiterated in Clive’s conscious attempt to dismiss her presence by clubbing her with a marginalized group of women, Maud and Ellen, Clive’s mother-in-law and Edward’s governess respectively when he says, “No need for any speech by the rest. My daughter, mother-in-law and governess” (252).

Contrasted against this apathy and neglect is the introduction Clive gives of his son Edward:

My son is young. I’m doing all I can

To teach him to grow up to be a man. (252)

The great sense of pride Clive feels in being the father of a son and the efforts he is making to make him “a man” are too visible in his speech. Clive attempts to impose on his son the tenets of patriarchy so that he grows up to be “a man”. Heterosexuality under patriarchy is regarded as ‘natural’, as the only ‘real’ form of sexuality; all other forms of sexual desire are deviant and abnormal. Edward struggles hard to fulfill his father’s
expectations from him as his natural inclination towards homosexuality makes him behave in an unmanly fashion. He says:

What father wants I’d clearly like to be.

I find it rather hard as you can see. (252)

Edward’s role is played by a woman to emphasize, Churchill tells us, “the way Clive tries to impose traditional male behaviour on him” (245).

Joshua too, Clive’s black servant bows completely to imperialistic demands of Clive and erases his identity. Clive introduces him in following words:

My boy’s a jewel. Really has the knack.

You’d hardly notice that the fellow’s black. (251)

Joshua wants to be what “whites want him to be … Nor does Joshua value himself as a black” (245). Clive’s authority and power render him headless, soulless and rootless and this becomes clear in the following speech of Joshua:

My skin is black but oh my soul is white.

I hate my tribe. My master is my light.

I only live for him. As you can see,

What white men want is what I want to be. (252)

Short sentences of monosyllabic words and a strict rhyme scheme of Joshua’s speech reflect his slavish aping of tradition in colony to please the authority.

Clive, as a true representative of imperialistic and patriarchal forces, tries to exert his suppressive power over all the characters in Act One. He keeps Betty confined under his rule while he himself indulges in extra-marital sex with Mrs. Saunders, a widow of Clive’s colleague and friend. Any threat to his authority like Betty’s infatuation for Harry
Bagley, an explorer, as reported to him by his faithful servant Joshua has to be curbed. Clive, behaving like a true master, makes Betty confess her “weakness” and feel sorry for her innocent kiss to Harry:

Clive. I have never thought of you having the weakness of your sex, only the good qualities.

Betty. I am bad, bad, bad.

Clive. You are thoughtless, Betty, that’s all. Women can be treacherous and evil. They are darker and more dangerous than men. The family protects us from that, you protect me from that. You are not that sort of woman. You are not unfaithful to me, Betty. I can’t believe you are. It would hurt me so much to cast you off. That would be my duty.

Betty. No, no, no.

Clive. Joshua has seen you kissing.

Betty. Forgive me.

Clive. … It was a moment of passion such as women are too weak to resist ….

We must resist this dark female lust, Betty, or it will swallow us up.


Clive. Yes, I do forgive you. But I can’t feel the same about you as I did. You are still my wife and we still have duties to the household. (277-78)

This long dialogue between Clive and Betty not only brings out the moral double standards of Clive as he makes Betty feel guilty and sinful, while he himself indulges in unrestrained sexual activity with Mrs. Saunders and reminds Betty the ideals and duty of a good wife but also reveals the threat of punishment to Betty (“cast you off”) and his
blatant misogyny (“women can be treacherous and evil. They are darker and more
dangerous than men”). In the name of family and household, a woman must abide by the
rigid rules of patriarchy. Any deviation is unacceptable (“I would be hurt, I would be
insulted by any show of independence.” (258)) and may invite punishment and
suspension from the family.

Female sexuality is a threat to Clive’s authority. Mrs. Saunders who is
independent-minded and doesn’t fit into a patriarchal set-up tells Clive, “I don’t like you
at all. But I do like the sensation (263).” Betraying no emotion or any kind of dependence
except sexual, Mrs. Saunder’s “amazing spirit” threatens Clive as he says, “You terrify
me. You are dark like this continent. Mysterious. Treacherous” (263). Clive’s description
reminds us of Helene Cixous’ inquiry into Freud’s designation of woman as a “dark
continent” (247) in her *The Laugh of the Medusa* (1980) with a mystery defying analysis
and understanding. She says:

> Conquering her, they’ve made haste to depart from her borders, to get out of
> sight, out of body…. One can understand how man, confusing himself with
> his penis and rushing in for the attack, might feel resentment and fear of being
> “taken” by the woman, of being lost in her, absorbed or alone. (Cixous 247)

Simone de Beauvoir too has commented upon the myth of woman in the chapter “Myth
and Reality” in *The Second Sex*. She points out that the mythical treatment of woman
poses her as “the absolute other, without reciprocity, denying against all experience that
she is a subject, a fellow human being”. The one most deeply “anchored in masculine
hearts” is that of the feminine “mystery” allowing him the luxury of “legitimately” not
understanding woman. He prefers living in the company of an enigma than “an authentic
relation with a human being”. Beauvoir emphasises that such feminine mystery is an illusion. What underlies the feminine mystery is an “economic substructure” of subordination: mystery always belongs to the vassal, the colonized, the slave (quoted in Habib 690).

In Act I Sc. 4 Clive tells Harry, “I suddenly got out of Mrs. Saunder’s bed and came out here on the verandah and looked at the stars…. There is something dark about women that threatens what is best in us” (282). Clive’s fear of being “taken” or being “lost” as explained by Cixous is demonstrated in Clive’s behaviour. He tries to tame all women in his life, be it Betty whose innocent fling with Harry is immediately checked and she is made to realize her duties or Mrs. Saunders whose “amazing spirit” fascinates and threatens him at the same time and he immediately asserts his position of power by engaging with her only in self-satisfying sex and ignoring her pleas for sexual gratification: “Caroline, you are so voracious. Do let go. Tidy yourself. There’s a hair in my mouth” (264).

We can easily establish a parallel in Clive’s taming of the female threat and exploitation of the natives in Africa. His views on Africa can be accepted as his views on female sexuality:

You can tame a wild animal only so far. They revert to their true nature and savage your hand. Sometimes I feel the natives are the enemy. I know that is wrong. I know I have a responsibility towards them, to care for them and bring them all to be like Joshua. But there is something dangerous. Implacable. The whole continent is my enemy. I am pitching my whole mind and will and reason and spirit against it to tame it, and I sometimes feel it break over me and swallow me up. (277)
In his subjugation of women and the natives, Clive demonstrates the manifestation of the repressive power of colonialism and patriarchy. Joshua’s total submission to his master’s values can be interpreted in the same way as Betty’s complete obedience to her husband. Shulamith Firestone in *The Dialectic of Sex* argues that race relations are akin to the hierarchical relations within the nuclear family:

> The white man is father, the white woman wife-and-mother, her status dependent on his; the blacks like children, are his property, their physical differentiation branding them the subservient class, in the same way that children form so easily distinguishable a servile class vis-à-vis adults. This power hierarchy creates the psychology of racism, just as in the nuclear family, it creates the psychology of sexism. (122-123)

Joshua has severed all his links to his fellow-natives to the extent that he refuses to go to his people when his parents are killed by the British soldiers and says instead “My mother and father were bad people …. You are my mother and father” (284). We remember how he introduces himself at the beginning of the play: “I hate my tribe. My master is my light” (251). He even accepts his master’s religion as his own as he tells Edward, “God made man white like him and gave us the bad woman who liked the snake and gave us all this trouble” (280). He also adopts his master’s and Christianity’s inherent misogyny as he complains to his master about Betty and Ellen being “Bad women” (285).

Joshua’s loyalties, torn between his own family and his white master, do not allow him to be loyal to either as we find him raising his gun to shoot his master Clive at the end of the act. When his parents are killed, he refuses to go to his own people but the way he reacts by covering his head with mud (a popular practice with African tribes) after hearing
about his parents makes us realize that he is still rooted in his own tribal culture. Again, while telling a story to Edward, Joshua narrates a tribal myth of creation with “the great goddess” as the creator who made everything in this world and a tree monster with a “long green tongue” with whom “she begets children which is us” (279). Obviously in conflict with the Christian creation myth of Adam and Eve, Joshua immediately rejects his story as being “not true” in favour of the Christian myth as he tells Edward that “Adam and Eve is true” (280).

We can see in both the stories (Christian and African creation myth) the similar projection of woman as one to be tamed. With almost similar sexual imagery of the “long green tongue” in Joshua’s story and the “snake” in Christian story and also “the goddess falling down onto the earth” into monster’s arms and Eve, the fallen woman of Christianity, Churchill draws our attention to the fact that in the both religions woman is projected as an object of male subjugation and hierarchical power structures exist cutting across religion and culture.

Gender consciousness exists in social hierarchies. In the first scene of Act One when Betty complains to Clive about Joshua having “said something improper to her” (254), Clive pretends to scold Joshua to satisfy Betty while he winks at Joshua, unnoticed by Betty. This example of male solidarity between Clive and Joshua at the expense of Betty’s respect goes beyond racial boundaries and establishes the fact that social hierarchy gives precedence to gender. Not surprisingly, Joshua, emboldened by his master Clive’s condescension repeats his insult to Betty in the third scene of Act One: “You’ve got legs under that skirt…. And more than legs” (278). Hierarchy has given the man liberty to use lousy language to oppress women.
But this time Betty complains to her son, Edward evoking his racial and class consciousness: “Edward, are you going to stand there and let a servant insult your mother?” (278). Edward immediately scolds Joshua: “Don’t speak to my mother like that again” (278), demonstrating his absorption of the patriarchal ideology of idealized motherhood. And, at the same time he exerts his class and racial authority when he calls Joshua “boy”. In this hierarchy of power Joshua may find himself placed above women but he has to acknowledge the position of power accorded to white male children.

Edward, the son of the family, is being taught to play the role of a man, howsoever conflicting this role may be with Edward’s natural inclination towards homosexuality. Clive’s introductory lines “My son is young. I’m doing all I can/To teach him to grow up to be a man” (253) reveal the significance of ‘teaching’ in gender – acquisition. Clive presents before his son a model of patriarchy when he instructs him: “You should always respect and love me, Edward, not for myself, I may not deserve it, but as I respected and loved my father, because he was my father. Through our fathers we love our Queen and our God, Edward. Do you understand? It is something men understand” (275). In this model of patriarchy Clive incorporates colonialist thought and a patriarchal interpretation of religion with no mention of mother. In this hierarchy of power real woman (against idealized woman ‘Queen’) finds no place. No wonder, Edward has learnt to regard his mother only as an ideal, an abstraction. Betty’s attempt to thank him with an embrace for his reprimand of Joshua makes Edward uncomfortable and he recoils at her touch and tells her, “Don’t touch me” (278). Fed on Clive’s teachings like “never mind the women” (257), Edward’s behaviour brings out the contradiction between the idealization of mother and contempt for women in his mind. The scene ends with a song “A Boy’s Best Friend [is his mother]” bringing out the undertone of Oedipus complex and also the irony of the situation.
In his idealization of the patriarchal model for his family and his conscious efforts to teach his son grow into “a man”, Clive overlooks or rather ignores the unconventional behavior of his son. He covers up his unconventionality by calling him “manly” and “brave”. Edward is caught holding Victoria’s doll and fearing Clive’s reprimand for being girly, tells his father that he was minding it for his little sister. Then Clive says, “Yes, it’s manly of you Edward, to take care of your little sister. We’ll say no more about it” (257). Again, when Edward steals his mother’s necklace to gift it to Harry with whom he is in homosexual relationship and names Joshua as having stolen it, Edward again tells a lie to protect himself from his father’s anger by saying that he was minding his mama’s jewels to protect them from the rebels. And yet again, Clive appreciates his son’s action as “manly” and totally ignores the real issue in his effort to disguise the “feminine” behaviour of his son.

Edward is caught in the contradictions between his homosexuality making him behave in a typically “sissy” way and the masculine expectations of Clive towards him. He demonstrates the confusion and ambiguity of his mind when he says, “Know it’s very bad of me. And I said I didn’t want to be like you and I said I hated you… please beat me and forgive me” (276) and again he says “I don’t like women. I don’t like dolls. I love you papa, and I love you, Uncle Harry” (276). Judith Butler in her book *Gender Trouble* observes:

The heterosexualization of desire requires and institutes the production of discrete and asymmetrical oppositions between “feminine” and “masculine” …. The cultural matrix through which gender, identity has become intelligible requires that certain kinds of “identities” cannot “exist” – that is, those in which gender
does not follow from sex and those in which the practices of desire do not “follow” from either sex or gender…. Indeed, precisely because certain kinds of “gender identities” fail to conform to those norms of cultural intelligibility, they appear only as developmental failures or logical impossibilities from within that domain”. (24)

Edward’s rebellion against his father’s oppressive authority and his imposition of a gendered behaviour on unconventionality of Edward becomes manifest when at the end of the act he does nothing to stop Joshua raising his gun to shoot Clive.

Despite his unconventional sexual behaviour, Harry, Clive’s friend and an explorer, tries to adhere to Clive’s patriarchal ideology: “The Empire is one big family” (266) and “I have my duty to the Empire” (281). He shares with Clive his patriarchal ideology when he tells Betty, “You are a mother. And a daughter. And a wife” (268). Confining women to family and home, Harry tells Betty, “when I think of you I always think of you with Edward in your lap” (261) and he associates men with adventure: “I need to go up rivers and know you are sitting here thinking of me” (268). Harry’s idea of Betty as “safety and light and peace and home” shows his idealization of woman which does not accommodate the presence of “dangerous women”.

Virginia Woolf in her *A Room of One’s Own* points out an ambivalence and irony in the male idealization of woman and the reality: “women have burnt like beacons in all the works of all the poets”, while in reality “she was locked up, beaten and flung about the room”. Occupying a position “of the highest importance”, woman is, observes Woolf, “completely insignificant” in practical life (43).
Harry rejects Betty’s advances when she says, “I want more than that” and confines her to an ideal. Asserting his sexual choice and immediately after telling Betty, “I don’t want to want you” (261), Harry asks Joshua, “shall we go in a barn and fuck?” (262).

Intent on maintaining society, Clive must suppress any threat to his sexual, political and domestic empire. Realizing that Harry has mistaken his views on male friendship (“friendship between men is … the noblest form of relationship” (283)) as an acceptance of his homosexual advances, Clive snubs Harry: “The most revolting perversion … this sin can destroy an empire … it’s unthinkable …” (283). Informed by Clive’s ideals of family and empire, Harry starts feeling extremely guilty about his unorthodox sexuality and says, “It’s not a sin, it is a disease… I am like a man born crippled …” (283). Clive further reinforces Harry’s guilt when he adds, “It is a disease more dangerous than diptheria. Effeminacy  is contagious” (283). Pathologising homosexuality as a disease, Clive asserts that any threat to social order and power relations must be suppressed. Refusing to accept his friend Harry’s unconventional sexuality, Clive imposes marriage on him as a solution for this ‘problem’ as it would mask his homosexuality and give the appearance of conformity to social conventions.

Clive’s authoritarian control and repressive ideology is further extended and promoted in the support and compliance offered by the women of the household. Condemning Edward’s feminine behaviour, Betty warns him, “Dolls are for girls … you must never let the boys at school know you like dolls. Never, never. No one will talk to you, you won’t be on the cricket team, you won’t grow up to be a man like your papa” (274-75). Maud, Betty’s mother too supports the masculine control over a family when
she tells her daughter, “Your father always knew what to do…. Since your father died. I know what it is to be unprotected” (274). Reminding Betty repeatedly the importance of a husband in a family (“Luckily this household has a head”), Maud also tries to inculcate in Victoria, Betty’s daughter, the patriarchal value of acceptance of father as the provider and the master of a family (“clap hands, daddy comes, with his pocket full of plums” (274)). Her repeated intervention in Betty’s family points out not only the influence of the past affecting the present but also the compliance of women in supporting the patriarchal values. Both of them, Maud and Betty, inculcate in the children gender-specific values and roles. Betty’s reprimand of Edward (“I have told you before, dolls are for girls” (274)) and Maud’s explanation to Edward that “Victoria will learn to play with her [doll]” (275) demonstrate their support and collusion with a rigid patriarchal system that allows no digression from a fixed pattern of gender behaviour. Through Betty and her mother Maud, Churchill dramatizes the issues of male–identified women and the socialization of children, an issue often raised by radical feminists.

Betty, after being made to feel guilty by Clive about her fling with Harry (“I’m sorry, I’m sorry. Forgive me … It is my wickedness, … Clive … I’m bad, bad, bad.” (277)), has internalized the patriarchal ideology to such an extent that she refuses to acknowledge lesbian advances of Ellen towards her. To Ellen’s kisses and proclamation of love, Betty’s responses like “Oh Ellen, you are my only friend” (271) and again “you don’t feel what you think you do. It’s the loneliness here and the climate is very confusing … I’ll forget all about it” (281) show that instead of understanding Ellen’s sexual orientation she imputes her lesbianism on loneliness and climate. Radical feminists’ criticism of compulsory heterosexuality is expressed by Andrienne Rich in her
influential essay “Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence” in which she observes that the process of becoming a woman in patriarchal societies is also the process of becoming heterosexual or male-identified. Women’s experience, values and culture are quite distinct from those of patriarchal heterosexual culture. This female culture is rendered invisible and marginal, if not taboo in the manner of lesbianism, by the imposition of heterosexuality and the insistence upon lesbianism as abnormal and perverse, “written out of history and catalogued under disease”. (216) Totally rejecting the unconventional sexuality of Ellen, Betty, just like Clive does to Harry, suggests marriage to Ellen, “If you go back to England, you might get married, Ellen. You’re quite pretty, you shouldn’t despair of getting a husband … women have their duty … you must be a mother if you can” (281). Betty’s suggestion of marriage to Ellen is based upon the patriarchal ideology requiring women to get married, have children and perform their conjugal duties. Betty, totally interpellated by a repressive patriarchal system, becomes its agent in curbing any deviance that may threaten the prevailing dominant ideology.

The institution of marriage, the very foundation of a patriarchal society is projected in the first act as a means for perpetuating patriarchy. Clive’s introduction of Betty clearly indicates the primary and secondary positions of the husband and the wife respectively: “My wife is all I dreamt a wife should be, everything she is owes to me” (251). For being the most desired and acceptable institution of the patriarchy, it would, as Clive and Betty both feel, suppress and conceal Ellen and Harry’s deviant sexual behaviour. For Clive, marriage also means availability of lawful sexual pleasure as he tells Harry, “And there is the pleasure” (282) and Mrs. Saunders also corroborates Clive’s view though she rejects Harry’s proposal: “Why? … I choose to be alone, Mr. Bagley, If
I can look after myself, I’m sure you can … There is only one thing about marriage that I like” (283-84). Ignoring Harry’s plea against marriage (“I suppose getting married wouldn’t be any worse than killing myself” (283)), Clive pressurizes him by linking marriage to patriotism when he tells him, “Ask her now, Harry. Think of England” (283). Under various pressures of patriarchy and empire, Harry, a homosexual acquiesces to get married to Ellen, a lesbian, who herself is skeptical of this relationship and has already declared to Betty, “I don’t want children. I don’t like children” (281). Clive’s assertion to Harry emphasising the necessity of heterosexual relationship that “There is the necessity of reproduction” (282) is clearly rejected by Ellen in defence of her lesbianism in her above quoted statement. And yet Harry and Ellen, both have to submit, howsoever unwillingly, to a dominant ideology by agreeing to get married to each other.

Interestingly, Ellen asks Betty a few very pertinent questions before she takes the final plunge into marriage: “What happens with a man?” and “Is it enjoyable?” (286). Betty’s reply that “You just keep still” and “you are not getting married to enjoy yourself” (286) brings into focus the irrelevance of sexual pleasure of a wife in a family and she must remain contented performing duties of a mother and a wife. Betty’s statement becomes significant when contrasted against Clive’s statement to Harry emphasizing the sexual aspect of marriage: “And there’s the pleasure” (282). Coming from the mouth of Betty, whose “shining example of domestic bliss” (287) has become an ideal to be pursued by Harry, this statement brings out the hollowness and hypocrisy of man-woman relationship in an ideal family in Victorian society.

In the last scene of the Act I, the marriage of Harry and Ellen becomes a forced union imposed by the patriarchy (Clive) with its core principle of compulsory
heterosexuality. The scene raises questions on issues of sexual and gender oppression and colonialism. Just before the marriage speech of the bridegroom there is a showdown between Betty and Mrs. Saunders who has been kissed and praised by Clive for her “amazing spirit.” Feeling insecure and jealous, Betty pounces upon Mrs. Saunders who is leaving shortly for England. Clive, who has been having illicit sexual relationship with Mrs. Saunders, becomes protective of his wife Betty and asks Mrs. Saunders, “How dare you touch my wife? You must leave here at once.” Declaring his commitment to the family, Clive takes no time to show Mrs. Saunders that no threat to patriarchal set–up, epitomized in a family, can be tolerated. Sexually exploited by Clive, Mrs. Saunders with her independent, “amazing spirit” has to be thrown away to maintain the peace and happiness of a nuclear family.

Harry’s marriage speech spoken against the backdrop of the suppression of an uprising in an African colony in which many people including Joshua’s parents are killed, becomes ironical in its glorification of the empire and the family: “My dear friends – what can I say – the empire – the family – the married state to which I have always aspired – your shining example of domestic bliss – my great good fortune in winning Ellen’s love – happiest day of my life” (287). Full of Victorian hypocrisy, this short, fumbling, incoherent speech reflects symbolically Harry’s lack of conviction in ideals of empire and family and also his shattered individuality.

Clive’s speech, equally ironic and hypocritical, follows almost immediately. With blessings for the newly married couple like “Long may you live in peace and joy and bliss” (288), the speech sounds hollow and full of lies in its denial of all threats (threat of
homosexuality and lesbianism and also the threat of colonial uprising): “Dangers are past. Our enemies are killed…. All murmuring of discontent is stilled” (288).

Clive’s hypocrisy and lies become all the more apparent when he praises Harry as being “so brave and strong and supple” and Ellen as “shyly peeking” (288), imposing on them a masculine and feminine veneer respectively to make them look like a traditional “happy couple” conforming to Victorian conventions.

Clive’s speech can be interpreted as the triumph of the patriarch and imperialist over unconventional sexualities and the rebellion and revolt of the colonized. But the threat is far from being over as reflected in the stage directions given by the playwright:

[While he is speaking Joshua raises his gun to shoot Clive. Only Edward sees. He does nothing to warn the others. He puts his hands over his ears.] (288)

This scene with Joshua, the black servant, raising a gun on Clive, and Edward, a homosexual, doing nothing to prevent it or to warn others signifies the revolt of the oppressed against the oppressor, undermining the values of the patriarchy and colonialism. In the action of Joshua and inaction of Edward we see a ray of hope against oppression experienced by both in different contexts.

The second act of the play, radically different from the first, is set in a London Park in 1979. Churchill tells us, “this is where I wanted the play to end up, in the changing sexuality of our own time” (246). Depicting a totally new and more contemporary world, Churchill takes a leap of almost hundred years, while the characters age only twenty five years more. The first act depicting the Victorian society with its conventional values is “male dominated and firmly structured” (Churchill 246). While the second act with its modern unconventional society draws “more energy from the women
and the gays” (Churchill 246). The threat of rebellion looming large over the first act has become a reality in the second act. The sexual unconventionality of gays and lesbians has come out in the open without being censured and suppressed. With the social taboos having become less constraining, the characters in this act are questioning the values of patriarchal marriage and compulsory heterosexuality. Asserting their sexuality or even sexualities, the characters are exploring alternative ways of life and relationship.

This changed scenario with many choices available reflects what Churchill calls the “uncertainties and changes of society” (246) leading to confusion and chaos. Most of the action taking place in a London Park in second act, against the confines of a colonial bungalow and its verandah of the first act, becomes significant in the light of the openness and freedom of the second act.

Most of the characters of the first act have ‘grown up’ and changed in the absence of Clive, the patriarch. Betty has left her husband and now lives in London. Victoria, the rag doll of the last act, has grown into a young woman and married to Martin. Edward, now living with his lover Gerry, is working as a gardener in the same park where most of the action of this act takes place. There is also a divorced white lesbian, Lin with her five-year-old daughter, Cathy.

While most of the characters, as mentioned earlier, have ‘grown-up’ and ‘changed’, the growth seen in the character of Betty is most significant. From being the most repressed character of Act I where she told us, “I live for Clive. The whole aim of my life is to be what he looks for in a wife” (251), Betty progressively develops a sense of independent identity. Yet, the influence of the oppressive past is seen the most on her character for some time till she breaks herself free from it and emerges as a new woman,
sure of herself, confident and happy. In the very first scene of Act II Betty tells Victoria, “I’m finding a little flat, that will be fun” (295). But her new-found enthusiasm and confidence is shaken under the weight of the past she is still carrying as she informs Victoria in the next scene, “I’ll never be able to manage. If I can’t even walk down the street by myself. Everything looks so fierce …. It’s since I left your father … Everything comes at me from all directions …. But I’m so frightened” (298). Having always played the role of a dutiful, conventional wife, Betty now finds it difficult to live only for herself, as she tells Lin, “It’s strange not having a man in the house. You don’t know who to do things for” (301).

Betty takes some time to see herself independent of her former identity of a ‘wife’. But gradually she overcomes this identity-crises and recognizes her own self, hidden till then under a patriarchal role for years. Coming to terms with her new identity, Betty discovers her sexuality and accepts the new concept of a family.

Her first step towards her freedom is the job she has taken which gives her economic independence. Her enthusiasm at this achievement is visible when she tells Cathy, “Betty’s been at work this week, Cathy …. And the money. I feel like a child with the money. Clive always paid everything but I do understand it perfectly well” (313). This financial independence makes her feel confident as she treats Martin, her son-in-law and Cathy to ice-creams: “No, the ice-cream was my treat, Martin” (316). Virginia Woolf in *A Room of One’s Own* claimed that women need financial and psychological independence in order to exercise their creative potential. The “power to think for oneself” rests on financial freedom (106). We can see the difference between the position of Maud, Betty’s mother, twenty five years ago, totally dependent on Clive, her son-in-
law, and Betty, proudly treating her son-in-law to ice-cream and asserting her financial independence, and thereby gaining in self-esteem. When her mother’s ghost visits her and warns her against being “unprotected”, Betty asserts her position: “But mother, I have a job. I earn money.” Now Betty’s “protection” is her financial independence, empowering her to live her own life without the “protection” of her husband.

Betty’s next significant step towards self discovery is the recognition of her own sexuality. Betty had lost her identity or rather she had never gained an identity in her role in a conventional patriarchal system as she tells us, “I thought if Clive wasn’t looking at me there wasn’t a person there” (316). Having been denied the pleasures of the body (Betty as a young child was caught masturbating by her mother and then was married when you don’t get married “to enjoy yourself” (286)), Betty’s rediscovery of her body and sexual pleasure becomes significant. She recounts her experience as follows:

One night in bed in my flat I was so frightened I started touching myself …. It felt very sweet, … just barely touching and I felt myself gathering together more and more and I felt angry with Clive and angry with my mother and I went on and on defying them, and there was this vast feeling growing in me and all round me and they couldn’t stop me and no one could stop me and I was there and coming and coming …. But I felt triumphant because I was a separate person from them. (316)

In her defiance of patriarchy and conventionality, Betty discovers her pleasure and more importantly, her separateness. With this new awareness making her feel “triumphant”, Betty is in a better position to think beyond conventional sexuality and this helps her to understand and accept the sexual choices of her children. Having forbidden Edward from
playing with dolls in first act, Betty accepts now the homosexuality of her son as she openly asks Gerry, “So what I’m being told now is that Edward is ‘gay’ is that right?” (319–20). This acceptance of Edward’s homosexuality, Victoria’s lesbianism and also the incestuous relationship between Edward and Victoria reveals that Betty has come a long way in having become liberated from all conventional taboos as she offers her money for buying a bigger house where all of them could stay together in clear contravention of the established norms of a nuclear family. In this new family set-up, Churchill completely demolishes the patriarchal concept of family. Betty tells Gerry with whom she tries to initiate a new relationship without realizing that he is a gay, “But if there isn’t a right way to do things, you have to invent one” (319). It indicates that she has overcome all barriers including those of age and class in her efforts to find new relationships. Learning to find a new way of living, Betty has finally come out of the shadow of patriarchy and conventionality with no guilt and total acceptance of the change as she says, “Well people always say it’s mother’s fault but I don’t intend to start blaming myself. He seems perfectly happy” (320).

The act closes with Betty of first and second act embracing each other, symbolizing the union of two selves of Betty and becoming a complete whole. But before this happens she is visited by Clive disapproving Betty’s freedom expressed in her initiative to find new relationships in her life: “You are not that sort of woman, Betty. I can’t believe you are” (320). He relates Betty’s freedom with the end of colonial rule in Africa which is taken over by the communists. It is significant that by the end of the play both, women and Africa have come out of the shadow of oppressive ideology of patriarchy and colonialism. In the image of Betty’s embrace, marking the emergence of a
complete woman, we see a new hope for a new society as Kritzer comments: It “breaks apart the unitary patriarchal construction of woman and creates an empowering moment of theatrical doubleness for women audience members” (Kritzer 127).

Victoria, Betty’s daughter, seen as a rag doll in Act I, is married to Martin who despite being a progressive husband tries to dominate her. Victoria too, like her mother, struggles in the first two scenes to find her ‘voice’ and establish a new relationship in the absence of a fulfilling relationship with her husband. In her relationship with Lin, a lesbian, Victoria establishes a different way of relating sexually to one another. Rejecting the patriarchal patterns of subservience and male-gaze, their relationship moves beyond the question of the gender of the partner and conventional assumptions and values as revealed in the following conversation between Victoria and Lin:

Victoria. Would you love me if I went to Manchester?

Lin. Yes.

Victoria. Would you love me if I went on a climbing expedition in the Andes mountains?

Lin. Yes.

Victoria. Would you love me if my teeth fell out?

Lin. Yes.

Victoria. Would you love me if I loved ten other people?

Lin. Yes.

Victoria. Yes.

Lin. Yes. (302)
Initially she rejects Lin’s suggestion to leave her husband and prefers to explore this lesbian relationship from the safety of her marriage but soon, overcoming her fears and defying social and conventional patterns, Victoria starts living with Lin. Bell Hooks in her chapter “Ending Female Sexual Oppression” observes:

Feminist movement to eradicate heterosexism – compulsory heterosexuality – is central to end sexual oppression…. Within the feminist movement lesbian women have worked hardest to call attention to the struggle to end heterosexist oppression…. They have shown many heterosexual women that their prejudice against lesbians support and perpetuate compulsory heterosexuality. They have also shown women that we can find emotional and mutual sexual fulfillment in relationships with one another. (152)

Victoria’s relationship with her mother, Betty also goes through a change. Her initial hostility towards her mother is expressed in her words to Lin: “Ten minutes talking to my mother and I have to spend two hours in a hot bath” (292). Lin’s suggestion that “Don’t think of her as your mother, think of her as Betty” (317) helps Victoria in finding a new meaning in her relationship with her mother, so much so that she starts calling her mother by name. This new alternative, certainly a subversion of the established conventional order, is often seen in feminist literature. The invocation of Goddess Isis made by Victoria, Lin and Edward in the middle of the night in the park reflects the same mood. Making a call to the Goddess of a lost tradition, they revoke a remote past beyond patriarchy. Acting as a priestess, Victoria invokes “Goddess of breasts … of cunts … of fat bellies and babies. And blood blood blood” (309), emphasizing the female anatomy

~150
and the specifically female physical functions of menstruation, pregnancy and childbirth, demonized by patriarchal system. Suggesting a total matrilineal system, Victoria says:

> The priestess chose a lover for a year and he was king because she chose him and then he was killed at the end of the year .... And the women had the children and nobody knew it was done by fucking so they didn’t know about fathers and nobody cared who the father was and the property was passed down the maternal line. (309)

Victoria’s rejection of patriarchy in favour of a matrilineal system emphasises the female element in Act II against the dominance of patriarchy in Act I.

Edwards’s sexuality, ignored or kept in wraps in Act I, comes out in open in this act. Despite his fear of losing his job, he stays with his male partner, Gerry, a working class man. In his relationship with Gerry, Edward follows the pattern of a conventional heterosexual marriage. His feminine, wifely behaviour towards Gerry whom he considers his husband opens up the issues of gender and sexuality. When Gerry draws his attention to this, saying, “you are getting like a wife .... Stop it .... Just be yourself” (306), Edward fails to understand Gerry’s point of view and says, “Everyone’s always tried to stop me being feminine and you are too .... I like doing the cooking. I like being fucked .... I like knitting” (306). Gerry again tells him, “you are putting it on” (306), emphasizing that femininity is a social and cultural construct. Unable to conform to a typical, masculine pattern of behaviour, he tries to take on a typically feminine role. Bound to the patriarchal binary thought, Edward attempts to follow the gender definitions and behaves like a conventional wife to Gerry who feels suffocated and tied down in this relationship and tells him to “stop playing the injured wife” (307) and breaks the relationship.
Edward, in his relationship with Lin and Victoria defies all gender distinctions and creates a completely new sexual identity when he describes himself as “a lesbian”. This new identity allows him to explore new relationships with Victoria and Lin and reinterpret and recast his relationship with Gerry. Demolishing the sexual conventions of a patriarchal family, Edward develops an incestuous relationships with his sister, Victoria. Freeing himself from all taboos and restrictions, Edward is not playing any role now. To Gerry’s question “whose wife are you now then?”, he replies confidently, “Nobody’s. I don’t think like that any more …” (315).

Lin, a white working class lesbian is most uninhibited in her sexual desires like Gerry and it is she who initiates a relationship with Victoria. A victim of an abusive husband, Lin expresses her hatred of men: “I hate men …. I just hate the bastards” (292). Lin’s position raises a question regarding her lesbianism being a natural choice or the result of an abusive marriage and thus links the issues of violence and gender as well. Bell Hooks in the chapter “Feminist Movement to End Violence” comments: “Male violence against women in personal relationships is one of the most blatant expressions of the use of abusive force to maintain domination and control. It epitomizes the actualization of the concept of hierarchical rule and coercive authority” (120). Despite her being most open and unconservative, Lin is grateful to her husband who let her keep Cathy and didn’t hit her harder than he did. She still needs a (bogey) man to frighten her daughter as her mother did. When Victoria draws her attention to this inconsistency in her behaviour, Lin’s reply that “I’ve changed who I sleep with, I can’t change everything” (303) shows that the shadows of the past are still present in the acceptance of male as the wielder of power. Conventional thought patterns affect one’s behaviour.
The playwright has drawn our attention to the artificiality of gender conventions through Lin and Cathy. Refusing to wear jeans in school because she is called ‘a boy’ there, Cathy wants to acquire feminine status and so she wants her ears pierced. She also admires Betty’s hat, beads and ear-rings. Now she wants her mother also to look more womanly by wearing skirts and tights. But she complains when the “Dead Hand Gang” refuses to play with her for being a girl: “They hit me. I can’t play. They said I’m a girl” (317). Churchill again draws our attention to the link of gender and violence through this incident.

The issue of violence once again becomes significant in the way Cathy is exposed by Lin to war toys. Lin’s suggestion to her daughter to “Paint a car crash and blood everywhere” (289) suggests of a deeper implication. Cathy takes pleasure in “shooting” others while playing and loves to copy the sound of a gun “Kiou kiou kiou kiou kiou” (296). Lin encourages Cathy in her aggressiveness: “Don’t hit him, Cathy, kill him. Point the gun … that’s the way” (291). Contrasting against the scene in Act I where women are told to stay indoor while flogging of natives is carried out, Lin and Cathy’s exposure to violence points out that in this changed scenario even women are not averse to violence and how it has permeated all levels of society.

Gerry, another working class character, is wary of any ties in his relationship with other men at the cost of his autonomy. Refusing to follow any traditional model in his relationship, he tells Edward, “I’m not the husband so you can’t be the wife” (307). Most casual and unrestrictive, he seeks pleasure in his flings on trains and parks etc. and presents a contrast against Harry’s sexual encounters hidden in a barn in Act I. He accepts Edward back only when he breaks free from the imitation of a conventional husband-wife model of sexual relationship.
Martin, Victoria’s husband, is the only heterosexual male in Act II. Despite being a progressive man, he tries to dominate Victoria in a typical patriarchal way. He discourages Victoria from taking up a job in Manchester as her independence amounts to a challenge to his male authority. Disapproving her decision to join her job in Manchester, he comments:

You take the job. You go to Manchester. You turn it down, you stay in London …. Do you think you’re well enough to do this job? You don’t have to …. There’s no point being so liberated you make yourself cry all the time …. I’m not putting any pressure on you but I don’t think you’re being a whole person. (299-301)

Caught in the chaos of new sexualities on one hand and the pressure of patriarchal roles on the other, Martin gets confused regarding his own role in this new set up. His view of women’s liberation remains most inadequate when he says, “If we’re all talking about is having a lot of sex there’s no problem. I was all for the sixties when liberation just meant fucking” (310). Obsessed with his own sexual performance and frustrated over Victoria’s sexual coldness, he says, “My one aim is to give you rolling orgasms like I do other women. So why the hell don’t you have them?” (300-301).

Demonstrating progression and change with his efforts to overcome his obsession with heterosexual masculinity, he accepts his wife Victoria’s relationship with Lin: “You’re the one who’s experimenting with bisexuality, and I don’t stop you” (301). In this new world where all conventions are being challenged, Martin finds a new role for himself. He becomes a caretaker of his son Tommy and Lin’s daughter, Cathy. Martin realizes that his patriarchal kind of masculinity must dilute its focus on male sexuality and accommodate the concepts of care and nurturance with it.
The appearance of the ghost of Bill, Lin’s soldier brother, killed in Northern Ireland reminds us of the colonial rule of Act I but the sense of pride, commitment and patriotism associated with the duty for Empire in Act I is missing in Bill’s incoherent and resentful speech. His appearance conveys the continuation of England’s policy of dominance and repression. Representing the decadent traces of imperialism, Bill expresses his anger and frustration over his sexual and economic repression. In the middle of the invocation of goddess Isis who never appears, emphasizing the marginality of women power, the ghost of Bill appears and when asked by Lin “Have you come back to tell us something?”, he says, “No, I’ve come for a fuck. That was the worst thing in the fucking army. Never fucking let out. Can’t fucking talk to Irish girls. Fucking bored out of my fucking head…. I got so I fucking wanted to kill someone and I got fucking killed myself and I want to fuck” (310-11).

Bill’s gloomy speech, linking aggression and sexual oppression and suggesting “the bitter end of colonialism” (246), becomes a parody of the song sung enthusiastically by all in the opening scene of Act I with high sentiments in praise of the imperialism of England.

As a part of specific theatrical techniques, influenced by Brecht, Churchill uses songs in both the acts of the play and creates a psychological distance between audience and the actors.

The first song, opening the first act of the play, praises “Our Empire” and “Our Queen”. Giving a call to “sons of England”, the song sets the tone of the Act I with a colonial setting in Africa. The song finishes with these words: “The forge of war shall weld the chains of brotherhood secure:/So to all time in every clime our Empire shall endure” (252). It indicates clearly the use of power and violence for securing “the chains
of brotherhood.” The same repressive power is used within a family so that the patriarchal empire is sustained.

The second song, a Christmas carol taught by Ellen, is sung by Joshua at the end of scene two. Ellen, herself a repressed character on account of her class and lesbianism, further colonises Joshua by teaching him a Christian song. Joshua, in his efforts to become “what white men want”, tries to adopt the religion of his white master. So, by making Joshua, an African, sing this song about totally unfamiliar frosty wind and “snow on snow”, a weather generally associated with European Christmas, Churchill draws our attention to the fact that the colonization is not only political but also religious and cultural.

The third song sung at the end of scene three celebrates son-mother relationship. The song takes place at the end of a scene when Edward reprimands Joshua for being vulgar and disrespectful towards his mother. Fulfilling the expectations of his mother, Edward becomes an ideal son but he cringes at the touch of his mother who is expressing her affection and thanks to him. The song strikes an emotional chord in the conventional mother and son relationship:

But there is one whose smile will ever on us beam,
Whose love is dear far than any other;
-----------------------------------------
Then cherish her with care
And smooth her silvery hair
When gone you will never get another.
A boy’s best friend is his mother. (279)
With the idealization of mother–son relationship, Churchill is striking at patriarchy which uses family to perpetuate its rule. With the undertones of Oedipus complex, the song becomes ironic when interpreted in the light of Edward’s aversion for his mother expressed in his words “Don’t touch me” (278).

The fourth and the last song, except for a few scatological songs, is the only song taking place in Act II. Corresponding with the unconventionality and freedom of the second act, the song deconstructs the conventional sexual patterns and family set-ups and explores the possibility of new social and sexual behaviour. Reflecting the uncertainties and ambiguities of this new social order in the line “Mist was rising and the night was dark”, the song also dwells upon the link of drugs and sex: “Smoked some dope on the playground swings/Higher and higher on true love’s wings” (312). Celebrating the unconventionality of lesbian and gay relationship, the song conveys a sense of freedom and acceptance:

Who did she meet on her first blind date?

The guys were no surprise but the lady was great

They were women in love, they were on Cloud Nine.

Two the same, they were on Cloud Nine. (312)

The song also depicts the defiance of an age old tradition of a younger bride:

The bride was sixty-five, the groom was seventeen,

They fucked in the back of the black limousine.

It was divine in their silver Cloud Nine. (312)

And finally, in the depiction of total chaos in an alternative family pattern, as we notice in the relationship between Victoria, Lin, Edward, Cathy and Tommy, we see a complete breakdown of systematic patriarchy:
The wife’s lover’s children and my lover’s wife,

Cooling in my kitche, confusing my life.

And it’s upside down when you reach Cloud Nine. (312)

Apart from these songs we have a few scatological songs, all sung by Cathy. The second act opens with Cathy’s song: Yum yum bubblegum./Stick it up your mother’s bum./When it’s brown/Pull it down/Yum yum bubblegum (289).

The fact that this song about explicit anal intercourse is sung by a four year old child, Lin’s daughter Cathy, prepares us for shocking unconventionality of Act II. Moreover, Cathy’s role is played by Clive from Act I. Having seen Clive in the role of a patriarch with his repressive ideology, it becomes all the more surprising to find him behaving so childishly and singing an obscene song. Churchill could not have thought anything more effective to parody the oppressive authority of Clive.

Other three songs, dealing with scatological subjects (farts) and sexuality, are equally outrageous and convey the sense of freedom, casualness and unconventionality, specially in sexual matters which may dismantle the rigidity and fixity of patriarchy and its institutions.

Churchill has also used the techniques of cross-gender (repeated after Vinegar Tom), cross-racial casting and doubling of roles to deconstruct sexual and racial identities. Creating a sense of alienation through the visual incongruity of a man playing the role of Betty, for instance, the playwright successfully impedes identification and empathy of spectators with the characters. The cross-gender casting in Victorian setting also suggests links between prescriptive ideology and prescribed gender roles and sexuality.

Janelle Reinelt observes: “Of course, gay drag had long been a venerable dramatic form, and cross dressing as the Greeks, but it now quickly became highlighted as
possessing a variety of possible forms and uses for resistance to the prescribed sex and
gender regime of representations” (182). The playwright in her list of characters tells us
that Betty is played by a man, Joshua, the black servant, by a white and Edward, Clive’s
son, is played by a woman and Victoria, his daughter is represented by a doll. Betty, as
she tells us, is “a man’s creation” and Joshua, a creation of his white master. Both of
them do not value themselves, Betty as a woman and Joshua as a black. The
representation of Betty as a man emphasizes the absence of female. She has no personal
identity except the one imposed on her by patriarchal gender codes. She is a product of
male “gaze” and a “sign” of patriarchal ideology and its values and accepts the subjective
identity imposed on her. Joshua, in his submission and servitude, has become “what
white men want” (252). Having Joshua played by a white actor clearly brings out the
hegemonic tendency of empire to repress all peculiarities of the colonized race and
country. Edward, on the other hand, showing his resistance to the imposition of
masculinity on him, is played by a woman. There is hardly any cross-casting in Act II
because the freedom from the repressive ideology of Act I allows the characters to feel
closer to their true selves. Cathy is the only Character in Act II played by a man (Clive of
Act I). Creating a contrast against the children of Act I, Cathy with her scatological songs
undermines the repressive ideology of Clive. Churchill herself offers an explanation for
Cathy’s cross-casting:

Cathy is played by a man, partly as a simple reversal of Edward being played by a
woman, partly because the size and presence of a man on stage seem appropriate
to the emotional force of young children, and partly, as with Edward, to show
more clearly the issues involved in learning what is considered correct behaviour
for a girl. (246)
By using cross-casting device in these characters the playwright has completely subverted their ideological value.

Another technique used by Churchill to create Brecht’s alienation effect in this play is doubling. Each of the seven members of the cast plays the role of two different characters, making it difficult for the audience to identify with the characters and allowing for more objective viewing of the play. Although Churchill in her notes on production has given a freedom of choice for doubling combinations yet we would like to concentrate upon the combinations the playwright herself has preferred: Clive – Cathy, Betty – Edward, Edward – Betty, Maud – Victoria, Mrs. Saunders/Ellen – Lin, Joshua – Gerry, Harry – Martin. The rigid wielder of power, Clive becomes the “naughty” Cathy in Act II. We have already discussed the significance of this doubling. The man playing Betty’s role in female drag becomes Edward and overcomes his feminine traits and asserts his homosexuality freely. The woman playing the role of “sissy” Edward in Act I becomes a free-willed and independent Betty of Act II. Maud, Betty’s mother, the enforcer of conventional values of Act I becomes Victoria, a true feminist defying the rules and conventions of a rigid ideology. The woman playing the role of Mrs. Saunders and Ellen in Act I now becomes Lin. Mrs. Saunders and Ellen both, marginalized in the patriarchal system, combine their uninhibition, ‘amazing spirit’ and lesbianism respectively to become one in Lin, the liberated woman of the future. Joshua, the colonized black servant of Act I now plays the role of a free, unconventional and promiscuous Gerry, emphasizing the freedom from colonial and sexual oppression. The technique of doubling serves the playwright well by highlighting the contrast between the environment and values of two acts. The technique also becomes an effective tool in the process of defamiliarisation.
Another Brechtian element used by Churchill in her technique is the disruption of chronology. The two acts of the play have a time gap of more than a hundred years while the characters grow only twenty five years older. Apart from being an alienation technique, this manipulation of time was necessary to defy the linear, the masculine for the depiction of an era which is unconventional, liberated and anarchic. The observation made by Christopher Innes, however, offers a different point of view about the second part of *Cloud Nine* which “uses a double time frame to dismiss anachronistic attitudes by showing the younger generation – twenty five years older, but a century later – achieving an alternative lifestyle” (515).

Suggesting a different explanation for this disruption of chronology by more than a hundred years, we may say that the playwright has hinted at the slow progress of social change. Commenting on this technique, Robert Asahina says:

> We are still reeling from Act I when Churchill throws us for another loop at the beginning of Act II. It is now one hundred years later, in contemporary London, but the characters have aged only twenty – five years, thus maintaining a continuity with the past that paradoxically underscores the passage of time and the change in mores. (564-65)

Mark Thacker Brown’s observation on this technique establishes the fact that Churchill believes in challenging the established norms:

> This dramatic device heightens the contrast between the two periods but reinforces the concept of historical and individual rebirth. The play asks the audience to adjust on so many levels – change of time, location, actor/character relationship, and social “norms” – that the assumptions that underlie modern Western views of reality are again strongly challenged. (43)
Churchill makes use of these various technical devices to register her resistance against conformity to the traditional theatrical style propounded by Aristotle.

Commenting on the structure of the two acts of the play Churchill says in her introductory notes to the play, “The first act, like the society it shows, is male dominated and firmly structured. In the second act, more energy comes from the women and the gays. The uncertainties and changes of society, and a more feminine and less authoritarian feeling, are reflected in the looser structure of the act” (246).

Just like the difference pointed out by the playwright in the structure of the two acts corresponding to the overall mood of each act, we also notice the difference in the use of language in the two acts of the play. The restrained language of the first act is in consonance with the discipline and a show of propriety exercised by Clive on everyone around. In Act I Scene I the following conversation between Clive and Betty demonstrates the restrain and sense of propriety in the short, clipped sentences:

Clive. And what has my little dove done today?
Betty. I’ve read a little.
Clive. Good. Is it good?
Betty. It’s poetry.
Clive. You’re so delicate and sensitive.
Betty. And I played the piano. Shall I send for the children?
Clive. Yes, in a minute. I’ve a piece of news for you.
Betty. Good news?
Clive. You’ll certainly think it’s good. A visitor. (252)

The characters of the second act break free from all restrictions including that of language and express themselves freely without any moral or ideological compunctions.
We notice this freedom in Gerry’s explicit account of his sexual encounter with a stranger in a train. And then also in Betty’s narration of her masturbation. The women and the homosexuals, repressed and silenced in the first act, find their voices in the second act and express themselves in fact, more freely than Martin, the only male heterosexual in Act II. Victoria’s question to Martin that “we’re having an orgy. Do you want me to suck your cock?” or Lin’s question to Victoria that “will you have sex with me?” could not have been more open or straight. This uninhibited expression of one’s sexual needs reflects the liberated and unconventional atmosphere created by the sexual revolution of Act II.

We also notice the unusual opening of the second act with the scatological song of Cathy: “Yum yum bubblegum./Stick it up your mother’s bum”. The shocking and outrageous language of the song describing anal intercourse sets the tone and mood of the second act.

With too many choices available to the characters in Act II against too few in Act I, there is a sense of confusion and anarchy in this freedom. This confusion, conveying the lack of definitiveness and absence of parameters, is expressed in the following conversation between Lin and Cathy:

Cathy. I’m going to bed now.
Lin. Not now but early.
Cathy. How early?
Lin. Not late.
Cathy. How not late?
Lin. Early.
Cathy. How early?
Lin. Not late. (306)
Churchill is certainly questioning the patriarchal values and suggesting the necessity of change of values and creation of new relationships through alternative ways of living. The utopia of *Cloud Nine* is beyond power-mechanisms with an acceptance of all races, all kinds of sexualities and women free from the objectification of the gaze and the repression of the patriarchy. But the new possibilities suggested by Churchill in the wider choices create chaos and confusion, closing the play amid uncertainty. Had she ended it with a definite restoration of order, many questions raised in the play could have been answered.
WORKS CITED


