A Comparative Reading of Positionings within Patriarchy in Caryl Churchill's *Top Girls* and Amirhossein Allahyari's *Qorab Jendun*: A Lacanian Approach

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Abstract:

Informed by the Lacanian conceptualization of the Name-of-the-Father, this research investigates Amirhossein Allahyari's *Qorab Jendun* (2022) and Caryl Churchill's *Top Girls* (1982). This study dialogically investigates the two authors' orientation toward and within patriarchy. It also explores the impact of resisting/accepting the patriarchal system and its consequences, and offers insight into the reverberation of (m)Other's presence in the process of subjectification. The central questions of this research are: How are the two works situated in the continuum of patriarchy according to Lacan's Name-of-the-Father? How is patriarchy negotiated with or subverted in accordance with Lacan's psychoanalytical conceptualization of the Symbolic and neurosis? And what are the two authors' orientations toward patriarchy? This analysis draws upon thematic textual analysis and Lacanian psychoanalysis to confront Eastern and Western patriarchal systems and ideologies in terms of Symbolic, unconscious, subject, Imaginary, and the Name-of-the-Father. The analysis contextualizes Allahyari's elegiac writing and Churchill's prescriptive text in light of the time-space features of their lives and their attitude toward the socio-political milieu of their countries, all of which array the two works as consequential or oppositional within the patriarchy. This study demonstrates the unfeasibility of Churchill's idealistic Symbolic solution and the necessity of having both patriarchy-oriented and matriarchy-oriented stances for a balanced psyche and a healthy society.

Keywords: Amirhossein Allahyari; Caryl Churchill; Jacques Lacan; Name-of-the-Father; Patriarchy; Qorab Jendun

1. Introduction

The UK's leading socialist feminist playwright, Caryl Churchill's works are heavily informed by modern ideas about women's rights and politics on feminism and sexuality, which, in turn, renders her works controversial. According to *The Guardian* (2015), her *Top Girls* (1982), which is an account of women's oppression in a patriarchal society, is among the "[g]reatest plays of all time" (Billington). It was in theatres for more than twenty years and was regarded as "[t]he best British play ever by a woman dramatist" by *The Guardian* (1983), and "one of the finest postwar British plays" in 2002. After her widely noticed play, *Cloud Nine* (1979), she moved away from conventional realism toward an anti-oppressive feminist centrality that is best exemplified by her *Top Girls*. Her take on patriarchy and women's oppression marks *Top Girls* as the crossroad between history and the contemporary.

Middle-East, the birthplace of some of the male-dominated religions of the world, has always been regarded as a patriarchal region. Amirhossein Allahyari was born in Tehran in 1983. His childhood coincided with the Iran-Iraq War. His *Nights of Rocket Attacks* (2022) is an anti-war free verse in collaboration with an Iraqi artist named Bassem Rassam. Folklore and fancy are among his interests. His *Parikhani* (2015), a sonnet cycle that includes 300 sonnets, derives its name, as is also the case with *Qorab Jendun*[1] (2022), from folklore that has roots in the belief system of the traditional southerners of Iran. *Qorab Jendun* glorifies seemingly benign patriarchy in a prototypical tale that is old enough to be considered history and recent enough to feel contemporary. Through creating a sense of timelessness, Allahyari incorporates the classical and mythical backgrounds of his country, Iran, into his oeuvre, and his views on patriarchy are no less than controversial.

Since these two authors hold different perspectives toward patriarchy in their plays – either complementary or contradictory – this study aims to comparatively investigate these two plays by drawing upon Lacan's conceptualization of the signifying system that helps the formation and progression of the subject within the so-called patriarchal realm.

Caryl Churchill's body of literature has received many positive and negative critical responses worldwide. Many of them have drawn on the issue of patriarchy. Among them, some drew upon Lacanian psychoanalytical illustration of subjectification, which by no means have been exhaustive.

Zozaya Ariztia María Pilar is among those literary scholars infatuated with Churchill. In her doctoral dissertation, *Gender, Politics, Subjectivity: Reading Caryl Churchill*, she employs a psychosemiotic approach to analyze Churchill's plays. Her analysis is informed by the Lacanian mirror stage, Symbolic, and Imaginary, which she employs interconnectedly with post-Lacanian theories – such as Post-structuralism and French Feminist Theory – to investigate Churchill's women in light of their revolt against patriarchal oppression. She argues that *Top Girls* establishes "a parallelism between politics and feminism, and [shows] that a feminism that follows the socio-political and economic structures created by patriarchy does nothing but perpetuate the very same systems of oppression" (300). Pilar fails to notice that, from a Lacanian perspective, accepting the Name-of-the-Father is inevitable. And the women's ability to redefine themselves in a patriarchal system, from a Lacanian perspective, is

the only possible option. She never discusses this matter, but in accordance with her approach, if the patriarchal system's features are totally ignored, then the only viable option would be aggression, which results in a catastrophe.

The English studies scholar, Danelle Rowe's dissertation, titled "*Power and Oppression: A Study of Materialism and Gender in Selected Drama of Caryl Churchill,*" selectively employs Lacanian psychoanalysis to analyze Churchill's plays. She argues that by dissecting traditional relations of power in Western culture, Churchill "explores women's oppression by grappling with issues such as the male gaze, the objectification of women, the masquerade of femininity, and women as objects of exchange within a masculine economy" (142). She believes that Churchill's *Top Girls* has no answers to the oppression of women in a patriarchal system, but it serves as an incentive to raise awareness.

Thanks to his being still alive and new to the world of literature (canon-wise), Amirhossein Allahyari's body of literature has only once been psychoanalytically inspected: In his "Will He Die by Being Killed? 'That Is the Question'," Allahyari and Farahbakhsh employ the Lacanian conceptualisation of "desire" to comparatively analyse Allahyari's *Qorab Jendun* and William Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. He pinpoints "their differentiation in Hamlet's fantasised and superficial Catharsis through mourning and facing death; against Khan Zadeh's firm belief in an afterlife where his (m)Other awaits him." (15).

Amirhossein Allahyari's usage of folklore and Churchill's selection of women from the past feel worlds apart and indeed the texts under study are from authors with totally different backgrounds and cultures; however, their ideological diversity can be interactively interpreted and consequently placed in a meaningful continuum that will provide a propitious platform for a comparative study. Despite the stark difference in the authors' geographical location, nationality, culture, and perspectival orientation, a fruitfully interactive psychoanalytic reading of them based on a concept as archetypical as patriarchy would prove the universality of comparative and world literature as well as interdisciplinary studies.

2. Theoretical Framework

One can trace the origins of psychoanalysis to Sigmund Freud and the publication of *The Interpretation of Dreams*. Every wave of analysts that came after Freud continually tried to update or redefine, and solve the contradictions he left behind. Among them, was Jacques Lacan (1901-85), whom some scholars regard as a central figure in the psychoanalysis canon. His *Écrits* (1966) is the collection of his published articles and annual seminars in Paris. Through his language-like structured conception of the unconscious and the relationship between Symbolic order and the subject, Lacan achieved new horizons in exploring the unconscious desires in the text, and opened new areas of debate in women and gender studies.

Lacan understands the human subject in three registers or orders: the Imaginary, the Symbolic, and the Real. For Lacan, the formation of the subject is in no sense an outcome but a process that happens in these three registers and the unconscious realm, all of which emerge at the same point within Lacanian theory. He believes that the subject is formed through an endless process of

subjectification that starts at the Imaginary, which, according to Lacan, "will mark with its rigid structure the infant's entire mental development" (*Écrits* 7). Homer argues that the individual subject or the 'self' only makes sense in accordance with another subject which is an 'other.' In other words, the existence of the self is bound to the existence of an-Other (23). Bruce Fink's masterpiece, *The Lacanian Subject: Between Language and Jouissance*, gives a brilliant account of Lacan's conceptualization of subject formation, "Lacan … finds the concept of subjectivity indispensable and explores what it means to be a subject, how one comes to be a subject, the conditions responsible for the failure to become a subject (leading to psychosis), and the tools at the analyst's disposal to induce a precipitation of subjectivity" (11).

Adopting a qualitative approach, this study draws upon Jacques Lacan's psychoanalytical postulation of the Name-of-the-Father to comparatively investigate the confrontations with patriarchy, its effects, and outcomes in Churchill's *Top Girls* and Allahyari's *Qorab Jendun*. It uses as its material various kinds of books, articles, e-books, and library or internet sources. As for "patriarchy," in her *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution*, Adrienne Rich defines patriarchy as "a familial-social, ideological, political system in which men – by force, direct pressure, or through ritual, tradition, law, and language, customs, etiquette, education, and the division of labor, determine what part women shall or shall not play, and in which the female is everywhere subsumed under the male" (57). In her *Patriarchy*, Pavla Miller connects the concept of patriarchy to early modern Europe's biblical conceptualization of the father and Jean Bodin's call for fatherly rulers. She elaborates that "Like God, the king was the head of the body and the shepherd of the flock…And because the rule of women was against divine, natural, and human law, no woman should ever become a monarch" (24). In this respect, the meaning that the term 'patriarchy' takes in a socialist-feminist context is taken by this study and is an informing influence in the analysis of the plays; in other words, it is employed as an evaluative tool for its relevance to the subject matter at hand. To see how patriarchal structures contribute to characters' subjectification in light of the Lacanian conceptualization of an-Other, this research endeavors to unmask the unconscious-fueled resistance/aggression against the patriarchal system and its ramifications on the subject as well as the system itself. The study at hand also examines the outcomes of resisting/accepting the patriarchal system – and the possibility of the existence of benign patriarchy as well as the equivalent matriarchy – in light of Lacanian understanding of Symbolic manipulation or neurosis.

3. Discussion

Informed by the Lacanian conceptualization of the Name-of-the-Father, this section comparatively investigates Caryl Churchill's *Top Girls* and Amirhossein Allahyari's *Qorab Jendun*.

3.1 Patriarchy: Negotiation vs Subversion

In their article, "The Tragedy of Love: A Study of Love and Death in Jacques Lacan's Thought," Ghaffary and Alizadeh note:

> In patriarchal and phallocentric societies, language is not a neutral system, free from gender-based biases.

> In fact, such a society revolves around masculine values and denounces feminine features as negative and even evil. In other words, from a Lacanian perspective, language is the embodiment of paternal authority, a system which is under the aegis of what Lacan terms *nom-du-père*, or the Name of the Father. (33)

Lacan identifies patriarchy with the Name-of-the-Father. According to Lacan, the Name-of-the-Father is a Symbolic function that breaks the Imaginary unity between the child and the (m)other. The child assumes s/he does not possess what the (m)other really desires, which is the phallus and is in the possession of the father (Homer 55). In other words, the desire of the (m)other is substituted with the Name-of-the-Father. This act of substitution initiates the process of signification and marks the child's entrance to the Symbolic order as a subject of lack. Lacan describes the process of symbolization as phallic and governed by the paternal metaphor and the imposition of paternal law which centralizes the Name-of-the-Father as the organizing signifier of the unconscious (*On the Names-of-the-Father* 28).

For instance in *Top Girls*, Griselda, the obedient wife from Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*, allows her husband to kill their child only to prove that she loves him, "JOAN. He killed his children / to see if you loved him enough? NIJO. Was it easier the second time or harder? GRISELDA. It was always easy because I always knew I would do what he said" (*Churchill's Plays* 99). Another instance is Nijo's memory of the Full Moon Ceremony: "I was eighteen. They make a special rice gruel and stir it with their sticks, and then they beat their women across the loins so they'll have sons and not daughters. So the Emperor beat us all / very hard as usual" (102). Lacan argued that if the transition to the Symbolic order gets interrupted/distorted, the subject would lose its sanity and enter a state of psychosis or neuroticism (*On the Names-of-the-Father* 12-40). The point of departure between *Top Girls* and *Qorab Jendun* is that Churchill's characters forgave those who wronged them, accepted the Symbolic order, and then tried to redefine or manipulate it. In this regard, one can argue that they have completed their transition.

In *Qorab Jendun*, however, there is a vivid conflict with the conceptualization of the Khan as the Patriarch or Name-of-the-Father. "Since the mother and the child are not conceptualised as two separate beings, their relationship is hardly possible. As a result, for Lacan, the child's maturation means self-defence" (Wierzchowska 6). Khan Zadeh rivals the father who, in his eyes, had access to the (m)Other and was or held the object of her 'desire.' As a result, he tries to substitute himself with what he assumes is the object of desire of a supernatural (m)other. In the last scene of the play, though "*Khan Zadeh is hanged from a black woven rope of women's hair*," it is "*in front of his father's chair*" (*Qorab Jendun* 61), which implies that no matter how hard he tried to escape/counter the Name-of-the-Father, he was still bound to his void. Khan Zadeh moves against the Lacanian transition; for instance, in the scene in which Khan Zadeh sits beside the apple trees waiting for sour oranges to grow on them:

> KHAN *whispering*. What do you want from the trees?! KHAN ZADEH. Sour oranges! KHAN. It would be a miracle to see some decent apples on them, let alone sour oranges! KHAN ZADEH. Maybe they'll bear sour oranges! KHAN. They won't ... They will never! KHAN ZADEH. What if they did?

> KHAN. Even if they do … what's it to you? KHAN ZADEH. Sour oranges are the fruits of the Djinn! KHAN. *Snorts* Says Who? KHAN ZADEH. Mah Baji! KHAN. She was an old hag! Screw her and her bloodline! Son! Grow up! There are no Djinn! No fairies! These are stories of old bum women! KHAN ZADEH. It's in the books too! KHAN. Which they wrote! (36-37)

Khan Zadeh's fixation on the supernatural contradicts his complete transition to the Symbolic order; his expectation from the apple trees to yield sour oranges implies that the lack could not be completely established in his unconscious; his liminal status with strong semiotic predilections could easily undermine the functionality of the Symbolic order. In other words, his transition to the Symbolic order is recurrently plagued by his bounce-backs to the Imaginary, which results in a delusional connection with his (m)other, "[t]his phantasmatic fixation on irretrievable ideals produces a state of permanent melancholia," that leads to his psychosis (Wierzchowska 6). Interestingly, Marlene does not have the binding patriarchal sympathy of the Khan for the subjects below herself; she "hate[s] the working class" and believes "it doesn't exist anymore, it means lazy and stupid" (*Churchill Plays* 164). In his *The Theatre of Caryl Churchill*, Darren Gobert argues that Marlene distinguishes herself from the masses by exploiting women and standing on her backs, "she uses not only her sister, who provides unpaid childrearing, but also the typists, clerks, and secretaries whose own typically female and non-unionized labor she sells to corporate clients" (6); however, unlike Khan Zadeh, she does not defy patriarchy head-on; she successfully takes up the traits that the patriarchy ascribes to men and harvests the achievements and trophies as the new woman; she reclaims her daughter and assumes the parental role that the patriarchy prescribes to women. In this regard, throughout and after the transition, no part in Marlene's psyche has interfered with the establishment of the lack, or filling the void with symbolic reality. She has just played it differently by her positioning toward gender signification to realize her desire within the framework of Patriarchy.

According to Lacan, desire is intertwined with lack. It is always the desire for something that is not yet in possession and thus involves a constant act of seeking the missing object. The rupture between the subject and the Other opens a gap between the child and the (m)other's desire which initiates its movement, and the emergence of *objet a*. The *objet a*, thus, becomes the void, the gap, and whatever that is temporarily filling the gap in the Symbolic reality (Homer 87-88). In accordance with the subject's futile attempt to articulate desire, Lacan mentions: "That which is thus given to the Other to fill, and which is strictly that which it does not have, since it, too, lacks being, is what is called love, but it is also hate and ignorance" (*Écrits* 263). In other words, *objet a* escapes symbolization and moves beyond representation. Lacan believed that the subject's "impossible" relation to the *objet a* is defined by "fantasy." In this regard, the subject employs fantasy to maintain an illusion of unity with the Other (Homer 83).

Unlike Marlene, who kept herself within the boundaries of patriarchy and, hence, sanity, *Qorab Jendun*'s Khan Zadeh breaks free from the Symbolic order and the Name-of-the-Father and goes back to Semiosis, all of which, ends disastrously in psychosis and destruction. The real problem is that he is now equipped with the Symbolic realm's desire, void, *Objet a*, as well as fantasy whose

functionalities are not defined in Semiosis. Khan Zadeh desires his absent mother and is constantly seeking her through symbolization. In a balanced psyche, this leads to desiring life, though incomplete but still alluring enough; however, in Khan Zadeh's psyche, since those functionalities are inversed, this has led to obsession over death. His infatuation with the supernatural and fairy tales as well as his insistence on the apple trees bearing sour oranges, shows his dislocation and fantasy in a lifelong illusion of unity with the (m)Other. In contrast to Marlene, who even though abandons her child, she desires a series of *Objet a* manifestations in the Symbolic order, whose possibility of realization is permitted by the Symbolic codes of patriarchy.

If we assume that the return to the mother is a return to the Semiotic, then in *Top Girls*, Churchill prescribes a return hybridized by having an established and appropriated status in the Symbolic realm. In this sense, Marlene's effort to take Angie back can be translated as a fight to take back what she assumed was robbed from her while she was absent and away hunting down 'phallic' symbols, "I know a managing director who's got two children, she breastfeeds in the board room, she pays a hundred pounds a week on domestic help alone and she can afford that because she's an extremely high-powered lady earning a great deal of money" (*Churchill Play's* 158). Another instance of her fight happens in a heated argument with Joyce, her sister, "MARLENE. You wanted it you said you were glad, I remember the day, you said I'm glad you never got rid of it, I'll look after it, you said that down by the river. So what are you saying, sunshine, you don't want her ... Because I'll take her, / wake her up and pack now" (159). She hated being Angie's "Aunty Marlene" and wanted to be her (m)Other. At first, Marlene wanted to unconsciously play it by default and become the mother that the Name-of-the-Father outlines; However, Churchill wants to imply that this cannot be granted to a modern and socially powerful woman. Close to the end, Marlene realizes that in order to stay away from the sense of loss, and to stay close to her biological daughter, as well as to stay sane, she has to take up what is available within the framework of patriarchy, which is joining a duo of motherhood along with her sister and even playing the father-figure in this binary, though biologically a woman.

Unlike Marlene, who is a charted rebel and progresses to realize her desire by observing the Symbolic codes, Khan Zadeh is an impractical anarchist who wants to break free and have a full-blown return to what he thinks he has lost. In other words, he desires to live in Semiosis, although, subjectivity-wise and temporally speaking, he is supposed to be in the Symbolic realm. The discrepancy is pushing him further and further on the verge of psychosis: he is obsessed with different narratives about his mother being a Djinn, and he identifies himself as a Djinn-spawn, "Khan baba it's me, the Djinn-spawn" (*Qorab Jendun* 47). He questions/blames his father for the absence/death of the mother (37-38).

Khan Zadeh's sense of belonging to the Djinn is manifest in things that he is attracted to, such as apple trees bearing sour oranges; beastial ravaging of the animal bodies, "bring me their guts to eat" (42); his passionate tracking of hoof prints, "Look! ... It's my mother's footprint" (52); and his assumption of the Djinn's lodging which was the wet underground below the pond, which he gets from Mah Baji's narrative, "The Djinn looked him in the eyes and said ... 'If you ever wished to see

me, come to the pond in the middle of the garden. Open the hatch and you'll see a 19-step ladder" (13). His strange and encryptive language falls within the lines of the Lacanian idea of "displacement," which "can always occur under certain conditions." Building on animals' "instinctual cycles," Lacan notes that those "displacements" can take place "within a specific behavioral cycle" (*On the Names-of-the-Father* 11). He then connects the elements of displaced instinctual behaviors displayed in animals with symbolic behavior (12). For Lacan, the Imaginary happens when there is a rupture in the dialogical relationship which then is employed by neurotic behaviors to profit from the "instinctual economy" (13). The same displacement, which is the mainspring of sexually related behaviors, can be observed in images that have fascinated and are voiced by Khan Zadeh. The technique seems to be right, but because Khan Zadeh's psyche has incorporated it to temporally regress – from the Symbolic paradigm, in which regression is impossible – he ends up neurotic. This is comparable to the course that Marlene's psyche has taken: it has not denied the progressive nature of this paradigm and does not want something that is considered an impossibility; she just heartily wants to be forgiven and be beside her daughter. She is also realistically ready to pay the price of her choices by being degraded to the "aunt" status.

3.2 Neurosis vs Sanity

For Lacan, the Symbolic that is involved in psychoanalytic exchange is defined in accordance with "symbols organized in language and which thus function on the basis of the link between the signifier and the signified, which is equivalent to the very structure of language" (16). There are, however, signifiers that are chosen thoroughly independent of their signification. Lacan exemplifies this notion with "passwords" and "words of endearment." In both, "language is particularly devoid of signification" (19). In this regard, what distinguishes symbols from signs is the interhuman function of symbols. Lacan connects this notion to neuroticism:

> In the end, the notion we have of the neurotic is that gagged speech lives in his very symptoms, speech in which a certain number, let us say, of transgressions with respect to a certain order are expressed, which, by themselves, loudly fustigate the cruel world in which they have been inscribed. Failing to realize the order of symbols in a living fashion, the subject realizes disorganized images for which these transgressions are substitutes. This is what will initially get in the way of any true symbolic relationship. (21)

In the same line, as *Top Girls* proceeds to its last scenes, the only way for the reconciliation of the sisters is through undermining all the facts and history behind them by resorting to drinking; in the same vein, Marlene's favorite nickname for Angie is "pet," which is the same nickname that Joyce has been using. On top of all these, her final acceptance of her label as "Aunty Marlene" implies her successful (albeit disorganized) realization of her 'desire' as part of the maternal theme and not as the (m)Other. This is in contrast with Khan Zadeh's state of being which uses one-on-one and non-arbitrary signification. As Khan Zadeh grows up, his Semiotically-charged statements escalate: "Khan Baba! It's me Djinn-Spawn! What happened Khan Baba? … why didn't you die!? … Let me tell you a story," his

incoherent language shows a pressured psyche, mostly formed by what "Mah Baji used to say ..." throughout the critical developmental stages of Khan Zadeh's subjectification (*Qorab Jendun* 47).

Mah Baji functions as a 'mirror' for Khan Zadeh who, as a child, lies on her lap and listens to her stories. Khan Zadeh sees himself both in the eyes of Mah Baji and in her narrative. As Lacan notes, the mirror stage is not exclusive just to the semiosis and sometimes recurs in the symbolic realm too (Homer 24-29). In other words, Mah Baji could see herself, with the help of Khan Zadeh's eyes as a mirror, as a sort of (m)other. The bond is so strong that Khan Zadeh still neurotically feels her presence up until the end of the play (*Qorab Jendun* 52).

In this regard, Khan Zadeh's seeing himself in the mirror of Mah Baji who, "*might have seen some strange things and keeps a closed book of them and her memories*" (*Qorab Jendun* 14), leads to his regressive desiring and neurosis and destruction. This is comparable to Marlene, who tries to see herself in the mirror of her sister Joyce, who aggressively bombards her subjectivity as a mother, "JOYCE. It's not my fault you don't know what she's like. You never come and see her ... [you] went away, not me. I'm right here where I was" (*Churchill Plays* 147-148), Joyce indeed leaves a fragmented remnant out of it; Paradoxically, this comes to help, and apparently Churchill is implying that it is the natural consequence that the modern superwoman should live with. In the end, Marlene owns her label of "Aunty[/Anti] Marlene" and goes against her own grain (as Nijo had done when she became a wandering nun), submits to the Name-of-the-Father (as the subservient and obsequious Griselda had done), and conforms to the roles prescribed to her (as Joan did to become the Pope), but contrary to them, Marlene dynamically shuffles between exploiting and accepting the available positionings in the Symbolic and patriarchal realms. Because of this, Churchill seemingly implies that Marlene is the legacy-bearer and a better version of those women before her.

Marlene is in a much better situation compared to Khan Zadeh, whose development of desire is manipulated and deformed by Mah Baji; her desires are realistic and feasible, and though she has performed badly as a mother, there is still a chance for her to get back to her daughter. As a modern woman, she takes up the route to financial independence and social status; a path to self-esteemed individuality of being a Top Girl as opposed to being a self-effaced conventional mother.

In *Top Girls*, Marlene describes her idealization of the future woman, "First woman prime minister ... You must admit. Certainly gets my vote ...I believe in the individual. Look at me" (*Churchill Plays* 163). She implicitly explains why she rearranged her life to focus on her career; she is actually justifying and championing her upward mobility within the social ladder: "I hate the working class ... it means lazy and stupid. I don't like the way they talk ... and I will not be pulled down to their level" (164). Churchill seemingly implies that the modern woman should prioritize self-esteem by aspiring to have worldly gains and securing a sociopolitical status; It is only after the realization of the former two that Churchill brings about family and familial concerns. To bring them down, in the hierarchy of values, is the price that the modern woman has to pay, even if it entails shouldering some guilt.

Lacan argues that "any analyzable relationship – that is, any relationship that is Symbolically

interpretable – is always inscribed in a three-term relationship" (*On the Names-of-the-Father* 27). This mediator sustains the subject and the object at a certain distance. The reason behind people's preference for guilt over anxiety, according to Lacan, is rooted in the same notion. He argues that "between the imaginary relation and the symbolic relation lies the entire distance attributable to guilt" (28). He notes that since anxiety is linked to loss, "an image of mastery by means of which the subject's desire and fulfillment can be symbolically realized. At this moment, another register manifests itself which is either that of the law or that of guilt, depending on the register in which it is experienced" (29). What Lacan means is that if you function in the Imaginary realm, everything produces anxiety; In the Symbolic, which is bereft of anxiety, there are two registers: either you rethink your choices which produce "guilt," or – best case scenario – "law." Although the presence of the guilt-law dichotomy is inevitable, the predominance of the law is conducive to a peaceful and solid psyche.

In *Top Girls*, at first, Marlene revolves around the guilt-law dichotomy and, in some sense, adjusts the law with the patriarchal codes to progressively mobilize and stabilize her whole self within the patriarchy. As we get close to the end of the play, she strips herself of the dichotomy and unconsciously succumbs to the Imaginary to reunite with her daughter. In contrast, Khan, as a subjectivity who is established in the symbolic realm, has a strong orientation toward the law. Under his rule, there is prosperity and peace, and he reconciles the conflicts of the villagers to maintain this order (*Qorab Jendun* 18). As we proceed in the play, thanks to Khan Zadeh's Imaginary-driven poundings, Khan's guilt gets bolder and bolder, which leads to his deterioration and demise in the face of Khan Zadeh's dark Imaginary force.

Khan Zadeh's desire toward the Djinn is due to "anxiety," which according to Lacan, "is an affect of the subject" and "is not without an object … *Objet a* is what fell away from the subject when anxious. It is the same object that I depicted as the cause of desire" (*On the Names-of-the-Father* 57-58). In other words, Khan Zadeh's void incites desire. He tries to satisfy the void and is finally reunited with his object of desire, but, as we know, this is an impossibility, and this reunion results in his death: "*Khan Zadeh hanged himself in front of his father's chair from the ceiling of the balcony. He is slowly moving from side to side with an open mouth and bulging eyes. The black rope resembles the hair of the Djinn*" (*Qorab Jendun* 61). Also, Lacan argues that desire "is the most intense thing the subject attains at the level of consciousness [which] confirms once again desire's dependence on the Other's desire" (*On the Names-of-the-Father* 59); Marlene wanted to be an object of desire both as a successful businesswoman and a mother. The former, she accomplishes by exploiting the patriarchal codes, "[she] stands not on women's shoulders but on their backs" (Gobert 6), but in order to achieve the latter, she has to be humbled to accept the compromised form of the conventional mother. In other words, Marlene desires her daughter, Angie desires to be desired by her (m)other, and Khan Zadeh desires to prove that he is part Djinn. Desire, as well as all those stages, should necessarily happen within a timed framework.

Temporality is very paradigmatic for the analysis of the Imaginary and Symbolic. Lacan argues that one must only analyze the Imaginary and the Symbolic in light of temporality, the "temporal

constitution of human action is inseparable from that of the relationship between the symbolic and the imaginary" (*On the Names-of-the-Father* 30). Even in the Imaginary, as long as the presence is concrete, the absence would be justifiable; to put it simply, the child is not bothered by the mother's absence because s/he clings to something that is associated with the mother. In the Symbolic, on the other hand, temporality has a strong presence, and the absences are metaphorically answered by the symbols. Lacan notes that "the symbol of the object is precisely the object that is here" (31), which, often, from a Freudian "fixation," is more desirable than the original. In other words, the Symbolic state is metaphoric as opposed to the Semiotic state, which is metonymic. The reason behind the vociferous articulation of water, trees, dirt, soil, wetness, fruits, and the whole folkloric background is because Khan Zadeh is mentally living in the Semiotic state, though, temporally speaking, he is supposed to be in the Symbolic one; Churchill, however, shows women thriving in different areas, such as being a businesswoman, or having socio-political status, both of which are replete with code-based lawful success and very small amount of "guilt," all of which are conducive to living in a very healthy Symbolic state.

For Lacan, the Other's voice is an essential object. He emphasizes the importance of analyzing the formation of the superego in accordance with *objet a*, "[e]very analyst is required to give it its due and to follow up on its varied incarnations, both in the field of psychosis and ... in the formation of the superego" (*On the Names-of-the-Father* 71). In other words, for Lacan, the superego is a 'law-driven' force that invites the subject to preserve the totality of the symbolic state. In her businesswoman persona, Marlene can easily be framed in this definition of a 'law-abiding' and superegoic subjectivity. Lacan believes the sequencing that *objet a* demands and brings about is responsible for the formation of the superego, which we can also observe in Marlene; her excessive desire for success in the business world has redefined her standards, one of which is a person with etiquette, who "spent a lot" (*Churchill's Plays* 153), so all her mental and actual signifiers symbolized that desire and repositioned her accordingly; that being said, after Angie's visit, Marlene is tempted to reclaim her motherhood, which is denying the consequences of temporality. Interestingly, in order to make a comeback she employs a metaphoric gesture of giving presents, which belongs to the Symbolic realm, but since it is fueled by her anxiety of either being there or not as Angie's mother, the act of gifting is 'guilt-driven,' intense, and lopsided: "MARLENE. Just a few little things ... birthdays and Christmas seems to slip by. So I think I owe Angie a few presents" (145). This internal conflict or dynamic is absent in Khan Zadeh, and "fantasy" in him is literally a reality; he Semiotically identifies with his supernatural (m)Other, framed into Mah Baji's discourse. In his atemporal state, he lays hold of his childhood memory of Mah Baji and denies her absence/death:

> KHAN ZADEH. Have you ever laid your head on her lap?! RAQIB. No, Khan! KHAN ZADEH. You should! It's so soft ... she tells the best stories! but don't tell her! ... she's old ... she'll get sad. RAQIB. Tell her what? KHAN ZADEH. Last night I dreamt of her ... she was sitting by the pond. I went and laid my head on her lap. It was as hard as wood ... she stroked my hair and her hands were just as hard ... like thorns! ... from the desert! ... I wanted to get up, but she didn't let me ... I pushed

> and broke her leg! … her bone came out … it was sharp! … It cut me, right here! *He reveals a nasty wound just around his shoulder*. (*Qorab Jendun* 52)

Khan Zadeh's semi-acceptance of Mah Baji's demise is paving the way for his transition. Since Khan Zadeh is mostly in the Semiotic world, he can now easily discard the entity that he associated with the mother, and in his mind reunite with the (m)Other.

3.3 Allahyari vs Churchill: Psycho-historical Contextualization

Under the cover of the abovementioned plays, a variety of strains can be observed which will put these two works in either a continuum or conflict. Historically speaking, *Qorab Jendun* can be situated, more or less, within the time period or the aftermath of the White Revolution, or so-called "The Shah and People Revolution", which was a catch-phrase for a series of radical reforms, including land reform, to modernize the nation (*Iran: A Modern History* 584-585). It led, among other things, to the "redistribution of wealth to Iran's working class" (590). The end result, according to William Branigin's article, titled "Farmers Dislike Shah's Land Reform," was not very promising:

> Mismanagement and corruption resulted in waste of many funds designated for agricultural development. Even though reforms turned many peasants into landowners, it imposed on them taxes and other costs … that they were not burdened with when they worked for landowners, while also eliminating services such as health and education that were provided for them by landlords under the traditional system. An influx of agricultural imports from the US also reduced the farmers' market share. (*Washington Post*)

According to Homer, any totalitarian or authoritarian system requires the active support and participation of the masses to continually exist. One might wonder why any population would participate in perpetuating an oppressive system. The answer to this question becomes evident through the Name-of-the-Father and what Lacan calls the "superegoic imperative to enjoy" (Homer 62). The leader/father figure, representing the authority, implicitly summons the subject to identify with it. At the same time, the subject identifies with that cruel manifestation/assumption of what Freud, in his *Totem and Taboo*, calls "the father of the primal horde" (208). Here, Lacan argues that if there is no access to enjoyment and pleasure, the subject assumes that someone has usurped its position and robbed him/her of that enjoyment. This class conflict and strong desire for upward mobilization can also be observed in Churchill's play which can be framed, according to "BBC - History: British History Timeline," into the Thacherite period, whose namesake, "promise that the Conservatives would cut income tax, reduce public expenditure, make it easier for people to buy their own homes and curb the power of the unions" (BBC). In contrast to Allahyari's elegiac tone for a bygone era enclosed by irreconcilable conflict against the patriarch and patriarchy, Churchill presents a challenging future that can be worked out if women of different mentalities and generations be humble enough to unite in the absence of or against patriarchy.

At the family-structure level, these two works can be seen as the proponents of patriarchy and

matriarchy. On one side, *Qorab Jendun* celebrates order, discipline, and productivity under the aegis of patriarchy and the patriarch (Khan). The subversion of the patriarch, naturally enough for the author, would lead to death, chaos, and darkness. Churchill, on the other hand, is endorsing/prescribing the bold participation of women to gain higher status in society. In an interview, Churchill remarks:

> What I was intending to do was make it first look as though it was celebrating the achievements of women, and then ask what kind of achievement is that? The idea was that it would start out looking like a feminist play and turn into a socialist one, as well. (qtd. in Betsko and Koenig 62)

The consequences and ramifications of this decision for the family structure can be atoned for by tapping into the Semiotic state. Interestingly, according to Allahyari, the presence of the same Semiotic state in the Symbolic realm in *Qorab Jednun* disintegrates not only the structure of the family but the whole society.

Speaking of the family structure, motherhood and womanity are at the center of both works. In *Qorab Jendun*, the mother figure, along with all the women, is socially, as well as identity-wise, almost completely static. This is in contrast with *Top Girls,* which promotes the dynamic lifestyle of most of its female characters that can socially mobilize them to the upper stratum and give them the capability to redefine themselves in society and reposition themselves toward motherhood.

If we put Marlene in the continuum of all the female apparitions before her – her vindictive actions after her symbolically taking the torch from all those suffered and tortured women before her, her shame and embarrassment as a mother, and her final absolution and acceptance – embody a long journey of maturation that she takes to unite with her daughter. What happens in *Qorab Jendun* is the polar opposite of this; the implicit summoning of Khan Zadeh by the Djinn, who are in the same league as his mother, is eery and one-dimensional, contributes to the downfall of the whole family, not to speak of the whole social structure of that place.

Because of the deep ambiguity in *Qorab Jendun*, it is really hard to say if the Djinn are just a figment of Khan Zadeh's imagination or a reality. There is a strong sense of ambivalence in the author's positioning toward the whole incident. The fact that Allahyari has an elegiac tone can also be undermined by enough – or lack of enough – evidence to claim that it is just an impersonal report of the situation of the country at that time. In this respect, the whole play adopts a descriptive approach with perhaps implicitly stating this: Long years of women's subjugation have made the female spirit of this land speechless and angry, which, in turn, has turned into a collectivity of monsters bereft of dialogic capability and with only one goal in mind: Destruction; The rift is so deep between patriarchy and its female subjects that there is no chance for negotiation or even reconciliation. In this sense, it can be claimed that *Qorab Jendun* can be placed in a continuum along with *Top Girls*. We can take Churchill's apparitions as the so-called descendants of Allahyari's Djinn; they are now more playful and dialogical, and even more prepared to tackle with – and at times exploit – the patriarchal system. In fact, Churchill's heroine in this play, and her other mouthpieces in other plays, echo "a socialist and feminist critique of the injustices and inequalities produced by

late twentieth-century [W]estern capitalism and patriarchy" (Aston 18). The very family structure that was disintegrated because of the patriarch's overarching power and the feminine aggression in Allahyari, is now resuscitated and revived in Churchill's play by empowering women in the social realm and redefining the concept of motherhood within the family.

The idea of family is indeed bold in Allahyari and Churchill, but their idea of a good or functional family is expressed differently in each. Apart from the abovementioned analysis, the best form of family, for Allahyari, is a benign (though despotic) patriarch, and after his demise, the whole structure crumbles into pieces. This may have some relation to Allahyari as an individual who has seen the degeneration of the alternative family structures, after replacing the classic patriarch-centered one, and its long-lasting consequences during his life, which is concurrent with the drastic change in the large socio-political scene of the country, thanks to the White Revolution that happened nearly two decades before him. The ramifications of implementing this program and the domino-like changes that it brought were so compelling and ingrained that they gave Allahyari the impression that it was irreversible, and that going back to the previous status quo could only happen in a nostalgic fantasy.

On the other hand, Churchill lived through the Second World War and the economic resilience programs of her government. She has also been caught among the feminist waves of the time, all of which had the promise of seizing the power from the belligerent patriarchy and bestowing it upon a sort of matriarchal system. Her play does not have any important male characters, and most of its dynamics are formed by or around females. The narrative has gone so far in this respect that even the family, which we see in the end, is all-female. This over-emphasis on excluding the males – and patriarchy in general – does not seem to be practical, at least in the present world, and females would not apparently have a splendid lifestyle if they were obliged with all the responsibilities of the patriarch; these are the words of one of the aspiring women, who lived in the 1990s several years after the staging of *Top Girls* with its clear-cut prescription for women to attain glory outdoors and love indoors:

> I particularly remember the car advertisements from the early 1990s because I had just had my own first child, and could not (in spite of myself) resist the fantasy of the executive-looking-mother-in-suit, strapping a placid, smiling baby into car seat. My own stressful reality was of early morning drives (6 a.m. starts) to child-minders (the most affordable form of child care) with a not always smiling baby, and on to work, with the minimal amount of attention to my own personal appearance. The glamorous image bore little relation to a stressful reality. (Aston 25)

Unlike the fantasy-like and nostalgic vibe of the bygone glorious patriarchal era that Allahyari's work sends, Churchill chooses to empower women of the present generation which would, in turn, pave the way for the upcoming female generation. Just like manifestos which aim at raising the consciousness of the subjects to transform their socio-political life, Churchill's work endeavors to give a blueprint of what it will be like to be at the "top;" however, as I have tried to demonstrate,

since the psychological system and interpersonal relations are based on a series of fixities, even if the gender layout changes from male to female, the "desire" to get a hold on "phallus" is just the same (Homer 98-106). Functionally speaking, the end result is still a patriarchy in Lacan's terminology, though outside this framework it may be labeled otherwise.

Indeed, if we frame Allahyari's work as a whole into the Lacanian "fantasy" (Evans 60-62), we could take it as one of those flash-like Semiotic interventions in the Symbolic life of the author as an adult whose unconscious has accepted the transition, which gives the work a Semiotic overtone that is usually identified with the feminine realm (*Écrits* 1-7). This is in line with the haphazard temporality of the narrative as well as its unknown time period, the illogical moves of Khan Zadeh and the bold non-verbal, though Real-spawned, presence of the Djinn, and the blurred line between reality and imagination are features of the Semiotic realm, all of which are ascribed to the Semiotic realm.

Paradoxically, for a radical female author, Churchill's work as a whole can be taken as a Symbolic venture in the footsteps of the patriarch. The structure of the play is replete with features of the Symbolic realm: the strongly verbal, modest, and polite presence of the apparitions, and their nonchalant symbiosis with alive humans as well as their engagement in a comprehensible (for humans) dialogue, clear time-specifications of the play, neatly sequenced scenes, and, last but not least, totally describable and explainable past of each character.

This brings us back to the Lacanian conceptualization of "sexual difference" (Evans 181-183). For better or worse, Lacan identified power with the patriarch and "phallus," but he did not believe that it must exclusively be embodied in males or masculine mentality (Homer 98-103). The phallic pendulum can swing toward females if they "desire" it more than males (103); however, it seems that Churchill is endorsing a bifurcated lifestyle, in which the new woman is a patriarch in socio-political interactions and networks and semi-absent in the family structure; back in the new household that is created because of the new woman's active participation in the social sphere, she has to reactivate the Semiosis, in which though there is not any clear phallegocentric explanation or answers for actions and emotions, they are just there vehemently and progressively. Maybe that is why the question of motherhood does not need to be solved, and Angie's fear is not taken care of. That being said, it is not clear yet if they will be better patriarchs than males, or if they are more capable of handling its power along with its corollaries and consequences, or if it is viable to turn the flash-like presence of Semiosis in adulthood into full presence within the family as a mature psyche and a balanced subjectivity. Maybe that is why at the end of Churchill's play, the adult sisters are either numb or reserved about what is to come, and Angie, as the representative of the generation to come, is frightened (*Churchill Plays* 166).

4. Conclusion

In contrast to Allahyari's elegiac tone for a bygone era enclosed by irreconcilable conflict against the patriarch and patriarchy, Churchill presents a challenging future that can be worked out if women of different mentalities and generations be humble enough to unite in the absence of or against patriarchy. At the family-structure level, these two works can be seen as the proponents of patriarchy

and matriarchy. On one side, *Qorab Jendun* celebrates order, discipline, and productivity under the aegis of patriarchy and the patriarch (Khan), the subversion of whom would lead to death, chaos, and darkness. Churchill, on the other hand, is endorsing/prescribing the bold participation of women to gain higher status – business and political wise – in society. The consequences and ramifications of this decision for the family structure might be eliminated by retapping into and repositioning towards the Semiotic state.

Allahyari and Churchill's plays can be juxtaposed in a continuum too. In this respect, Allahyari's play adopts a descriptive approach with an implication: Long years of women's subjugation have made the female spirit of this land speechless and angry, which, in turn, has turned into a collectivity of monsters bereft of dialogic capability and with only one goal in mind: Destruction. The rift is so deep between patriarchy and its female subjects that there is no chance for negotiation or even reconciliation. *Qorab Jendun* can be placed in a continuum along with *Top Girls*. In this line, we can take Churchill's apparitions as the so-called descendants of Allahyari's Djinn; they are now more playful and dialogical, and even more prepared to tackle with – and at times exploit – the patriarchal system. The very family structure that was disintegrated because of the patriarch's overarching power and the feminine aggression in Allahyari, is now resuscitated and revived in Churchill's play by empowering women in the social realm and redefining the concept of motherhood within the family. The best form of family, for Allahyari, seems to be a benign (though despotic) patriarch, and after his demise, the whole structure crumbles into pieces. Unlike the fantasy-like and nostalgic vibe of the bygone glorious patriarchal era that Allahyari's work sends, Churchill chooses to empower women of the present generation against patriarchy or even in the mold of alternative forms of the patriarchy itself, which, would in turn, pave the way for the upcoming female generations.

Endnotes

1. The author has undertaken all *Qorab Jendun* translations.

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