

THE THEME OF MEMORY IN CARYL CHURCHILL'S "FAR AWAY" AND "ESCAPED ALONE"

Belgin BAĞIRLAR

Dr. Öğr. Üyesi, Adnan Menderes Üniversitesi, bagirlar.belgin(at)adu.edu.tr

ABSTRACT

Keywords:
Churchill, Far
Away, Escaped
Alone, Postmodern
Theater, Memory

From the 1990s onwards in particular, much significance has been given to theatre that is themed around the dual relationship between the mind and exposing the hidden memory, or re-animating what has been erased from memory. The aim of this paper is to uncover and defend the existence and future existence of a dystopic world in terms of how the mind relates it with reality in two post-modern plays, *Escaped Alone* (2016) and *Far Away* (2000), by one of British theatre's most prominent of playwrights Caryl Churchill. Churchill, who is familiar negative direction that the world within which she lives is going, makes mention of a world that is leaning towards an unpredictable chaos by putting violence, death, and political events at the forefront. Within the frame of Jeanette Malkin's Memory-Theatre theory, the notion of the hidden memory emerges as Churchill uses the art of over-representation. In *Far Away*, how memory is changed and re-created as well when and how it affects the persona is emphasized through the use of three characters. *Escaped Alone*, which is about four women in their 70s who are reminiscing while gathered around in a backyard, the concept of time mangled into a state of complexity, bits and pieces of memories merge together, and global mayhem is projected before people's eyes. Savagery and barbarianism are at the helm of each of these two plays. Churchill paints the future with a bleak sense of hopelessness and leaves her works open-ended.

CHURCHILL'IN FAR AWAY VE ESCAPED ALONE OYUNLARINDAKİ HAFIZA TEMASI

ÖZ

Anahtar Kelimeler:
Churchill, Far
Away, Escaped
Alone, Postmodern
Theater, Hafıza

Gizli kalan belleği açığa çıkarmak ve ya hafızadan silinmiş olanı tekrar canlandırmak adına birbirinin içine geçmiş olan tiyatro ve bellek ikilisinin ilişkisine özellikle 1990'lardan sonra daha çok önem veril-meye başlanmıştır. Bu makalenin amacı, İngiliz tiyatrosuna damgasını vurmuş oyun yazarlarından biri olan Caryl Churchill 'in *Escaped Alone* (2016) ve *Far Away* (2000) isimli postmodern oyunlarında, belleği nasıl gerçek ile ilişkilendirilerek disütopik bir dünyanın var olduğunu ve var olacağını savundu-ğunu ortaya koymaktır. Yaşadığı dönemde dünyanın kötü gidişatına tanık olmuş olan Churchill, eserlerinde şiddet, ölüm ve siyasal gelişmeleri ön plana çıkararak, sonunu tahmin edemediği bir kaosa doğru sürüklenen dünyadan bahseder. Jeanette Malkin'in Memory-Theater teorisi çerçevesinde incelenen eserlerinde Churchill gösterim sanatını kullanarak saklı kalmış belleği ortaya çıkarır. Sadece üç karakter kullanarak, *Far Away* oyununda belleğin nasıl değiştirilip tekrardan yaratıldığını ve zaman içinde bunun kimliği nasıl etkilediğini vurgular. En az 70 yaşlarında olan dört kadının arka-bahçede bir araya gelerek hatıralarını yad etmelerini konu alan *Escaped Alone* eserinde ise zaman kavramını karmakarışık bir hale getirerek, bölük pörçük anılar arasında sıkışıp kalmış, dünyadaki felaketleri gözler önüne serer. Vahşetin, barbarlığın ve felaketlerin ön plana çıktığı her iki eserinde de Churchill gelecek için umutsuzluğunu açıkça ortaya koymuş ve oyunlarını açık uçlu sonlandırmıştır.

INTRODUCTION

From the 1980s and onwards, we have encountered the snug relationship between theatre and memory in various forms that are mostly tied to a character's recollections. Henri-Louis Bergson, an influential figure in 20th century philosophy, had put forth that a meaningful link of sorts exists between the past and the future within human consciousness (1946: 28), claiming that "the future has an effect upon the present, that the present brings something into the past.." (1946: 118). He—in exposing the cultural function of memory—asserts that memory unites and melds the past with the future. However, according to Bergson, this does not mean that memory is the coming together of two mutually exclusive things. To the contrary, memory is a concrete expression of the weaving together of the places, locations, and events that exist in our minds. Jan Assman views the mind as being "a faculty that enables us to form an awareness of selfhood both on the personal and collective level" (2008: 109). Assman discusses 'personal' and 'collective' memory as being interdependent, as well as talks about collective conscious as being made up of the conscious minds of individuals. Thus, what emerges is the memories of individuals influencing and being influenced by the memories of other individuals. What this in essence means is that an individual's memory is in dialogue with the reflected recollections of others as opposed to just what (s) he has experienced or the things that are familiar to her/him within her/his mind. This also shows as that the link between memory and society is therefore strong. Upon further examining the theme of memory, one of the reasons that I choose Churchill was because I feel that she is among one of the best postmodern playwrights. Furthermore, in both of her plays, *Far Away* and *Escaped Alone*, she hangs the realities of the world within which we are living

out into the open, and in doing so utilizes the dynamics of memory such as forgetting and remembering.

Since the Middle Ages, the 'art of memory' has served as a broad and fruitful means of understanding different eras. Our memory ties our experiences to the dynamics of time and place, considering that without one, the other cannot exist. Thus, memories are as unique as the individual experiencing them. In order to re-enact and translate moments from within the mind, specific settings are chosen, and specific materials are used. Cicero puts forth the existence of a strong link between art and memory by explicitly stating that:

Those who would like to employ this part of their abilities should choose localities, then form mental images of the things they wanted to store in their memory, and place these in the localities. In this way, the order of the localities would preserve the order of the things, while the images would present the things themselves (2001: 219).

The artist uses cultural and societal memory as well as different registers of language in order to reflect societal development into his/her work. As theater (too) is an important part of art, it is impossible for theater not to become intertwined with memory. Collective memory according to Maurice Halbwachs—who had spent much of his career explaining and debating this notion—entails elements such as values, events, and people that are hidden or encoded within the mind in proportion to experiences as being one. However, collective memory is not individualistic, but rather it "requires the support of a group delimited in space and time" (Halbwachs, 1992: 23). Alan Confino, both in supporting Halbwachs as well as in defining the mind as being "the ways in which people construct a sense of the past" (McCullough&Wilson,2015:12), defends that that the mind is liable to change over time and even according to a person's individual sense of perception. In fact, Halbwachs and Confino prove correct upon considering that no two people even

comprehend or interpret the same event written in the same daily newspaper in an identical fashion.

The acts of remembering and forgetting are more or less essential to the most important two components of collective memory. Assman backs this by stating that “The dynamics of individual memory consists in a perpetual interaction between remembering and forgetting. On order to remember somethings, other things must be forgotten” (2008:97). He, in viewing the act of forgetting has being a natural game within the mind of the individual, emphasises that forgetting is inescapable in order for the mind to develop. Events that are either willingly or unwillingly recalled upon being discerned are known as the act of “remembering”. Conversely, according to Halbwach’s what is being remembered is never verbatim the same as how they actually were, because “past is not preserved but is reconstructed on the basis of the present” (1992:40). For this reason, the sociological and political context of the particular period in time, alongside both the particular role of the individual as well as situation at hand also need to be considered and subject to examination when one probes collective memory. Jeanette Malkin, in explaining that the interrelationship between theatre and memory are undeniable, “Memory theater, like postmodern thought, contains the marks and traces of cultural discourses and historical remains” (1999:8). In this context, memory theatre is analogous to a reflection of both culture and history. Nevertheless, Malkin feels that it is more difficult to examine the relationship between postmodern theatre and memory than it is to study the relationship between modern or classical theatrical works and memory. In her eyes, “evaluation is problematized by the lack of didacticism, or fixed perspective and determinate meaning available through such shapings” (1999:13). In simpler terms, what distinguishes postmodern

from modern theatre is the matter of limits, insofar that no clear line is drawn in postmodern theatre when it comes to the message being given.

Even though Ruby Cohn and Stephen Watt had both made mention of the changes that were taking place in post-1950s British theatre, the two had talked more about the redundancy of the concept of “postmodern drama” to the point that they had even rejected it all together. Despite this Malkin, alongside Nick Kayne and number of other theorists as well as critics had now started to defend the features of modern theatre such as an organized sequence of events, unity of theme, and the concept of linear time as now no longer existing all the while being hesitant of directly using the term postmodern drama. According to Malkin, one of the most important features of the postmodern drama is its being polyphonic and decentring. In a play, characters who are recalling the past carry on through random monologues that are void of particular sequence. That is, as opposed to modernism, postmodernism does not bring hidden memory into the open through a set sequence of events. In Malkin’s own words:

Where once memory called up coherent, progressing narratives of experienced life, or at least unlocked the significance of hidden memory for the progressions of the present, this kind of enlightenment organization has broken down in postmodernism and given way to the nonnarrative reproduction of conflated, disrupted, repetitive, and moreover collectively retained and articulated fragments. This shift in the workings of memory is reflected in plays shaped through fragment, recurrence, and imagistic tumult (1999: 4).

Thus, the play becomes decentred through repetitions of words and/or sentences, fragmented dialogues, and spaces or voids between monologues. Moreover, no clear sense of progression exists in postmodern theatre. It also keeps a distance from the sequence of introductions, bodies, and conclusions. In turn, one is able to suddenly flash back the past upon talking about the future. Malkin labels this as being progress, and carries the view that “ The virtues of progress and goal-ori-

ented history-compromised beyond repair by this century's ideological excesses—are rejected in post-modernism and replaced by concept stressing synchronicity, the simultaneous, repetitive, plural and interactive" (1999:10). Therefore, in postmodern drama the order becomes destabilized both by re-treating to the past and by talking about fragments of that past. Hence the memory of both the past as well as the present is formed right from the very start. The concepts of remembering and forgetting within memory theatre are important within postmodernism according to Malkin, postulating that 'postmodernism is crucially bound up with agendas of remembrance and forgetting, serving, at least in part, to re-call the past from repression or from its canonized 'shape' in order to renegotiate the traumas, oppressions and exclusions of the past' (1999:1). Malkin openly puts forth the relationship between postmodern theatre and memory in her emphasising of the significance of forgetting and remembering there within. She thinks that the past ought to be an act of remembrance considering that it is the reason behind trauma and depression, as well as feels that those who try to forget the past should be brought into the light. Caryl Churchill herself disturbs the order by recalling the past in her two plays *Far Away* and *Escaped Alone*. Moreover, she exhibits the past before her audiences' eyes in viewing the past as the basis for the future.

Churchill, who in continuously centring her plays around various themes and is known for her unconventional use of language, has been praised by many a writer, critic, and theorist such as Alex Sierz, Siân Adieshiah, and Alastair Macaulay, among others. Praising her originality, Macaulay labels Churchill as "a visionary, a poet, an absurdist, a politician, a satirist" (Luckhurst, 2015:13). In her each play, Churchill confronts her audiences with her different policy. Supporting Macaulay,

Adieshiah mentions "Churchill's works offers a complex theatrical mix of tensions between the individual and the collective, private and public spheres, and emotional, philosophical, psychoanalytical and political conceptual frames" (Adieshiah, 2009:105). Adieshiah, in claiming that Churchill's plays lend themselves to interpretation from any number of angles, also argues that Churchill is a writer who has always been open to innovation by avoiding traditional form, taking different approaches when it comes to conveying her message(s), and through her inclusion of 'dance and song' (Adieshiah, 1999:105). According to Churchill,

we need to find new questions, which may help us answer the old ones or make them unimportant, and this means new subjects and new form... The imagination needn't have the same limits as factual knowledge; we may make cautious philosophical and scientific statements, but we do not have to feel, visualise and imagine cautiously. (1960: 449)

In light of this, Churchill feels that it is necessary for the chaotic complexity of the world to be probed and to be questioned rather than to be explained, and that in order to accomplish this she talks about her seeing it necessary to prefer being novel as she thus has done. In her play *Top Girls* (1982), she had brought together guests from different historical periods. In *Love and Information* (2012), she has embraced modernist approach; whilst in *Lives of the Great Poisoners* (1993) and *Turkish Delight* (1974) she had woven in the combination of music and dance. Moreover, in *Far Away* (2000) and *Escaped Alone* (2016), she had mixed and matched opposing places and times; whereas in *Cloud Nine* (1979), she had completely uprooted the concept of time between acts. Consequently, she has succeeded being avant-garde—be it in terms of theme or of form.

British politics had shifted from left to right following Tony Blair's taking the seat as head of the Worker's Party, as well as his becoming Prime Minister of the United Kingdom in 1997. This massive

rightwards swing had caused a dry spell within the arts in Britain. Churchill, who was affected by this change, had only written two small plays: *Blue Heart* (1997) and *This is a Chair* (1999). Gobert, in mentioning Churchill's halt, had also talked about her stupendous return to the stage later on: "Churchill's search for a different mode of political engagement ultimately engendered an invigorated theatrical form fitted to twenty-first-century concerns. And a new chapter in Churchill's stagecraft was inaugurated with *Far Away*, premiered at the Royal Court's Theatre Upstairs on 24 November 2000" (2014: 31). He, in praising Churchill's remarkable comeback through *Far Away* also points out her innovativeness in terms of how her choice of theme is suitable for 21st century. Simon Stephen, a playwright, describes the play as "the strongest theatrical response to 9/11"; however, Churchill had written the play prior to the September 11 attacks. Elin Diamond claims that *Far Away* consists of "a war of all against all with no sign of resistance or memory of an ethical alternative" (Aston & Diamond, 2009: 139). Through this lens, *Far Away* has become a reaction to the politics of the day in its own right. Malkin underlines the strength of the link between memory and theatre by saying that "Until the collapse of a rural peasant culture during the nineteenth century, and the ensuing 'acceleration of history', memory and history had been experienced as coeval" (1999:24). Churchill, who is well aware of this link reflects the theme of war, terror, and violence in her play. Even though the 1980s was rather calm and pleasant in terms of world peace, from the 1990s onwards, we began to observe the breakout of many a war, violence, and chaos. "This decade witnessed the Sierra Leone civil war (1990-2002) and the first Gulf War (1991), swiftly followed by the Bosnian War (1993-5), the Chechen war (1994-6) and the Kosovan intervention in 1999—all interspersed with repeated

coalition bombings of Baghdad" (Malkin, 1999:110). Churchill had successfully and predictively reflected the spreading of war and chaos on a global scale following the 9/11 events in making room for the horrors of conflict in *Far Away*.

FAR AWAY

Far Away (2000) is made up of three acts—each of which comprised of dialogues that take place behind closed doors. The dialogues occur between a girl by the name of Joan, her friend Todd, and her aunt Harper. In Stephen Daldry's version of the play directed in 2000, one sees Harper right at the beginning of the play mumbling Andrew Young's hymn "There is a happy land, far far away", and thus the audience encounters the title of Churchill's work in a deeply meaningful manner.

In the first act, Joan, who lives with her aunt, voices that she is unable to sleep. Her aunt Harper, senses that the reason for Joan's inability to sleep is not innocent, that night Joan hears some bizarre noise and sneaks out of the window in the middle of the night. She sees her uncle who assaults a group of people with a metal baton shed in the yard. She asks questions her aunt to understand the logic of her uncle's terror. On the other hand, Harper explains the events to Joan in a strewn manner in order for the horror of them not to get etched into young Joan's mind.

Joan: He was pushing someone. He was bundling someone into a shed.

Harper: He must have been putting a big sack in the shed. He works too late.

Joan: I'm not sure if it was a woman. It could have been a young man.

Harper: Well I have to tell you, when you've been married as long as I have. There are things people get up to, it's natural, it's nothing bad, that's just friends of your uncle was having a little party with. (2006:7)

Joan always believes her aunt's white lies, however when she tells her aunt about the children that

she saw out back as well as blood that was on the ground, her aunt approaches the situation was though Joan has discovered something that is very secret. "Harper: You have found out something secret. You know that don't you?" (2006:8). Harper manages to convince Joan the people that she saw were caught in a difficult sense of circumstances, and that her uncle was merely trying to rescue them from their woes. After Joan accepts her aunt's explanation:

Harper: But now you understand, it's not so bad. You're part of a big movement now to make things better. You can be proud of that. You can look at the stars and think here we are in our little bit of space, and I'm on the side of the people who are putting things right, and your soul will expand right into the sky. (2006:9).

Harper thus in making Joan believe this story in fact makes her a piece of this violence, and moreover in normalizing the torture in Joan's mind also completely changes the cause of the events. Joan with changed memories gives up questioning cruelty and accepts it. At the same time, Churchill also forces her audience to come to terms with violence and torture through the past.

In the six-section second act, Joan matures and emerges as a young woman who earns her bread and butter as a hat maker. Churchill shows us how incredibly easy it is to manipulate Joan's mind. Joan, who is considered to be the best in her field, feels ready to resign from the job at which she is tremendously successful at under the influence of her co-worker Todd's words "You'll find there's a lot wrong with this place" (2006:10), as well as because of the unfolding friendship-relationship between the two. Throughout the second act, it becomes apparent that the incredibly large and flamboyant hats that the two make are for criminals who are either sitting in prison and/or who are awaiting a death sentence, as well as that criminals are burned whilst wearing those hats. At the beginning of the play, Churchill in saying that "The

Parade (Scene 2.5): five is too few and twenty better than ten. A hundred?" (2006:1) suggests that the number of those who are to be executed in those ostentatious hats is extraordinarily high. In Daldry's version of the place, the audience encounters a crowded collective of women, men, and children in groups of three, four, and five who are unable to properly walk due to the chains wrapped around their necks and feet. Churchill and Daldry, who both are of the opinion that the number of slaves is excessive, draw attention to the fact of how traumatically large the event in fact is. However dramatic the march of the slaves towards their deaths is, the absurd hats that they are wearing creates the entirely opposite effect. Joan, in response to the double standard that Churchill has created, draws a line in the sand when she receives an award for one of her hats with the statement: "It seems so sad to burn them with the bodies" (2006:12). For Joan and Todd, the art of their hats is more important than those slaves who are heading towards their deaths, and in fact view what the reality as being rather natural. One of Joan's hats earns her an award. "Joan Sometimes I think it's a pity that more aren't kept. / Todd Exactly and then we'd be out of work." (2006: 13)

When Joan questions why they did not set more the hats aside, Todd to her horror replies by saying that if they were to take the hats home that they could consequently lose their jobs. Here in fact exists sort of a natural cycle whereby the two are struggling to stay alive and keep afoot, much akin to those who are about to die. Both Joan and Todd know very well that "There's other parades" (2006:13), and that they will continue to do the same things until "the parades are corrupt" (2006:13). Churchill provides yet another reason why Joan accepts the horror of this situation as being normal. Joan—whose memory is under the direct influence

of her aunt Harper—had learned and come to understand as a little girl that the subjection of criminals to violence is nothing out of the ordinary.

The final act, similar to the first act, takes place a few years later at Harper's home. This time around, the dialogue is between Todd, Harper, and Joan—who joins in a little later on. Even though their chit chat about things such as killing wasps and torturing butterflies may catch the audience off guard at first, it later becomes apparent that all life on Earth is caught in the midst of war. "The global war that Todd and Joan are stuck within, as well as the growing violence that unfolds during their visit with Harper. All flora, fauna, and human beings are at battle with one another." Todd and Harper are of the opinion that wasps, deer, and crocodiles need to die given the fact that they savagely attack and torture other animals. However, even though they find themselves caught in strife both in the same house as well on the same world, they are unable to discern who is on which side of the fence, and consequently are suspicious of one another. "Harper: You agree with me about the crocodiles? / Todd: What's the matter? You don't know whose side I'm on? / I don't know what you think." (2006:15).

Even though the world that Churchill has conjured up is one that insists that Harper's home is safe and that the characters all hail from the same family, neither Todd nor Harper believe one another. Todd, in order to prove that he is no different from Harper, describes the blood curdling things that he has done in a disturbing manner. "Todd: I've shot cattle and children in Ethiopia. I've gassed mixed troops of Spanish, computer programmers and dogs. I've torn starlings apart with my bare hands. And I liked doing it with my bare hands. So don't suggest I'm not reliable." (2006:17).

However, even Todd's crime and barbarity

against nature and humanity is not enough to gain Harper's trust. Churchill's world is so fiercely dark that not only is everyone and everything at war with one another, people moreover are unable to trust one another. Harper is not at peace with Joan's arrival, and asks that she and Todd leave the house or else the situation could get ugly for herself. Finally, Joan enters into a rather long dialogue in which she unbelievably brutal aspects of the trauma through which she has lived.

Joan ...In fact I killed two cats and a child under five so it wasn't that different from a mission, and I don't see why I can't have one day and then go back, I'll go on to the end after this...the weather her's on the side of the Japanese... The rats are bleeding out of their mouths and ears... there were piles of bodies and if you stopped to find out there was one killed by coffee or one killed by pins, they were killed by heroin, petrol, chainsaws... (2006:18)

Both Joan and Todd adapt to violent world as well as they do not feel any remorse because of their murders. According to Nalbantion "Childhood memories... offer evidence of longer-term memory." (2003:3). In this sense, the reason of their dark sides is their childhood memories which are full of violence. Joan is uncertain as to whether or not she should 'cross the river', stating that "When you've just stepped in you can't tell what's going to happen" (2006:18). In essence, that sense of uncertainty as well as lack of trust is not only against mankind, but it is also against nature. Here, the river symbolizes the 'bubble' as it were within a happier and more secure Earth had once existed that she herself had once experienced. However, as Churchill had clarified at the very onset of the play, all things that are beautiful are now more distant from happiness, content, and peace than ever. "In the first two decades of the twenty-first century the world has seen numerous attacks targeting civilians in major urban centres. Non-terrorism-related acts of sociopathy perpetrating violence have also continued, increasing in impact." (Angelaki,2017: 6). Churchill, in line with what Angelaki's statement, portrays a very dark face of the future that

draws upon the rise in terror and violence of the period within which the play was written, and by using memories from her own past.

Where memory theatre lays out the traumatic mind for all to see, it also becomes the reason behind why people of all ages recall the memories of others. According to Malkin, "The political effect of postmodern (memoried) art depends crucially on its interaction with the (memoried) audience for whom it is meant at a given time" (1999:214). In *Far Away*, the character of Joan appeals to a middle-aged audience who is wanting to learn the truth behind the events that have unfolded around her. Moreover, the fact that her mind has been censored by her aunt also appeals to parents who wish to or have tried to protect their children from violence. In addition, no one memory is experienced the same way by different people either emotionally or momentarily speaking. Churchill thus effectively reflects the influence of people's memories into her play for the very reason that she appeals to different age groups.

ESCAPED ALONE

Churchill's *Escaped Alone* had caused quite stir within the world of theatre when it aired on stage in 2016 at the Royal Court Theatre. Artistic director Vicky Featherstone's response to the play was that "it is deeply domestic yet within that the form is one of the most challenging things you will ever read" (The Guardian, 2016). Susannah Clap, on the other hand, had responded with more feminist stance, commenting that "Caryl Churchill's magnificent new play unleashes an intricate, elliptical, acutely female view of the apocalypse" (The Guardian, 2015). Churchill shows us a negativity-filled netherworld by drawing from her sense of political memory. In terms of linguistics, even though the language used in the play is fluent and

conforms within a modernist framework, Churchill does not allow her characters to speak in a coherent sense of order. The character's utter short random sentences or word clusters, whilst the direction of the conversation changes according to their spontaneity. Only one of the characters, Mrs J(arret), enters into long monologs in which she rambles on about frightening events involving the rotting away of human bodies, drowning, chemicals, hunger, illness, and fire.

Churchill gives no importance to punctuation in her script. James Macdonald, who was the plays director, notes that Churchill places more emphasis on the main themes of her play than she does on the use of punctuation, claiming that "Pinter did the same thing. So did Beckett. What interests them is the shape of an idea, so the gesture is more interesting than filling in the detail" (Independent, 2016). In this regard, Churchill's avoidance of commas and periods both in *Escaped Alone* as well as in *Far Away* point to one feature of postmodern theatre. As Macdonald had previously mentioned, Churchill's lack of punctuation alongside her characters' haphazard utterance of sentences about their lives without rhyme or reason, at the same time draws more attention to Mrs. Jarret's rather winded speeches.

In the play there are four characters in their seventies by the names of Sally, Vi, Lena, and Mrs Jarret (Mrs. J). The piece is comprised of eight acts, within which the four ladies get together one summer evening in Sally's back yard and both chit-chat about their mundane lives as well as reminisce about the past. In the first act, as Mrs. J is coming down the street, the other three women cross through the gate of the back yard. Sally talks about having to pick a lock because she forgot her granddaughter Rosie's keys; whilst Mrs. J chats away about how her son Frank is suffering from insom-

nia. The conversation then shifts again to Sally going on about giving a pink hat to someone who she thinks was named Angela but cannot completely remember, and that she bought herself a green hat that does not quite suit her. However, towards the end of the act, Mrs. J slips into a soliloquy about how the world came crashing to a dramatic end, about violence, and about how a new species of being had emerged. "Mrs. J: Four hundred thousand tons of rock paid for by senior executives split off the hillside to smash through the roofs, each fragment onto the designated child's head... Time passed. Rats were eaten by those who still had digestive systems, and mushrooms were traded for urine..." (2016:8). Mrs. J, who in describing this hair-raising surreal barbarity talks in the past tense. According to Malkin, 'postmodern memory-theatre is often overburdened by disconnected stimuli: conflicting discourses, unexplained objects, intruding images, overlapping voices, styles that veer and shift in baffling and sudden ways' (1999:9). Here, Churchill shows us two starkly different but nevertheless worlds tangled within memory in simultaneously using both the past and present tenses. However, she also creates a sense of disconnection and disorder through the tool of memory by neither indicating *which* world is real and which is not, or *who* escaped alone (i.e. the title of the play). In the second act, the women discuss the shops and cafes from their glory days. Nevertheless, what they remember is shrouded in fog, and they wind up completing one another's thoughts. Vi's being unable to remember an antiques shop by the name of *Blue Antelope*, alongside Mrs. J being unable to remember how long it was that Vi had been away fill in the memory gap between the two characters.

VI I: *did miss a few things when I was away*

MRS J: *away was you?*

LENA: *just a little while*

VI: *six years*

SALLY: *that's what it was then, Blue Antelope* (2016: 10)

As the play unfolds, not only do the characters complete one another's recollections and thoughts as they converse about their day-to-day lives, they also cut into one another mid-sentence. Thus, Churchill as pieced together a mosaic out of tiny fragments through unconventional language. Towards the end of the second act, Mrs. J talks at length about how people wasted water, and then about how Mother Nature fought back by wiping humanity of the face of planet through mass floods.

MRSJ: *First the baths overflowed as water was deliberately wasted in a campaign to punish the thirsty... then the walls of water came from the sea. Villages vanished and cities relocated to their rooftops...when the flood receded thousands stayed on the roofs fed by helicopter...* (2016:12)

Churchill shows us two different realms of existence. The first one is the world of four women who about their mundane lives and refresh their memories. The second one is a dissimilar world filled with drudgery and violence as depicted by Mrs. J. In the third act, the women recall the old soap operas that they used to watch. Moreover, towards the end of their conversation Vi and Sally become angry at one another due to their mutual suspicion. This time Mrs. J's end of act monologue describes a world how the birth rate keeps falling due to the long-term effects that various chemical substances have had on human health, as well within which both deformed children are born, and where people are forced to wander the streets in gas masks.

Malkin notes that 'memory theater, like postmodern thought, contains the marks and traces of cultural discourses and historical remains' (1999:8), implying that memory theatre treads in the footsteps of both culture and history. Malkin moreover supports Churchill's use of jokes in the fourth act of the play. Churchill's political memory is thrown into the woman through the actors ridiculing for-

mer American president George Bush's countless blunders, as well as their making fun of Americans' 'being stupid' (2016:19).

VI: three Brazilians dead and President Bush said Oh no, remind me how many is a brazilian

SALLY: he's taken the place of moron

LENA: moron? (2016:18)

American society in general was not particularly satisfied with George W. Bush Jr.'s 2001 – 2009 leadership, and consequently had endured a rather difficult period in history. Countless American comedians had taken turns satirically roasting their President in order to express their dissatisfaction. "An aide to the prime minister of Canada called President Bush a moron. Well that's not fair. Here's a guy who never worked a day in his life, got rich off his dad's money, lost the popular vote and ended up president. That's not a moron, that's genius!" (Cavandish: 2008). Churchill both translates her own political memory for us as well as refreshes the collective memory of her audience through the medium of humor in her play. At the same time, she expresses the political climate of that particular period through Sally and Vi.

SALLY: you always get people hating their neighbours

VI: yes the closer they are

SALLY: Serbs and Croats, French and English (2016:19)

In fact, not only does Churchill remind her audience of the worldwide hate and sense of enmity felt towards the Bush Administration, she also sheds light upon the overall political climate within Europe at the time as well. As the play continues, Churchill dips into religious memory by talking about the biblical story of Cain and Abel, recalling that was the historical starting point of hu-

man slaughter. It is at this point in the play that we learn about Vi's 'accidentally' (2016:20) stabbing her husband to death and her entering prison for it. Malkin challenges that 'flashbacks, evocations, aspirations, and nostalgic monologues bring the past into the present, as the characters willingly or unwillingly remember the days...' (1999: 125). In the play as well, Churchill frames the murder first through a political lens and then through a theological lens, which in turn becomes the reason behind Vi's confessing that she stabbed her husband, as well as the reason behind why she recalls something that she would rather forget. In the fifth act, the women start off by going on about flying and dream of becoming invisible, and then begin to talk out of the blue about animals. Sally conveys a dimension of fear towards the audience by discussing how she has spent her life being afraid of cats. Later on, Lena announces that she would like to become an eagle, however Sally and Vi counter her by citing that there is an eagle on the American flag, and by insisting that Americans are fascist. The act yet again closes off with Mrs. J describing how the wind had annihilated human beings and animals alike. In the sixth act, Churchill yet gain embraces an avant-garde approach and this time incorporates music. The four women mumble the lyrics, and Mrs. J describes in a rather petrifying tone of voice how illness had consumed and finished off the world. During the seventh act, the women reminisce about their glory days and past recollections. On one end, Sally brings up how she missed working, as well as mentions missing the apples and snacks that ate during her term in prison. On the other end, Lena recalls her own state of depression, and how she both hated work as well as felt lonely. The act is wrapped up with Mrs. J describing how fire had consumed what was left of the world to ashes. In the final act Vi, who is ornithobic, reveals yet again that she has lived through some kind of

trauma. “VI: I can’t love a kitchen, I can’t love a kitchen any more, if you’ve killed someone in a kitchen you’re not going to love that kitchen...” (2016:40).

Vi, who upon killing her human, moves out of her own home however never once cooks again. She was unable to confess what happened to her at the time 12-year-old child—who winds up being forced to raise himself while she is behind bars. Mrs. J suddenly bursts out in rage, crying out “terrible rage terrible rage...” (2016:42). Nevertheless, no one in the circle takes any notice towards her rant about the perishing of animal and mankind alike, and carry on with their discussion, mentioning how happy they are to be together at that moment. The women—with the exception of Mrs. J—are rather content as they recall their days of yore. The play finishes with Mrs. J uttering a mere: “And then I said thanks for the tea and I went home” (2016:42). It is unclear as to where Mrs. J went, or what the three remaining women did thereafter. Churchill closed *Escaped Alone* by leaving it hanging in suspense, just as she had done in *Far Away*. In doing so, Churchill wants her audience to interpret and draw their own conclusion rather than providing them with a didactic warning.

We also encounter Churchill’s fascination with memory as well as her usage of past events and people in two of her previous works, *Top Girls* (1982) and *Cloud Nine*. Despite the presence of this theme in her earlier works, we see that it is more dominant in *Far Away* and *Escaped Alone*. In the latter two plays, Churchill lays two polar opposite worlds before her audiences. In *Far Away*, the world that Joan learns through her aunt, versus the war and violence-filled world within which she lives are as opposite from one another as day and night. The world within Joan’s memories is safer and more pleasant, which is why she wants to face

danger and cross through the river that lies within a world where even nature is at war. In Macdonald’s production *Escaped Alone*, both he and Churchill once again exhibit two contrasting worlds through the woman sitting together and chatting about their mundane lives in an emerald green garden, versus the gloomy violent world described by Mrs. J at the tail end of each conversation. This sense of oppositeness is perhaps why the women assemble together each afternoon and fervently reminisce in order to find tranquillity. No trace of dogma is to be found in either of the two plays; however, Churchill, in drawing upon memories of conflict and racism in order to evoke memories of the past, she at the same time reminds us that what is yet to come is just as bleak, if not worse.

Conclusion

According to Malkin ‘memory-theatre might be doubly defined as a theatre that imitates conflicted and sometimes repressed or erased memories of a shared past; and as a theatre that initiates processes of remembrance through practices of repetition, conflation, regression, through recurrent scenes, involuntary voice, echoing, overlap, and simultaneity’ (1999:8). In *Escaped Alone*, each of the women share a common past and, even if what they remember is at times foggy, the remaining characters fill in one another’s gaps. Sally’s forgetting about giving her pink at to a lady named Angela versus Lena and Vi’s being able to recall that incident, Vi’s repetition of the sentence “I can’t love that kitchen” (2016:40) immediately after remembering more than once that she stabbed and killed her husband, and Mrs. J’s carrying on throughout the play about the black world in which she recalls living through and/or from which she escaped alone, as well as her stuttering of the two words “terrible rage” (2016:42) are all examples embodying this filling in of blanks. In *Far Away*, Churchill follows somewhat

of a different path in putting forth the memories of two youth. In the second act, Todd and Joan also talk about the past, but instead resort to silence rather than repetition, and their dialogues are thus both award and nerve-wracking. Their talking about violence—which is part of their conscious—is bewildering in the least. Where Todd boasts about having “shot cattle and children in Ethiopia” (2006:16) and gassed mixed troops of Spanish, computer programmers and dogs” (2006:18), whilst Joan admits to having “killed two cats and a child under five”, neither of the two seem to display any sense of guilt or remorse. To the contrary, Todd indicates that he finds murder to be pleasurable, whereas Joan argues that it is a duty of sorts.

The human mind encodes memories by associating what it wants to remember with a particular place and time. Both in *Far Away* and in *Escaped Alone* the concepts of place and time as one has been completely shattered. In the beginning of *Far Away*, Joan in living with her aunt is away from her own family, and at the end of the play both she as well as Todd are thrown out of the house by that same aunt. Neither Joan nor Todd, who are both void of any sense of belonging, do not take a stand against the situation within which they find themselves because neither of two know anything else. In fact, the two respond better to the dark world through bloodshed. In *Escaped Alone*, Churchill throws the concept of time completely out the window, and is ambiguous about when the events that Mrs. J describes take place. In terms of location, a backyard is used symbolically within which the women meet in every afternoon in order to jog their memories.

Finally, one can say that every topic that is dealt with within a work of literature is very much tied to the society within which the writers as well as to contemporary tools of communication. Churchill, who is influenced the political atmosphere

surrounding her had weaved threads of political memory into both of her plays. In *Far Away*, she projects her own sense of political memory in talking about former American president George Bush. She integrates Bush’s infamous speech bloopers, which have been cited countless by the media and comedians. This is also evidence of how political memory has been reflected throughout the play. There is no such thing as, nor will there ever be a utopic world in Churchill’s view. Both her memories, as well as her experiences, give one the sense that the future will be dark and chaotic. In this sense, Churchill manifests her somber outlook in both of her works. People and nature are both at war as well as are obliterated in each work. Carl Marx paraphrases this conflict as mankind being alienated both from nature as well as from human nature. *Far Away* cites the ferocity of crocodiles, the river as being a transit point for mankind, Todd’s slaughter of cattle, and deer leaving humans with nothing to eat. Mother Nature—of which mankind was once were a part of—is now unreliable, and whether or not they are in harmony with nature now not even worth asking. In *Escaped Alone*, Churchill, who cites Sally’s loathing of animals, how “pets rained from the sky” (2016:28) in a world that is standing on its last legs, and who contradictingly exalts how her female characters—like telephones—are nothing more capitalist toys, in essence refers to how people have become alienated from both nature as well as from themselves; in turn reflecting her own negative political memories onto the stage with both incredible mastery and grace.

REFERENCES

Adiseshiah, Sian. Churchill’s Socialism: political resistance in the plays of Caryl Churchill. Cambridge Scholars, 2009.

Angelaki, Vicky. Social and Political Theatre

re in 21st Century Britain. New York: Bloomsbury, 2017.

Assmann, Aleida. *Cultural Memory Studies*, ed. By Astril Erll and Ansgar Nunning. New York: Walter de Gruyter, 97-108, 2008.

Assman, Jan. *Communicative and Cultural Memory*. An International and Interdisciplinary Handbook. Eds. Astrid Erll, Ansgar Nunning, and Sara B. Yound. Berlin, New York: Walter de Gruyter GmbH & Co, 109-19, 2008.

Bergson, Henri. *The Creative Mind*. Trans. Mabelle L. Andison, Philosophical Library New York, 1946.

Cavendish, Dominic. Culture Comedy: George W. Bush Gods gift to Comedy. The Telegraph, 12:01AM GMT 02 Feb 2008.

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/comedy/3670910/George-W-Bush-Gods-gift-to-comedy.html>

Cicero, Marcus.T. Cicero: On the Ideal Orator, Trans. James M. May and Jakob Wisse. Oxford Publishing, 2001.

Churchill, Caryl. Note Ordinary, Not Safe: A Direction for Drama?. *Twentieth Century*, 443-451, 1960.

Churchill, Caryl. *Far Away*. Nick Hern Books, 2000.

Churchill, Caryl. *Escaped Alone*. Royal Court Theatre Presents, 2016.

Clapp, Susannah. *Escaped Alone* review-small talk and everyday terror from Caryl Churchill. The Guardian, 2016.

<https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2016/jan/31/escaped-alone-caryl-churchill-re>

view-royal-court

Featherstone, Vicky. Royal Court's 60th year kicks off with Caryl Churchill play with older women. The Guardian, 2015.

<https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2015/act/12/caryl-churchill-play-mature-women-kicks-off-royal-courts-60th-year>

Gobert, R. Darren. *The Theatre of Caryl Churchill*. Bloomsbury Publishing, 2014.

Halbwachs Maurice. *On the Collective Memory*, trans. Levis A. Coser. The University of Chicago Press, 1992.

Luckhurst, Mary. *Caryl Churchill: Routledge Modern and Contemporary Dramatists*. New York: Routledge, 2015.

MacDonald, James. *James Macdonald on Caryl Churchill's 'Escaped Alone': 'I'm drawn to plays I don't know how to do*. Independent, 18 January 2016.

www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/theatre-dance/features/james-macdonald-on-caryl-churchills-escaped-alone-im-drawn-to-plays-i-dont-know-how-to-do-a6819916.html

Malkin, Jeanette. R. *Memory-theater and postmodern drama*. University of Michigan Press, 1999.

McCullough C. & Wilson N. (2015). *Violence, Memory, and History: Western Perceptions of Kristallnacht*. Routledge, New York.