



Faculty of Education
Department of English.

***A Feminist Ethical Approach to the Plays of
Ann Jellicoe and Caryl Churchill***

A Thesis

Submitted in Fulfillment of the Requirements of the Degree of
Ph.D. in Teacher Preparation (English Literature)

Submitted by

Mai Mohamed Ali Abouzaid

Under the supervision of

Prof. Mona Abousenna

Professor of English Literature
Department of English
Faculty of Education
Ain Shams University

2016

Table of Contents

	Pages
<i>English Abstract</i>	2-4
<i>Acknowledgement</i>	5-6
<i>Preface</i>	7-10
<u>Chapter One</u>	
<i>"Autonomy" and the "Moral Subject" in Kantian and Feminist Ethics</i>	11-54
<u>Chapter Two</u>	
Tracing the <i>"Moral Subject"</i> in Ann Jellicoe's Women Characters	55-128
<u>Chapter Three</u>	
<i>Autonomous Heroines in Caryl Churchill's Plays</i>	129- 234
<i>Conclusion</i>	235- 241
<i>English Summary</i>	242- 249
<i>Bibliography</i>	250-255
<i>Arabic Abstract</i>	256- 258
<i>Arabic Summary</i>	259-263

Abstract



Faculty of Education
Department of English.

A Feminist Ethical Approach to the Plays of Ann Jellicoe and Caryl Churchill

Submitted by:

Mai Mohamed Ali Abouzaid

Abstract

This study tackles two major concepts. First, "***Autonomy***", which is a key concept in moral philosophy, developed by the German philosopher Immanuel Kant. '***Autonomy***' in Kant's philosophy is often used as the basis for determining moral responsibility for one's actions or it is the ability to impose objective moral law on oneself. Second, the "***Moral Subject***"-a term coined by Karen Green, in her book ***The Woman of Reason***. This term is Green's feminist re-working of Kant's concept of "***Moral Autonomy***". According to Green, the main issues around which feminist ethics revolve are the concepts of "***Autonomy***" and the "***Moral Subject***". The difference between both terms is that Kant's concept is purely intellectual based on his speculative philosophy and his universal approach, whereas feminist ethics, on the other hand, locates the female self within a specifically social-economic environment. Therefore, Green chooses to reconstruct Kantian ethics through a feminist approach of ethics that aims at establishing and consolidating women's individuality. Thus, the objective of this research is to investigate the major concepts of feminist ethics with particular emphasis on Karen Green's writings and applying them to contradict Kantian ethics.

This philosophical background will be used as a guideline to reading and analyzing the theoretical feminist writings of both Ann Jellicoe and Caryl Churchill and how they transformed these ideas into dramatic and

theatrical presentations. This study is divided into three chapters as follows: **Chapter One:** This chapter introduces the philosophical trend of feminist philosophy known as feminist ethics, pioneered by Karen Green, focusing on the concept of "moral subject" which she coined as a feminist ethical reworking of Kant's concept of "autonomy." The chapter includes other women philosophers who have contributed to the field of feminist ethics. **Chapter Two:** This chapter is an intensive analysis of the plays of Ann Jellicoe in light of her own personal assimilation of the concepts of feminist ethics which are then transformed into dramatic and theatrical representations which have made of her theatre a model of the feminist experimental political theatre. **Chapter Three:** This chapter tackles the dramatic and theatrical transformations of Caryl Churchill's feminist politics combined with the concepts of feminist ethics to create her socialist-feminist drama. **Conclusion:** The conclusion is an analysis of the conclusions reached in the three chapters with the end of formulating a synthesis between the concepts of feminist ethics and feminist drama, in general, and the plays of Ann Jellicoe and Caryl Churchill in particular.

Key words:

- 1- Ethics**
- 2- Autonomy**
- 3- Moral subject**
- 4- Patriarchy**
- 5- Oppression.**

Acknowledgment

Acknowledgment

I am greatly indebted to my supervisor ***Professor Mona Abousenna***, for her patient support, her advice and encouragement. I also owe a special tribute of sincere gratitude for her instructive criticisms without which this work could not have been submitted. She provided me with sources that would not have been otherwise available to me, In addition to her gifts to me over several years of scholarly life have been immeasurable. I consider myself fortunate that I have worked under her supervision. Special thanks for her sincere and kind assistance, for her endless support and her warm personal encouragement. She watched over my thesis at various stages and gave me many illuminating suggestions.

Preface

Preface

As long as the researcher will investigate the major concepts of feminist ethics with particular emphasis on ***Karen Green's*** writings and applying them to the plays of ***Jellicoe*** and ***Churchill***, the purpose of this study is to highlight the awareness of the two feminist dramatists of the principles and the ideas of feminist ethics at a very early stage of feminist drama, as a trial to prove that the ethical dimension is a basic component of their feminist drama that must be taken into consideration in any study of their plays. Therefore, the main focus of the plays under study is to raise women's consciousness of the nature of their oppression by highlighting the absolute necessity of women's moral responsibility towards their own liberation from oppression, this moral awareness that mainly starts on intellectual and psychological levels and extends to social and political actions.

Focusing on this theoretical background, the dramatic aspects of the plays of Jellicoe (1927) and Churchill (1938) will be studied and analyzed within an integrative approach which considers the dramatic structures of these plays as artistic objectifications of the theoretical issues of feminist ethics, particularly the concepts of *Moral Subject* and *Autonomy*. The emphasis will be laid on the dramatic presentation of women characters and their language as expressed in the dialogues, monologues and songs which represent the central line of the dramatic argument of the plays.

Both of our writers are devising new forms of unconventional techniques of writing; and this is highly apparent and manifested in portraying their autonomous heroines. Both writers are the forerunners of feminist drama and they are skillful in depicting their heroines' struggles to free themselves from conventional expectations about women's life and from the servitude imposed upon them by their own society, their femininity as well as their own free will.

Jellicoe for example is an experimental playwright who works in the "theatre of demonstration" where action is considered more important than words. Her visceral approach to drama emphasizes movement and sounds rather than language in its traditional communicative sense. She used many of her plays to further explore her innovative ideas on theatre, such as ***The Knack***, which is a whimsical comedy about sexual prowess and male rivalries. This play revolves around three intelligent young men who become ruled by their sexual feelings when an attractive young woman enters their lives. Also her play ***The Sport of My Mad Mother***,

which is a fantasy about teenage violence. This play centers on a group of teenagers given to outbursts of violent behavior, sparked interest because of its fragmented structure, and the extensive use of chants, drumbeats, and meaningless phrases. Jellicoe combines realism, mysticism, music, dance and ritual to create a powerful feminist myth about modern civilization.

The main element that makes Ann Jellicoe a forerunner of feminist writers is her treatment of the crucial problem of women's sexuality when it is threatened by the repercussions of a male-dominated authoritative society, such as rape, domestic violence, and ultimately war through destructive militarism. Jellicoe also does not free women from the responsibility of their own subordination to men. In this sense, she is very aware of the distinction between sex and gender, or the biological specification of women as a species and their gender roles which are socially determined by the patriarchal society. It is in the latter that Jellicoe lays the blame on women, namely in their complicity with authority by submitting to the inferior gender role imposed upon them, and their reluctance to rebel against it.

Churchill also is known for her use of non-naturalistic techniques and feminist themes, dramatization of the abuses of power and exploration of gender and sexuality. Her playwriting career and political outlook have consciously been shaped by a continuing commitment to feminism and to socialism. Churchill believes that socialism and feminism are not synonymous but as she explained in her writings that she feels strongly about both and wouldn't be concerned in a form of one that did not include the other. Thus, her drama re-iterates how meaningful change is impossible while women continue to oppress one another and while economic and political structures perpetuate patriarchy.

In this sense, Churchill wrote *Owners* about 'obsession with power', in which the blatant abuse of women in a male-dominated society had resulted in a continuous struggle by them for equal opportunities as they attempted to improve their positions in the society, *Cloud Nine*; which is 'a farce about sexual politics', *Vinegar Tom* in which a witch finder and his assistant hunt for witches. Every woman is a suspect and even normal activities will be looked on with suspicion and will be turned against them. The accused are a woman healer, a young woman who had an abortion and some who rejected the advances of a local farmer who then became impotent, and *Top Girls* which deals with women's losing their humanity in order to attain power, liberation from domesticity and child-bearing, and the chance for success in the male enclave. Churchill

also utilizes epic theatre as a means of giving voice to her feminist concerns as in **Mad Forest**, in which she politicizes her female characters by positioning them in the structures of power where the politics are primarily sexual.

The researcher adopts a feminist ethical approach based on the major concepts of feminist ethics with particular emphasis on *Karen Green's* writings which represent the foundations of feminist philosophical ethics and how they differ from the male traditional ethics that firstly appeared in the philosophy of *Immanuel Kant*. This philosophical background will be used as a guideline to reading and analyzing the theoretical feminist writings of both Ann Jellicoe and Caryl Churchill and how they transformed these ideas into dramatic and theatrical presentations. This approach unites philosophical concepts, particularly feminist ethics, with dramatic themes and techniques.

This study is divided into three chapters as follows: **Chapter One:** This chapter introduces the philosophical trend of feminist philosophy known as feminist ethics, pioneered by Karen Green, focusing on the concept of "moral subject" which she coined as a feminist ethical reworking of Kant's concept of "autonomy". The chapter includes other women philosophers who have contributed to the field of feminist ethics.

Chapter Two:

This chapter is an intensive analysis of the plays of Ann Jellicoe in light of her own personal assimilation of the concepts of feminist ethics which are then transformed into dramatic and theatrical representations which have made of her theatre a model of the feminist experimental political theatre.

Chapter Three:

This chapter tackles the dramatic and theatrical transformations of Caryl Churchill's feminist politics combined with the concepts of feminist ethics to create her socialist-feminist drama.

Conclusion:

The conclusion is an analysis of the conclusions reached in the three chapters with the end of formulating a synthesis between the concepts of feminist ethics and feminist drama, in general, and the plays of Ann Jellicoe and Caryl Churchill in particular.

Chapter One

Chapter One:

"Autonomy" and the "Moral Subject" in Kantian and Feminist Ethics

This chapter tackles two major concepts. First, "**Autonomy**", which is a key concept in moral philosophy, developed by the German philosopher Immanuel Kant. '**Autonomy**' in Kant's philosophy is often used as the basis for determining moral responsibility for one's actions or "it is the ability to impose objective moral law on oneself" (*Groundwork*, p.38). Second, the "**Moral Subject**"-a term coined by Karen Green, in her book *The Woman of Reason*. This term is Green's feminist re-working of Kant's concept of "**Moral Autonomy**". According to Green, the main issues around which feminist ethics revolves are the concepts of "**Autonomy**" and the "**Moral Subject**". The difference between both terms is that Kant's concept is purely intellectual based on his speculative philosophy and his universal approach, whereas feminist ethics, on the other hand, locates the female self within a specifically social-economic environment. Therefore, Green chooses to reconstruct Kantian ethics through a feminist approach of ethics that aims at establishing and consolidating women's individuality.

Ethics is defined in *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy* as, "the study of how things *ought to* happen in the world of human beings"(p.473). Also in her article '**Feminine and Feminist Ethics**', Rosemarie Tong writes, "Ethics or moral philosophy as it is sometimes called will be used to designate the systematic endeavor to understand moral concepts and justify moral principles and theories. It undertakes to analyze such concepts as right, wrong, permissible, ought, good and evil in their moral contexts"(p.15). In this sense, ethics seeks to establish principles of right behavior that may serve as action guides for individuals and groups. It investigates which values and virtues are paramount to the worthwhile life or to society.

Ethics or moral philosophy may also be divided on the basis of whether it is pure or empirical. In *The Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, Kant distinguishes two parts of moral philosophy: Kant states that, "**Pure philosophy**" deals "only with a priori concepts, concepts that occur to us independent of any experience or sensual perception"(p.217). By contrast, "**empirical philosophy**" "deals with the objects we experience in the world around us"(p.217). This means that, pure moral philosophy, is a metaphysics of morals, which relies on the a priori concepts of

reason, not on empirical observations, and this implies that moral obligation are binding not just for particular people in particular circumstances, but rather for all rational beings in all places at all times.

In this sense, Kant aims to establish the supreme principle of morality. The distinction that Kant draws in the preface of his book *The Critique of Pure Reason* between "pure" and "empirical" concepts is of critical importance to his philosophy. He states that "empirical philosophy is subjective or biased, while pure reason is only objective"(p.102). Kant affirms that one's philosophy must be objective to be moral. And also believes that a moral law must be essential for all people or in other words, "what is considered moral for one person is and must be considered moral for everybody else"(*Groundwork*, p.80).

Kant argued that many of "our basic ideas about the world, our notions of time, space and causation are a priori concepts; or concepts that occur to us before we have any experience of the world and they are hardwired into our brains rather than extrapolated from our experiences"(p.20). In the *Groundwork*, he offers some criticism of philosophers who have advanced different bases for morality. He argues that when we think about morality, we naturally presume that moral laws must apply to all people at all times. He bases this claim on the notion that moral actions are supposed to be undertaken for the sake of morality alone, we are supposed to have pure as opposed to self-interested motivation for moral actions. Yet as soon as particular circumstances enter the picture, it becomes impossible to think of motivations being entirely pure in any particular situation, human beings will have interests and concerns that form a component of motivation. In Kant's view, human nature should not be a consideration in moral thinking. Human nature is a particular circumstance that affects human beings.

The train of thought leads Kant to the conclusion that a secure understanding of morality must be based on the pure concepts of reason, if moral ideas were drawn from experience, then they could not be assured universal validity, for they would be based only on the limited set of events that we have experienced. "Moral ideas may be universally valid", Kant argues "only if they are based on the validity of a priori concepts"(p.315). Or in other words, "our moral thinking is not based on an understanding of nature or disposition, but rather on universally applicable concepts and the only concepts that we can apply in all circumstances are the concepts that occur to us a priori, independent of any particular experience or circumstance"(p.318).

In this sense, the ethics of Immanuel Kant is often contrasted with that of David Hume. Hume's moral philosophy or Hume's approach to ethics could be called naturalistic, empirical or experimental. In the second book of *The Treatise of Human Nature*, Hume seeks to displace a priori conceptions of human nature and morality with an approach according to which everything about us is open to empirical investigation and to explanation in naturalistic terms. While Kant emphasizes the necessity of grounding morality in a priori principles, Hume says that "reason" is properly a "slave to the passions"(p.213).

Kant has in mind a philosophy grounded exclusively on principles that are inherent in and revealed through the operations of reason. For Kant 'a moral action' is defined as "one that is determined by reason, not by our sensual impulses"(p.63). This sort of moral philosophy contrasts with Hume's empirical moral philosophy, which is grounded in a posteriori principles, "principles inferred through observation or experience" (*Treatise*, p.217). But Kant rejects and states that; "while empirical moral philosophy can tell us how people do act, it cannot tell us how they ought to act"(*Groundwork*, p.330). According to Kant, morality's commands are unconditional and autonomous. We could never discover a principle or a moral law that commands all rational beings with such absolute authority through a method of empirical moral philosophy.

Kant views that the will of a moral subject is autonomous or it is self-legislating in that it both gives itself the moral law and can constrain or motivate itself to follow the law. He also assures that the source of the moral law is not in the subject's feelings, natural impulses or inclinations, but in his/her pure rational and autonomous will. In *The Critique of Practical Reason*, Kant defines "autonomy" as "an action which is determined by the subject's own free will and the moral action is defined as being *autonomous*"(p.74), Kant says when "we will autonomously we must abstract from all objects of the will to this extent: that they have no influence at all on the will"(p.77). This seems to imply that a person wills autonomously only when he/she completely detaches him/herself from the influence of his/her own desires and emotions, as well as from all social and even casual influences.

Kant argues that 'autonomy' is demonstrated by a person who decides on a course of action out of respect for moral law, or an autonomous person acts morally only for the sake of doing good, independently of any other incentives. Kant famously begins the first section of the *Groundwork* by;