

Beyond the Patriarchy: Feminism and the Chaos of Creativity

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Sue Ellen Case has asked the question, "Is there a women's form—a feminine morphology?"¹ In examining Caryl Churchill's play, *The Skriker*, I propose to show how chaos theory can serve as a methodology for analyzing dramatic structure thereby facilitating the re-visioning of classic works, while also providing a critical model for new feminist plays. Annette Kolodny states, "The power relations inscribed in the form of conventions within our literary inheritance . . . reify the encodings of those same power relations in the culture at large."²

The application of chaos theory to drama provides a "new conceptual framework from which to view the continuing interaction between pre-modern and postmodern and popular and classic works."³ This approach supports divergence from (masculine) Aristotelian dramatic forms,⁴ in concert with the re-visioning of history from the feminine perspective.

When used to analyze feminist plays that on the surface seem disorderly and dysfunctional in form, chaos theory reveals underlying structures of integration and order—creating a representation of the feminine experience that is true to nature.⁵ Such an approach may help to bridge the gap, as Patricia Schroeder suggests, "between form and content, tradition and innovation, culture and the individual, rebellion and accommodation."⁶ Elin Diamond contends that for the feminist playwright,

mimesis denotes both the activity of representing and the result of it . . . , simultaneously the stake and the shifting sands: order and potential disorder, reason and madness. . . . On the one hand,

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it speaks to our desire for universality, coherence, unity, tradition, and on the other, it unravels that unity through improvisations, embodied rhythm, powerful instantiations of subjectivity, and what Plato most dreaded, impersonation, the latter involving outright mimicry. In imitating (upholding the truth value of) the model, the *mimos* becomes an other, is *being* an other, thus a shapeshifting Proteus, a panderer of reflections, a destroyer of [traditional, patriarchal] forms.⁷

In the fifth century BC, prior to Aristotle's organization of poetic structure, Plato, in the *Ion*, describes the source of the mimetic arts—inspiration—as a frenzied, chaotic process that disregards the intellect as well as the skillful mastery of an art form.⁸ In response to Plato, Aristotle, in the *The Poetics*, bases his theories of the poetic arts upon an orderly, mimetic nature formed in a closed system.⁹ Referring to the structural elements of plot, Aristotle states, “if any one of them is displaced or removed, the whole will be disjointed and disturbed. For a thing whose presence or absence makes no visible difference, is not an organic part of the whole.”¹⁰ Aristotle's tenets of narrative order were foundational to the rational acceptance of drama and its collaborative arts and propelled a linear theory of unity and aesthetics codifying “human experience and constructing nature through fixed operations and principles of regularity.”¹¹

Feminist theory contends that Aristotle's theories of *mimesis* have been promulgated primarily by men to narrate the story of the world according to men and for men.¹² As Joseph Campbell succinctly states, “Society is always patriarchal. Nature is always matrilineal.”¹³ However, feminist writers and critics reject strict adherence to classical Aristotelian linearity, asserting that because of its dominant use in Western thought to perpetuate the patriarchy,¹⁴ it cannot adequately express the feminine experience.¹⁵

In the twentieth century, classical notions of linear unity and universal aesthetics of truth and beauty have been severely challenged with the introduction of quantum physics, the theory of relativity, and chaos theory. These ideas “changed the way the universe is viewed by calling into question the essence of reality and the Newtonian basis of certainty.”¹⁶ Concurrent with this paradigm shift, the borders of containing patriarchal constructs of power were also being transgressed by the rising tides of feminist thought and practice—initiating a re-visioning of history.

Today, the trend towards chaos and relativity in dramatic practice is viewed as unnatural from the Aristotelian point of view, while quite the opposite is true, as Tom Mullin states: “Chaos has survived the fashionable phase, and perhaps one reason is that the natural world is inherently nonlinear.”¹⁷ The disintegration of the concepts of linear unity and universal aesthetics happened because the action of humanity does not occur, as Aristotle surmised, in a closed system. One action

or thought impinges on another, modifying it, changing it in a continuous flow of energy—what mathematicians refer to as dynamism. We do not live in a perfect, two-dimensional, Euclidian world, but a three (or four) dimensional world that is not static, but living, breathing, growing, changing: no one is an island, and nothing happens that does not affect something else. As contemporary historians revisit the past, what has previously been viewed as absolute, has appeared enigmatic because our “*relation to the real has changed.*”¹⁸ As Certeau contends,

... the situation of the historiographer makes study of the real appear in two quite different positions within the scientific process: the real insofar as it is the *known* (what the historian studies, understands, or ‘brings to life’ from a past society) and the real insofar as it is entangled within the scientific operations (the present society, to which the historians’ problematics, their procedures, modes of comprehension, and finally a practice of meaning are referable). On the one hand, the real is the result of analysis, while on the other, it is its postulate. Neither of these two forms of reality can be eliminated or reduced to the other. Historical science takes hold precisely in their relation to one another, and its proper objective is developing this relation into a discourse.¹⁹

In this view of history, past and present are held in tension, much like strange attractors in an unstable system that “show processes that are stable, confined, and yet never do the same thing twice. . . . they have patterned order and boundary.”²⁰ Such a view of history is dynamic, shattering a linear, view of the world, suggesting, as Rosemarie Bank postulates, that “historical time flows in many directions.”²¹

The atmosphere is an example of a dynamic system, “governed by physical laws, [that] is unstable with respect to perturbations of small amplitude” such as the flapping of a butterfly’s wings.²² This type of interaction in the atmosphere is known as the “butterfly effect,” discovered by Edward Lorenz: it illuminates change as it occurs in an unstable system that is sensitively dependent upon initial conditions—meaning that a “small anomaly in the system leads to major changes later.”²³ The idea that a small aberration can lead to complex and unpredictable changes in a natural, but unstable system shatters previous deterministic theories (such as that of Newton’s causal view of the universe or Aristotle’s linear conception of the order of the drama) which view the occurrence of natural actions as either “probable” or “necessary.”²⁴ If the atmosphere, as well as other natural systems, operates in this way, then Aristotle’s view of dramatic theory that is based on a fixed and closed view of nature is not applicable to art forms that incorporate

random, improbable, or seemingly unnecessary elements that are structured and/or interact in a non-linear fashion.

This literal dis-integration of Aristotle's concept of artistic unity does not negate creative order or integration, however, but merely changes the way in which it is perceived. "The mythic and historical as well as the new scientific meanings associated with the word 'chaos' allow it to serve as 'a cross-roads, a juncture', a matrix where various cultural associations interact and converge."²⁵ Caryl Churchill's plays embody such a matrix, or birthplace (in the literal sense of the word)²⁶ for the interaction, and sometimes disruption, of cultural/historical associations of dramatic constructs. In *The Skriker*, in particular, Churchill includes mythological, perhaps archetypal, characters who symbolically represent the cross-roads or juncture where quintessential paradigms converge or clash. The chaos that ensues from Churchill's systematic portrayal of matriarchal integers seeks to expose the historical oppression of women and deconstruct patriarchal ideology. According to Alexis Lloyd, Churchill's "dramatic structure creates a liminal space where we catch glimpses of pathways, of possibilities for change."²⁷ In concert with the "new poetics" Sue Ellen Case advocates for feminist theatre, Churchill's strategies work "to make women visible, to find their voice, . . . to explain the historical process of the suppression of women and its effect on their achievements, . . . and to deconstruct the canon of dramatic criticism."²⁸ The methodology of chaos theory applied to Churchill's work demonstrates her abandonment of "traditional patriarchal values embedded in prior notions of form, practice and audience response."²⁹

As defined by Stephen H. Kellert, chaos theory is "*the qualitative study of unstable aperiodic behavior in deterministic nonlinear dynamical systems*."³⁰ A "*qualitative study*" is an analysis of *patterns or process*, rather than the application of a quantitative equation which rationally, clearly, and logically produces measurable results. Caryl Churchill's play, *The Skriker*, is such a qualitative study—an analysis, indeed, an indictment—of the damaging patterns and processes of the past perpetuated in contemporary society. True to feminist multiplicity, Churchill implies more than one subject in the societal, psychic metaphor of *The Skriker*: mental illness; the untimely death of children; the plague of homelessness;³¹ "friendship, betrayal," revenge;³² and the "catastrophic abuse of the environment."³³

To epitomize the patterns of this contemporary dis-ease, Churchill engenders tensions between conscious and unconscious realities by creating a mythic site. She populates her evocative, subtextual landscapes with beings from English folklore: the Kelpie, Spriggan "Rawheadandbloodybones, Nellie Longarms, Thrumpins, Johnny Squarefoot, Bogle, etc.,"³⁴ who are "eccentric creatures who have been alive for centuries, . . . though they can change appearances and often masquerade as homeless people, these grimy, motley creatures dress like scavengers, blithely mixing genders and centuries. One male fairy wears knee boots, angel

wings and a tutu."³⁵ These mythic characters are not gods, but surreal misfits; they represent the damaged, collective human unconscious. Through dance and movement, these creatures "convey the rich 'otherness' of myth,"³⁶ creating a living, moving, pulsating tapestry of damaged people in an infected and injurious realm. These "thieves, and murderers, enchanters and wreckers of havoc" do not speak, but emitting moans and shrieks they further compound the themes and texture of the play contributing to a subterranean, "turbulent yet subtle soundscape burbling underneath, comprising drum beats, found music, dripping water, animal grunts and more, all in a strange dark symphony evoking the nether world—both literal and psychic—[that] the play explores."³⁷

In the conscious terrain of the play text, Churchill also employs the use of multiple subjects/protagonists who are women:³⁸ Josie and Lily are two young mothers/friends—Josie has presumably killed her child and is confined in an asylum; Lily, her friend, is pregnant. The Skriker is an androgynous fairy who appears in deceptive, luring forms of women, children, and men, as well as an inanimate (or in this case animated) sofa, and she haunts both women. The haunting of the Skriker and the increasing, smothering presence of the weird (in the Shakespearian sense) creatures embody the processual pressures and stresses of life against which the single mothers struggle to survive.

The fathers are distinctly absent, yet their role is represented in the containing function of the mental hospital that bookends the conscious world of the play. In *The Skriker*, Churchill uses the biological aspect of the women's bodies as the vehicle by which they are contained, constrained, or dominated by the patriarchy. Susan Bordo refers to the body as the "text of culture" as well as the "practical direct locus of social control." Churchill visibly portrays what Bordo asserts, "Our conscious politics, social commitments, strivings for change may be undermined and betrayed by the life of our bodies—not the craving, instinctual body imagined by Plato, Augustine, and Freud, but the docile regulated body practiced at and habituated to the rules of cultural life."³⁹

The two female protagonists in *The Skriker* could thus be perceived semiotically as cultural representations of women damaged by years of patriarchal containment. Historically, the absence of the fathers in the play constitutes its referential origin, or past—a figurative death,⁴⁰ embodied in the Skriker who is "a shape-shifter and death portent, ancient and damaged."⁴¹ In *The Skriker*, while the patriarchy may be associated with origins through one type of absence, the death of Josie's daughter constitutes another, integrally connected to the discourse of the woman's body, her containment defined by her lack of offspring. According to Certeau, death "manifests the very condition of discourse. . . . It is born in effect from the rupture that constitutes a past distinct from its current enterprise. Its work consists in creating the absent, in making signs scattered over the surface of current times become the traces of 'historical' realities, missing indeed because

they are other.”⁴² The Skriker functions as the historical matrix for Churchill’s discourse, as she embodies past damage that is reiterated in the present lives of the women and threatens their future.

Viewed as the essence of that which is woman, the Skriker is deformed and corrupted by years of her own ensnarement: her dysfunctionality results from succumbing to the hegemonic practice of defining herself by her reflection in the patriarchal mirror⁴³—which Churchill manifests in the Skriker’s subversion, seduction, and eventual domination of Josie and Lily. As the play begins, Josie has already sustained irreversible damage, blaming the Skriker for her woes. Lily, however, attempts to befriend the Skriker, to live and let live, but finally succumbs to its incessant pressures. As reviewer Matt Wolf states, Churchill “is again probing at the confluence of private and public—at the ‘damage’ that she believes is occurring to both nature and human beings/[women], . . . the bruised interaction of its three main figures [women] becomes a way of addressing the profound anger and offhand cruelties common to many contemporary lives/[women].”⁴⁴

The notion of “*instability*” in chaos theory refers to a system that displays “sensitive dependence upon initial conditions. In other words, the system will never settle into a pattern of behavior consistent enough to remain unaffected by small disturbances.”⁴⁵ *The Skriker* begins with the introduction of the psychic microcosm of the underworld from which disturbing details bubble up, as if from a cauldron, into the macrocosm—or conscious existence—of the two women, Josie and Lily. These perturbations set off a chain reaction of events that seem unthinkable and unpredictable. In *The Skriker*, Churchill linguistically initiates this cycle via her “terrifying mutation of the English language,”⁴⁶ “a skittering between sense and nonsense, . . . rhymes, jokes, puns, obscenities, and a chaos of associations”⁴⁷ that structurally work to convey chaotic instability by deconstructing the Skriker’s language—and through her language our complacent, waking notions of the world. The practicality of Churchill’s chaotic use of language for feminist purposes is that it “shatters the phallogocentric model . . . [and] disturbs the traditional linear play structure . . . serving as a sign-system criticizing the social and political plight of women.”⁴⁸ In *The Skriker*, themes that seem familiar or static to us are defamiliarized through the language, vivified and recontextualized—yet distanced from us in a Brechtian way so that we may access meaning from a new perspective.⁴⁹ The Skriker’s name itself descends from “a Lancashire term for ‘a shrieker, a screamer’:⁵⁰ as such, she is the clarion to a different sort of vigilance by Churchill, “suggesting other worlds, other ways of being than those of ordinary speaking.”⁵¹

In the monologue that agitates this unstable system, the Skriker tells an angry story of injury and abuse—harm done in the macrocosm that results in hurt and hatred in the microcosm:

They used to leave cream in a sorcerer's apprentice. Gave the brownie a pair of trousers to wear have you gone? Now they hate us and hurtle us faster and master. They poison me in my rivers of blood poisoning makes my arm swelter.⁵²

The Skriker spins a tale reminiscent of Rumpelstiltskin with the threat of children's deaths and changeling substitutions. A hag is chopped up; the forbidden fruit is eaten, and so on:

Down comes cradle and baby. . . . Revengeance is gold mine, sweet. Fe fi fo fumbledown cottage pie crust my heart and hope to die. My mother she killed me and put me in pies for sale away and home and awayday. Peck out her eyes and have it. I'll give you three wishy washy. An open grave must be fed up you go like dust in the sunlight of heart. Gobble gobble says the turkey turnkey key to my heart, gobbledegook de gook is after you. Ready or not here we come quick or dead of night night sleep tightarse.⁵³

This suppressed, unconscious world whirls inexorably in a deadly cyclone of death and destruction—repeatedly rupturing into the conscious terrain of the play, as the Skriker assumes the pain of the dead child and seeks vengeance on its mother, Josie, and mothers in general—like the pregnant Lily:

Ms. Churchill intelligently keeps the line between the victim and the predator cloudy. The Skriker is a natural force corrupted by a denaturalized world. And though she is known to feed on infants, it is Josie who has killed her 10-day-old child before the play starts. Images of babies and children in jeopardy abound. A little girl sings of being murdered and eaten by her parents. Lily, who is pregnant when the play begins, speaks of motherhood after her child's birth in a sad, telling speech. 'Everything's shifted so she's in the middle,' she says of her daughter. 'I never minded things. But everything's dangerous, seems it might get her. . . . If she wasn't all right, it'd be a waste, wouldn't it?'⁵⁴

The "initial conditions" of the play represented by the "cosmically polluted spirit world that parallels a much abused planet earth"⁵⁵ are already so corrupted that the "system will never settle into a pattern of behavior consistent enough to remain unaffected by small disturbances." Rather, they harbor the explosive essence of elements spiraling towards self destruction (in the terms of psyche) for the

women—whose ability to survive is subverted and marginalized even as they attempt to fulfill their biological roles as mothers. Through Josie and Lily, Churchill addresses the patterns of a warped society by which women (in particular) are reduced to: *containment*, as Josie is confined in the psychiatric ward, having killed her child; *surrender*, as Lily succumbs to the Skriker's deadly siren song, and eventually relinquishes her nurturing capacity; and *silence*, as the deformed granddaughter shrieks in wordless rage—victimized once again by the inexorable reiteration of helplessness:

Lily appeared like a ghastly, made their hair stand on endless night, their blood run fast. 'Am I in fairylanded?' she wandered. 'No,' said the old cmony, 'this is the real world' whirl whirl wh wh what is this? Lily was solid flash. If she was back on earth, where on earth was the rockabye baby gone the treetop? Lost and gone for everybody was dead years and tears ago, it was another cemetery, a black whole hundred years. Grief struck by lightning. And this old dear me was Lily's granddaughter what a horror storybook ending. . . . 'Oh they couldn't helpless,' said the granddaughter, 'they were stupid stupefied stewpotbellied not evil weevil devil take the hindmost of them anyway.' But the child hated the monstrous. (*GIRL bellows*)⁵⁶

In the context of the play's intersecting realities or "simultaneous universes," language becomes a functionary of time and space,⁵⁷ animated by movement that expands and defines timeless images of inherited malignancy. Exposing the impairing patterns and destructive cycles of hegemonic constraint, Churchill creates a dynamic, re-visioning of history that manifests the necessity for change with "language [that] does not contain, [but] carries; it does not hold back, it makes possible."⁵⁸

In a chaotic system, "*aperiodic behavior*" is action that is broadly patterned but never repeats itself exactly, nor is immediately predictable or perceivable—much like Churchill's twisted, but dynamic language. In *The Skriker*, such aperiodic behavior also reveals itself in Churchill's use of non-linear time construction, which creates theatre that

challenges patriarchal structure . . . by undermining basic assumptions of linearity through a reconfiguration of time frames. Many of her plays operate within past and present simultaneously, encouraging a perception of causality that is non-linear. She uses this 'doublevision' to place women as both outside of and shaped by history, creating multiplicity in place of unity in order

to locate spaces for radical change. . . . This manipulation serves to alienate the spectator, but also implicates her/him in the performance.⁵⁹

The Skriker and the other creatures who populate the landscape of *The Skriker* are unconstrained by linear time, yet they inhabit Josie's and Lily's space (and/or consciousness) as well as that of the unconscious/underworld—thus occupying an other dimension simultaneously with that of the women. However, as Josie's and Lily's time lines within the world of the play do progress in a forward, cyclic motion, they are not demarcated by night or day or a particular period. The women's lives are circumscribed by the sporadic interruptions of the Skriker, who weaves in and out of the women's present while attempting to lure them into her own. While they are shaped by historical patterns perpetuated by the patriarchy, they are also outside of history, placed in a continuous present in Churchill's mythic world, unable to escape the strangling death portent of the past.

We now know that time and space are related as Einstein's Special Theory of Relativity states that they are actually one four-dimensional entity known as the space-time continuum, as time moves through space.⁶⁰ Time in this sense lives, breathes, *matters* in space, and explodes the concept of linearity in performance, crumbling traditional patterns of representing time as a fixed entity. In *The Skriker*, the best example of this kinesthetic notion of time is the episodic nature of the play that appears as a temporal twilight, a liminal matrix which breeds digression, progression, or no change at all in terms of the development of the characters. While the Skriker physically shifts from one shape to another throughout the play as the ultimate psychic trickster, her energy does not wane. Rather, it is reconfigured to an approximation of its original state of repressed anger in order to reiterate another cycle of oppression and vengeance. While Jodie makes aggressive attempts to rid herself and Lily of the Skriker, ultimately she does not progress beyond the walls of the asylum. Lily's surrender to the Skriker's lure results in the simultaneous view of her present digression as well as the future victimization of her children. Oppression ravages the world of the play—and by Churchill's implication, society—affecting all of humanity as long as it remains unchallenged through the complicity of its victims. As Josie and Lily envision a bleaker future in their fruitless attempts to break free from their ensnarement, Churchill

shows us that we cannot move forward from the present without first coming to terms with the influence of the past. . . . Past, present and future all depend upon each other, and Churchill creates moments where they all exist simultaneously, reflecting, influencing, and shaping each other; thus creating the capacity for fluidity and change.⁶¹

Because Churchill makes us face “a historical function specified [in] the ceaseless confrontation between a past and a present—that is between what had organized life or thought and what allows it to be thought nowadays,” she provides us with the possibility of “an infinite series of ‘historical meanings,’”⁶² with implications for the future.

Chaos theory holds that “*deterministic, nonlinear dynamical systems* are sets of mathematical differential equations that describe how a system changes through time and contain one or more non-linear terms,”⁶³ or as James Scaife Meriwether, III puts it,

Nonlinear systems involve equations expressing relationships which cannot be graphed using straight lines (like linear systems) and which are much harder to solve. The behavior of nonlinear physical systems is considerably more complex than that of linear ones. One way that this complexity has been described is that “Nonlinearity means that the act of playing the game has a way of changing the rules.”⁶⁴

This means that one reaction does not necessarily follow another in straightforward time line, but one action may bifurcate and produce two, two may produce more, ad infinitum, all of which may loop back upon themselves through feedback in a continuous, complex chain of events. In the multiple dimensions of time and space in Churchill’s play, the Skriker and her cohorts of the underworld repeatedly burst through the seams of the women’s consciousness. These disorderly ruptures precipitate feedback that breaks down their resistance with each puncture, looping back and re-iterating similar patterns and processes that deterministically perpetuate the prevailing, destructive order of the dominant ideology. As Alice Rayner states, “In *The Skriker*, folklore, myth, and fairy-tale haunt the worldliness of the realistic characters, not as representations ‘of’ an imaginary world, but as a mode of perception and thought that links words, matter, images, time, and experience by the tropes of contiguity and similarity.”⁶⁵

This type of order arising from disorder was mathematically demonstrated by Benoit Mandelbrot when, in 1975, via the computer, he created *fractals*—irregular geometric shapes with the same degree of irregularity on all scales.⁶⁶ The computerized repetition of Mandelbrot’s equation provided feedback that produced a deterministic geometric shape or pattern that was self-organized, or inherently coherent. This led to the notion that order arises *naturally* from disorder. According to Brooks, the

relationship of order and disorder must be viewed in this light as complex and continuous, rather than dichotomous. Simple, deterministic mathematical equations may harbor chaotic behavior, while order has been shown to underlie and even arise out of apparently random, chaotic behavior. *Order and disorder are no longer oppositional, but instead interactive and complimentary in the driving forces of nature.*⁶⁷

What this means is that a chaotic system—such as that in Churchill's play—can demonstrate a certain order. In contrast to an Aristotelian play, however, balance cannot be restored to its initial state—in a chaotic system, there is no initial balance;⁶⁸ in *The Skriker*, change accelerates within the system in a process of self-similar alteration that highlights the clarion of “difference,”⁶⁹ in reponse to the reiteration of the patriarchal order. The characters have no sense of closure—because there is no catharsis, nor do they experience the self-revelation or reversal that generally accompanies Aristotelian, cathartic structure: they are contained within an entropic cycle of damage.

While Churchill does not provide her audience with a linear context that “makes the process of interpretation easy,”⁷⁰ her intent is to disrupt the typical response of the audience on multiple levels, through associative language, music, movement, mythic/archetypal images. She wishes to impact the audience not just mentally, but imaginatively through all the senses, to engage them not just for the ‘moment’ in the theatre, but for also the future, to evoke continuing thought and active response in reaction to the alarum she is raising.

In analyzing conventional audience response, Ann Wilson cites reviewers' incomprehensibility of *The Skriker* as an indicator of its “failure” as a theatrical production because it does not conform to the “linear” progression of the subject's action resulting in “revelation.” Its dramatic progression is not that

of conventional dramatic action where characters are implicated in action which rises to a dramatic climax and thus is resolved. This narrative structure allows the audience to enter the “relay” of theatrical signification by providing a structure which allows those watching the play to understand the conflict within the play, even if . . . the characters themselves never come to the realization of the terms of the dramatic crisis and hence do not experience a sense of resolution. My contention is that the key to understanding an audience's theatrical pleasure is tied to the sense of mastery, of understanding the action which unfolds on the stage.⁷¹

While Wilson contends that the “idiom of the Skriker swirls with a seeming randomness which does not result in revelation,”⁷² quite the opposite occurs. According to chaos theory, the nonlinear pattern of the play is true to nature and orderly in its disorder—as its multidimensional, cyclic structure, through feedback, constructs a *different* representation of reality, opening emergent avenues of perception. In *The Skriker*, Churchill consciously uses all of her skill to produce multiple levels of feedback or revelation in the audience, and she gets it: wonder, awe, horror, discomfort, terror, chills, thrills. She refuses to “perpetuate the conventions of realism/narrative,” she thwarts “the illusion of ‘real’ life,” and she threatens “the patriarchal ideology imbedded in [the] ‘story’”⁷³ through the decomposition of language, the breakdown of time and space as we know it, and the portrait of characters at once familiar and foreign. The character of the Skriker, whose “daring presence tears down the ‘fourth wall’ between herself and the audience”⁷⁴ by extending the action beyond the periodic limits of the proscenium arch, creates bifurcated responses that exceed two dimensions as Churchill, through her, instigates interaction with the audience, which further shapes the action of the drama as feedback—both immediate and subliminal—and comes back to haunt you another day.⁷⁵ Churchill provides a relative, subjective view of the world “in which history is not necessarily objective, space is not necessarily static, and time is not necessarily linear.” Churchill writes a history that Certeau might contend

is played along the margins which join a society with its past and with the very act of separating itself from that past. It takes place along these lines which trace the figure of a current time by dividing it from its other, but which the return [re-iteration] of the past is continually modifying or blurring. As in the paintings of Miró, the artist’s line, which draws differences with contours and makes a writing possible (a discourse and a ‘historicization’), is crisscrossed by a movement running contrary to it. It is the vibration of limits. . . . The truth of history resides in this ‘in between’ on which a work marks its limits, without being able to create an object taking the place of this relation. In the case of Marc Soriano, analysis of Perrault’s fairy tales becomes itself the narrative or avowal of an investigation, in such a way that the object of his research—fragmented as it is by diverse methodological inquiries—finds its unity in the operation where the actions of the author and the resistances of the material are being combined endlessly.⁷⁷

Chaos theory provides an effective methodology for analyzing Churchill’s play-text, because it allows us to confront the unintelligible, the other, that which has

been marginalized, through a unified, if diverse, inquiry that allows for dialogue between past and present.⁷⁸

Within the dynamic plot that emerges in each performance of *The Skriker*, the thought or meaning of the play modulates as it is received on different levels by different audience members with different receptors each time it is performed—opening up “the negotiation of meaning to contradictions, circularity, multiple viewpoints.”⁷⁹ Churchill refrains from revealing the precise meaning of the play, preferring the audience to assign their own meaning to the performance—to be as much an interpreter of the work as the author.⁸⁰

As much as the “death of the author” has been purported by post-modern theory,⁸¹ Jeanie Forte contends that

For feminism, the author can't be dead. . . . In the dialogue between spectator and performance text that feminism hopes to turn into a dialectic, the intensity of the relationship between writer and text—the *personal* connection, if you will—emerges as a crucial point of context. In the theatre, this would of necessity extend to the interpreters of the text, who must somehow share in the authentic exploration of female subjectivity. This is not to reinstate ‘author’s intent’ as a guiding principle of production; rather, it connotes for feminist theatre practice what I have been discussing for feminist theatre writing—an engagement with the issues and problems inherent in the commitment to a political agenda.⁸²

In *The Skriker*, Churchill deconstructs the notion of woman as represented by Josie and Lily, as she positions them, as in many of her other works, in a “liminal, reflective territory [that] is outside of society, a space that women are relegated to, and therefore must use to their advantage as a place to reclaim themselves.”⁸³ However, in the *Skriker*, Josie and Lily are ultimately powerless to overcome the overwhelming constraint of patriarchal ideology. They “primarily belong to the margins of society, are revealed as impossible beings. They have insufficient social and economic power to embody the cultural ideal of ‘woman,’ yet there is no symbolic space in which to create an alternative identity. These women are trapped between visibility and invisibility,”⁸⁴ and cannot reclaim their identity as women. It is through the mythic presentation of the image of the damaged feminine psyche, which in turn impairs society as a whole, that Churchill manifests the urgent need for change.

Rather than didactically (in a Brechtian sense) presenting the problem and/or solution to the audience, she engages both dialogue and action. While she

denies “interpretative mastery” to an audience conditioned to view and interpret primarily linear works,⁸⁵ Churchill does not limit the interpretation of messages but instead relinquishes authorial intent. She subjects it to the audience’s authority to produce thought, dialogue, or action in response to their perception of the play. Thus, the meaning of the text is consummated in collaboration with audience response/feedback.⁸⁶ Seen as a history modified through Churchill’s interpretation of the past object by present practice, the status of interpretation is transformed, “no longer being present within authors as the frame of reference of their thought; it is not situated within the object that we, as new authors, have to render thinkable. As the function of an *other* situation, from now on it is possible to study our predecessors’ modes of comprehension as prejudices, or simply the givens of a period.”⁸⁷ This allows us to see beyond a history of facts established according to patriarchal paradigms, by engaging the dialectic of difference towards a history of possibilities.

As described by chaos theory, this unique responsiveness to meaning determined by an audience is precisely what occurs in feminist theatre. Quantum theory overlaps chaos theory in this respect, stating that even the interaction between the observer (audience) and observed (art work) is dynamic—that “there is no intrinsic meaning without observation,” because the “act of observation changes whatever is being observed and therefore becomes a creative act.”⁸⁸ The objectivity of Aristotle is thus replaced by subjectivity and a reality in which everything is not as it appears. Thus, “in a theatre re-visioned using 20th century scientific theory . . . more questions are asked than answered, knowledge is always partial, meaning is always multiple, and the individual perspective of each audience member creates the drama for themselves.”⁸⁹ This is a theatre of probabilities and possibilities, rather than probability and necessity.⁹⁰

There is chaos in creating works of art, because if art reflects nature, it also reflects its inherent mysteries and paradoxes as instability and order interact within the fractal model. Chaos theory allows one to analyze a play, diverging from the linear presuppositions of form as well as giving playwrights the freedom to experiment with new forms as they explore disorder and difference within the constraints of a self-organizing paradigm. According to Demastes, the breakthroughs in modern scientific theory as applied to the arts “reveal the limited human potential for control of our universe, but they also forcefully argue against our succumbing to despair, given the vast new opportunities that (they) offer for understanding the world,”⁹¹ in a re-visioning of history that takes us beyond the hegemonic limits of the patriarchy.

In feminist theatre, the deconstruction of linearity and introduction of difference as disrupting influences of societal norms serve to create new models that can serve to perpetuate societal changes. Caryl Churchill demonstrates the use of displacement of time and place, disintegrated linearity, and deconstructed

and reinvented language⁹² in her work to engage the imagination of the audience with new linguistic and behavioral images in order to appropriate new paradigms for living, and for perceiving life. Using the tools of chaos, Churchill works to subvert the status quo of the dominant society, "producing a disruptive consciousness in which meanings are revealed in a new way."⁹³

Chaos theory as applied to feminist theatre thus rejects both a linear as well as a fragmented view of the universe. It represents an attempt to find organized principles in a diversity of forms and ideally describes these forms and their relationships to one another with their own distinctive beauty that is true to nature. Chaos theory "is ideologically unrestricted as well as multi-disciplinary"⁹⁴ and, as such, informs new, practical constructs in feminist theatre for expressing its own phenomenology.

Notes

1. Sue Ellen Case. "Towards a New Poetics," *Feminism and Theatre* (New York: Methuen, 1988) 127.
2. Annette Kolodny, "Dancing Through the Minefield: Some Observations on the Theory, Practice, and Politics of a Feminist Literary Criticism," *Feminisms, an Anthology*, ed. Robyn R. Warhol (New Brunswick: Rutgers UP, 1997) 147.
3. Harriet Hawkins, *Strange Attractors: Literature, Culture, and Chaos Theory* (New York: Prentice Hall, 1995) 5.
4. Current feminist thought states that Aristotelian theory has formed the basis for the dominant ideology proscribed by Western literary theory and practice—what is referred to as the "patriarchy": Patricia S. Schroeder, "American Drama, Feminist Discourse, and Dramatic Form: A Defense of Critical Pluralism," *Theatre and Feminine Aesthetics*, eds. Karen Laughlin and Catherine Schuler (London: Assoc. UP, 1995) 71, quotes Nancy S. Reinhardt, from "New Directions for Feminist Criticism in Theatre and the Related Arts," *A Feminist Perspective in the Academy: The Difference it Makes*, eds. Elizabeth Langland and Walter Grove (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1981) 36-37. "The structure of traditional Western drama, an 'imitation of an action,' is linear, leading through conflict and tension to a major climax and resolution. . . . One could even say that this aggressive build-up, sudden big climax, and cathartic resolution suggests specifically the male sexual response." Case 124. Sue Ellen Case also states, "An even deeper analysis which has recently emerged in the realm of feminist psychosemiotics suggests that the form of narrative itself is complicit with the psychocultural repression of women."
5. Jill Dolan, "The Discourse of Feminisms: The Spectator and Representation," *The Feminist Spectator as Critic* (Ann Arbor: U of Michigan P, 1988) 7, says, "The revelation of women's experience and intuitive, spiritual connection with each other and the natural world is idealized as the basis of cultural feminist knowledge. Because they can give birth, women are viewed as instinctually more natural, more closely related to life cycles mirrored in nature. Men are seen as removed from nature."

Because women are intrinsically, biologically connected to natural processes, it seems that they may also be able to resonate with the process of chaos theory—which is also inherently natural—for use in feminist dramatic theory and practice.

6. Patricia S. Schroeder, "American Drama, Feminist Discourse, and Dramatic Form: A Defense of Critical Pluralism," *Theatre and Feminine Aesthetics*, eds. Karen Laughlin and Catherine Schuler (London: Assoc. UP, 1995) 78.

7. Elin Diamond, *Unmaking Mimesis* (New York: Routledge Press, 1997) v; brackets, mine.

8. Plato, *Two Comic Dialogues: Ion and Hippias Major*, trans. Paul Woodruff (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1983) 1-39. In Western thought, the history of theatre criticism in particular, as well as criticism of the arts in general, is traceable primarily to Plato and Aristotle. In *The Republic*, Plato sets up the rationale for artistic aesthetics, to which Aristotle responds in *The Poetics*.

9. Aristotle, *The Poetics*, trans. S. H. Butcher, *Dramatic Theory and Criticism, from the Greeks to Grotowski*, ed. Bernard F. Dukore (New York: Holt, Rinehart, & Winston, 1974) 38. "A beautiful object," writes Aristotle, "... must not only have an orderly arrangement of parts, but must also be of a certain magnitude; for beauty depends on magnitude and order." Aristotle here expresses the idea of the limits or field in which truth and beauty are contained. He concedes their connection to that which is reflected in nature, but their appearance in that which is artistic is conditional—dependent upon reasonable conditions such as order, probability, and necessity.

10. Aristotle, *The Poetics* 39.

11. Robert E. Brooks, *Creativity and the Cathartic Moment: Chaos Theory and the Art of Theatre*, diss., LSU, 1998, 1.

12. Laurie Schneider-Adams in *A History of Western Art* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1997) 97, gives an overview of the general attitude towards women in Classical Greece (500 B.C. onwards) that was also translated into their art: "In the words of the historian Thucydides, it was a woman's duty 'to be spoken of as little as possible among men, whether for good or ill.' In the words of Aristotle, 'The deliberative faculty is not present at all in the slave, in the female it is inoperative, in the child undeveloped.'" Much like Afghan women under Taliban rule, women in ancient Greece could not go out unless they were accompanied, they could not vote, their marriages were arranged, and they were regarded as the property of men.

13. Joseph Campbell, *The Power of Myth* (New York: Doubleday, 1988) 101.

14. Prior to the Renaissance, the perpetuation of patriarchal hegemony continued via its inscription in the art, architecture, music and liturgical drama integrated and associated with the building of the cathedrals; see Kenneth McLeish's introduction to *The Greek Myths*, by Robert Graves, Vol. 1 (London: The Folio Society, 1996) 12. During this period, the rise of the cult of the Virgin and her iconography in various art forms along with the broader education of women was perhaps an attempt to rectify this imbalance, with significant but only moderate ramifications. After the Reformation, the arts became less supported by the church, and entered the commercial sphere of private patronage (individuals or royalty) or individual entrepreneurship, and were philosophically influenced by Newton's premises of a causal, contained universe that further reinforced patterns of linearity established by Aristotle.

15. Schroeder 70-1. Schroeder says, "Another approach to defining feminist drama focuses on creating a new dramatic form that reflects women's experience. For scholars and theatre artists

using this approach, a feminist play resists oppression of traditional dramatic practice in theme and form as well as in characterization; it may also resist the hierarchical power structures of traditional theatre practice, emerging as a collectively scripted, avant-garde, alternatively produced ensemble piece."

16. Michael Leroy Phillips, *20th Century Scientific Theory as an Interpretive Tool for Dramatic Literature*, diss., University of Oregon, 1996, 1.

17. Hawkins xiv. Hawkins quotes Tom Mullin, ed., from *The Nature of Chaos* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1993).

18. Michel de Certeau, *The Writing of History*, trans. Tom Conley (New York: Columbia UP, 1988) 30. Certeau continues, "The organization of every historiography as a function of particular and diverse points of view refers to historical acts, to what establishes meaning and founds the sciences. In this respect, when history takes 'doing' (or 'making' history) into consideration, it simultaneously locates its origins in the actions which 'produce' history." *The Skriker* is an organized mythic world, which refers to patriarchal historical acts/practices, present or absent, the response to which informs discourse from the feminist point of view.

19. Certeau 35.

20. Judy Petree, "Strange Attractor in Chaos Theory." (2001 <http://www.wfu.edu/~petrej4/Attractor.html#bk8>).

21. Bank 76.

22. Hawkins 2.

23. Phillips 147.

24. Aristotle, *The Poetics* 38, 40. In *The Poetics*, Aristotle states that in the action of a drama, the structure of the incidents must have a beginning, a middle, and an end; the order of the incidents should not be random, and the events should be both probable and necessary. However, in *Chaos and Order*, trans. D. I. Loewus (New York: VCH, 1993) 117, Fritz Cramer states that the operation of the butterfly effect in an unstable system such as the atmosphere demonstrates events which do not follow linear trajectories, but pass through one or more bifurcation points and thereby become indeterministic, or seemingly improbable, unnecessary, or both.

25. Hawkins xi.

26. *Webster's New World Dictionary*, 2nd Edition 875. The word matrix descends from the Latin word *mater*, mother; the genitive, *matris*—of the mother; this usually refers to the "womb" or "origin."

27. Alexis Lloyd, "Make Us the Women We Can't Be: Caryl Churchill's Feminist Theatre. III. Churchill's Dramatic Structure: Subverting the Linear Narrative: B: Ritual Performance as a Method of Revelation and Reconstruction." (1996 <http://www.el.net/~alexis/thesis/structure2.html>).

28. Case 113.

29. 114.

30. Brooks 4. Brooks quotes Kellert from *In the Wake of Chaos: Unpredictable Order in Dynamical Systems* (Chicago: Chicago UP, 1993).

31. Carey M. Mazer, "The Skriker." Rev. of *The Skriker*, by Caryl Churchill (2 March 2000 <http://www.english.upenn.edu/~cmazer/skriker.html>.)

32. Gerry Colgan, "The Skriker." Rev. of *The Skriker* by Caryl Churchill (*The Irish Times*, 9 Nov. 1995. Lexis-Nexis. Online. Internet).

33. Paul Taylor and Judith Mackrell, "Spirit Levels: Paul Taylor and Judith Mackrell Cast Separate Eyes on Caryl Churchill's *The Skriker* at the Cottesloe." Rev. of *The Skriker*, (*The Independent* [London] 29 Jan. 1994. Lexis-Nexis. Online. Internet). Interestingly enough, Churchill's story resembles that of Marge Piercy in her feminist, utopian, science fiction novel, *Woman on the Edge of Time* (New York: Ballantine, 1976).

34. Caryl Churchill, *The Skriker* (London: Nick Hern Books, 1998) iii.

35. David Patrick Stearns, "Bewitching *Skriker* is a Bold, Grim Fairy Tale." Rev. of *The Skriker*, by Caryl Churchill (*USA TODAY*, Gannet Company, Inc. 15 May 1996. Lexis-Nexis. Online. Internet.).

36. Claire Armitstead, "Tale of the Unexpected." Rev. of *The Skriker*, by Caryl Churchill (*The Guardian* [London], 12 Jan. 1994. Lexis-Nexis. Online. Internet).

37. Jeremy Gerard, "The Skriker." Rev. of *The Skriker*, by Caryl Churchill (*Daily Variety*, Reed Elsevier, Inc. 16 May 1996. Lexis-Nexis. Online. Internet). Erin Harper, Birgitta Victorson, and MJ Kopolow also contend that, in *The Skriker*, the movement and sounds of the creatures' choreography, as a choreopoem, is "used more to create scene and character than to intertwine itself with the text . . . to provide a powerful visual image which will be processed longer by an audience and leave greater impressions than just the spoken word." ("Physical Theatre from the Woman's Perspective" (Online. Internet. <http://pubweb.acns.nwu.edu/~rrosenbe/phystheatree.html>).

38. Case 121. Case states, "Constructing woman as subject is the future, liberating work of a feminist new poetics. . . . the subject represents a point of view. . . . The subject in semiotics is that which controls the field of signs. . . . the subject is a position in terms of a linguistic field or artistic device such as narrative. What had earlier been considered a 'self', a biological or natural entity, imbued with the sense of the 'personal' is now perceived as a cultural construction and a semiotic function. The subject is an intersection of cultural codes and practices."

39. Susan R. Bordo, "The Body and the Reproduction of Femininity: A Feminist Appropriation of Foucault," *Writing on the Body: Female Embodiment and Feminist Theory* (New York: CUP, 1997) 13. Bordo's concepts of containment stem from the suppositions of anthropologist Pierre Bourdieu and philosopher Michel Foucault.

40. Certeau 46-7. Certeau states, "Such is history. A play of life and death is sought in the calm telling of a tale, in the resurgence and denial of the origin, the unfolding of a dead past and result of a present practice. It reiterates, under another rule, the myths built upon a murder of an originary death and fashions out of language the forever-remnant trace of a beginning that is as impossible to recover as to forget."

41. Churchill 1.

42. Certeau 46.

43. Case 122. Case states that in traditional linear narrative, the woman's notion of her self has been inscribed as "self as male" vs. self as female, which is why a new way of writing with woman as the subject, perceived as female, is being sought in the experimentation of new forms. As Case

reiterates, quoting Gillian Hanna of the Monstrous Regiment (with whom Churchill has worked), "It's precisely a refusal to accept . . . that life is linear . . . which has to do with male experience."

44. Matt Wolf, "A Damaged World in Which Nature is a Weirdo Killer." Rev. of *The Skriker* by Caryl Churchill (*New York Times*. 5 May 1996. Lexis-Nexis. Online. Internet). brackets, mine.

45. Brooks 5.

46. David Patrick Stearns, "Decoding the Speech of the Human 'Heart.'" Rev. of *The Skriker*, by Caryl Churchill (*USA TODAY*. 2 Feb. 1999. Lexis-Nexis. Online. Internet).

47. Taylor and Mackrell, "Spirit Levels."

48. Price, "The Language of Caryl Churchill: The Rhythms of Feminist Theory, Acting Theory, and Gender Politics." (22 July 1999 <http://www.womenwriters.net/editorials/PriceEdl.htm>).

49. In "Brechtian Theory, Feminist Theory: Toward a Gestic Feminist Criticism," *Unmaking Mimesis* (New York: Routledge, 1997), Elin Diamond makes the case for the appropriation of Brechtian theory for feminist practice.

50. Wolf, "Damaged World."

51. Taylor and Mackrell, "Spirit Levels."

52. Churchill 4. This is part of the Skriker's beginning monologue of the play, which spins its tale of damage and loss and precedes its haunting of Josie and Lily.

53. Churchill 5.

54. Ben Brantley, "A Land of Fairy Tales Creepily Come True." Rev. of *The Skriker*, by Caryl Churchill (*The New York Times*. 16 May 1996. Lexis-Nexis. Online. Internet).

55. Ben Brantley, "Finding Appalling Sense in a Giddy Anarchy." Rev. of *The Skriker*, by Caryl Churchill (*The New York Times*. 1 Feb. 1999. Lexis-Nexis. Online. Internet).

56. Churchill 51-2.

57. Rosemary Bank, in "Time, Space, Timespace, Spacetime: Theatre History in Simultaneous Universes," *Journal of Dramatic Theory and Criticism* 5.2 (1991): 65-84; here 71, discusses the implications of discourse raised in a view of history and change, that, when viewed through the lens of contemporary physics, is relative and provides a matrix for discourse and change: "At human scale, to 'travel' knowingly in simultaneous universes and to conceive of interaction, as in Cramer's waves, as past and future, assumes a reading of history that is both fluid and relational."

58. Price, "The Language of Caryl Churchill," quotes Hélène Cixous in Rosemarie Putnam Tong's *Feminist Thought* (Boulder: Westview, 1988. 193-211) 201.

59. Alexis Lloyd, "Churchill's Dramatic Structure: Subverting the Linear Narrative: A. Temporal Manipulation: Reconfiguring Identity." (2 March 2000 <http://www.el.net/~alexis/thesis/structure1.html>).

60. Phillips 139.

61. Lloyd, "Identity."

62. Certeau 34.

63. Brooks 6.

64. James Scaife Meriwether III quotes Gleick in *Unity, Duality, and Multiplicity: Toward a Model for Post-Modernism*. diss. Florida State University, 1993, 85.

65. Alice Rayner, "All Her Children: Caryl Churchill's Furious Ghosts," *Essays on Caryl Churchill: Contemporary Representations*, ed. Sheila Rabillard (Winnipeg: Blizzard, 1998) 209.

66. Hawkins 79. Also see Benoit Mandelbrot, *The Fractal Nature of Geometry* (New York: Freeman, 1977).

67. Brooks 14; emphasis, mine. Rosemary Bank further delineates the relationship of fractal dynamics in the interpretation of history (71), "At issue in chaos research is what happens in systems (e.g., the formation of shorelines, heartbeats, population growth) that work on themselves again and again, and what can be read of dynamic systems when they are jelled in physical forms," such as that of a playtext. "These 'fractal' processes (fractal is used as both a noun and adjective to evoke brokenness and irregularity) are not the final states of systems, but the dynamics whereby systems choose among competing options. Fractal dynamics help an historian articulate the discontinuous relationships that define an historical timespace within the multiple universes of contemporary spacetime." This 'articulation' of relationships between past, present and future is precisely what Churchill effects in her fractal composition of *The Skriker*, in the context of a nonlinear, contemporary view of the effects of past actions/processes on present societal practices. For more on fractal dynamics, see James Gleick, *Making a New Science* (New York: Penguin, 1987) 98, 113-117.

68. Hawkins 14.

69. Helen Gilbert and Joanne Tompkins, in *Post-Colonial Drama: Theory, Practice, Politics* (London: Routledge, 1996) 4, quote Alan Lawson and Chris Tiffin ("Conclusion: Reading Difference," *De-Scribing Empire: Post-Colonialism and Textuality* [London: Routledge, 1994] 230), " 'Difference' which in colonialist discourse connotes a remove from normative European practice, and hence functions as a marker of subordination, is for post-colonial analysis the correspondent marker of identity, voice, and hence empowerment." Gilbert and Tompkins contend that feminism is one of the primary expressions in post-colonial drama, as the genre functions to expose and deconstruct oppressive power bases, giving voice primarily to feminist, and class-based issues. Churchill's works might be considered post-colonial from the point of view that she writes about the oppression and colonization of women, with the intention of empowering woman's self-discovery, voice, and resistance to repressive, hegemonic societal practices.

70. Ann Wilson, "Failure and the Limits of Representation in *The Skriker*," *Essays on Caryl Churchill: Contemporary Representations*, ed. Sheila Rabillard (Winnipeg: Blizzard, 1998) 176.

71. 184-5.

72. 184.

73. Jeanie Forte, "Realism, Narrative, and the Feminist Playwright—a Problem of Reception," *Feminist Theatre and Theory*, ed. Helene Keyssar (New York: St. Martin's, 1996) 21.

74. Laura Thompson, "Limelight." Rev. of *The Skriker*, by Caryl Churchill (*The Daily Telegraph*. 7 May 1994. Lexis-Nexis. Online. Internet).

75. Many of the reviewers cited in this paper expressed the notion that *The Skriker* tended to crop up in their thoughts long after the event had passed, in effect, to haunt them.

76. Phillips 140.

77. Certeau 37-38.

78. Chaos theory, as a mode of (historical) comprehension or interpretive method, as Churchill has demonstrated, can certainly be applied as a paradigm for feminist playwrights who wish to explore the marginalization of women. Certeau states, 44, "every interpretive procedure has had to be *established* in order to define the procedures suited to a mode of comprehension. A new determination of 'what can be thought' presupposes those economic or sociocultural situations that are its conditions of possibility. All production of meaning admits to an event that took place and that permitted it to be accomplished. Even exact sciences are led to exhumate their relation between a coherence and a genesis. In historical discourse, investigation of the real therefore comes back, not only with the necessary connections between conditions of possibility and their limitations, . . . but in the form of the *origin postulated* by the development of a mode of 'the thinkable.' . . . The activity that produces meaning and establishes an intelligibility of the past is also the symptom of an activity *endured*, the result of events and structurings that it changes to objects capable of being thought, the representation of an evanescent order of genesis." In *The Skriker*, Churchill gives us a specific referential origin, the containing force of the patriarchy, and develops "the mode of the thinkable" in the effects of the origin on the lives of the women through the actions of the Skriker. Meaning is ascribed in the understanding of how the past affects the present, producing responses to the continuous genesis in the perpetuation of patriarchal hegemony—what is "capable of being thought."

79. Forte 21.

80. 32. Forte quotes Tania Modeleski, "Feminism and the Power of Interpretation: Some Critical Readings," *Feminist Studies, Critical Studies*, ed. Teresa de Lauretis (Bloomington: INP, 1986) who states, "'feminists at this historical moment need to insist on the importance of real women as interpreters,' which includes author-actor-spectator."

81. Roland Barthes, "The Death of the Author," *Image, Music, Text* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977) 148. Barthes contends, that contrary to classical criticism, it is the reader who "holds together in a single field all the traces by which the written text is constituted," thereby validating the function of the "audience" as not only the receptors of, but also those who assign the meaning of that which is read, or in the case of a play, performed. He also states, "a text's unity lies not in its origin, but in its destination," implying that (as feminist theory contends) the work finds its completion in its reading (or performance).

82. Forte 30.

83. Alexis Lloyd, "Churchill's Dramatic Structure: Subverting the Linear Narrative: Conclusion." (2 March 2000 <http://www.el.net/~alexis/thesis/structure1.html>).

84. Lloyd, "Conclusion."

85. Wilson 187. Wilson contends, "While the social impact of interpretative mastery over a text has less tangible effects than other modes of social mastery, the point remains that interpretative mastery is compatible with other modes of mastery. It is a mode of social regulation and *containment* based on relations of power which are, by definition, hierarchical and potentially oppressive. From this perspective, Churchill's refusal to allow the audience access to a position of interpretative 'mastery' over *The Skriker*, is an act of political resistance." italics, mine.

86. Each of the reviewers cited in this paper experienced different responses to Churchill's play.

87. Certeau 34.

88. Phillips 141.

89. 142.

90. Case 129. Case's discussion of the term "contiguity" in relation to a new feminist form bears many similarities to chaos theory: contiguity is "an organizational device that feminists have discovered in both early and modern works by women. Luce Irigaray describes it as a 'nearness', creating a form constantly in the *process of weaving itself* . . . embracing words, and yet casting them off", concerned not with clarity, but with what is 'touched upon'. Cixous calls it 'working the in-between,' and Jane Gallop describes it as 'the register of touching, nearness, presence, immediacy, contact.' It can be *elliptical* rather than illustrative, *fragmentary* rather than whole, *ambiguous* rather than clear, and *interrupted* rather than complete. This contiguity exists within the text [which 'orders' the system] and at its borders: the feminine form seems to be *without a sense of formal closure*—in fact, it operates as an *anti-closure*." (emphasis, mine). The paradoxical nature of the feminine form fits well with the elements of chaos as it is cyclical, not linear; it creates forms that are self similar which loop back upon themselves as feedback; while it appears ambiguous and fragmentary, the text ultimately is the author of the system's order; the lack of formal closure indicates the openness of the system to response and shaping (perhaps engagement or dialogue) by say, the audience, as they become co-interpreters of meaning.

91. William Demastes, *Theatre of Chaos: Beyond Absurdism into Order Disorder* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1998) 75.

92. Michael Leroy Phillips provides an excellent application of chaos theory to Caryl Churchill's *Mouthful of Birds* and Susan Lori Parks's *Imperceptible Mutabilities in the Third Kingdom* in his dissertation, *20th Century Scientific Theory as an Interpretive Tool for Dramatic Literature* (University of Oregon, 1996). Carol Fisher Sorgenfrei's revisionary methods are examined in "Tensile Strength: Carol Fisher Sorgenfrei, Theatrical Fusion, and the Women of the Western Canon," by Laura D.C. Box, *Constructions and Confrontations: Changing Representations of Women and Feminisms, East and West*. Vol. 12, *Literary Studies East and West*, eds. Cristina Bacchilega and Cornelia N. Moore (Honolulu: U of Honolulu P, 1996).

Like Churchill, feminist playwright Suzan Lori Parks's play, *Imperceptible Mutabilities in the Third Kingdom*, is nonlinear—with scenes that do not follow in a sequential order. Time is also flexible, encompassing present, past, and future experiences that sometimes occur simultaneously. The main characters' "her-stories" are not told in the context of historic events, but of personal experiences. The language of the play is figurative, poetic, looping back upon itself in repetitive motifs. About her re-visionary style and repetitive motifs, Parks says:

"We accept it in poetry and call it 'incremental refrain.' For the most part, incremental refrain creates a weight and a rhythm. In dramatic writing it does the same—yes; but again, what about all those words over and over? We all want to get to the CLIMAX. Where does repetition fit? First, it's not just repetition but repetition with *revision*. And in drama change, revision, is the thing. Characters

refigure their words and through a refiguring of language show us that they are experiencing their situation anew. Secondly, a text based on the concept of repetition and revision is one which breaks from the text which we are told to write—the text which cleanly ARCS. . . . I'm working to create a dramatic text that departs from the traditional linear narrative style to look and sound more like a musical score." 129.

93. Price, "The Language of Caryl Churchill."

94. Hawkins 14.

