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Research Article

Nothing to See and the Proliferating Body: Irigarayan Morphology in *The Skriker* by Caryl Churchill

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ABSTRACT

In the landscape of second-wave and contemporary feminist theory, Luce Irigaray's groundbreaking critique of phallogocentrism remains one of the most radical interventions, exposing how Western philosophy, psychoanalysis, and language itself are covertly structured around a singular male morphology that reduces women to a state of lack, invisibility, and specular inversion. By rereading Freud, Lacan, and the entire Platonic tradition through a strategic mimesis, Irigaray reveals that the apparent neutrality of the Symbolic order is in fact organized by the visible, erect, self-identical phallus, rendering female sexual difference unrepresentable except as castration or nothing to see. Against this economy, she proposes a generative revaluation of female morphology, not as deficiency but as plurality, auto-affectation, and tactile fluidity, most powerfully articulated in the metaphor of the 'two lips' that touch themselves continuously, defying oculo-centrism and opening the possibility of a genuinely sexual Symbolic. This article brings Irigaray's morphological and symbolic critique into dialogue with Caryl Churchill's 1994 play *The Skriker*, a work that stages the violent return of repressed feminine difference in the form of a shape-shifting, language-devouring fairy who preys upon two traumatized young mothers in a contemporary urban wasteland. Through the Skriker's protean corporeality, fragmented punning speech, and invasion of maternal bodies, Churchill theatricalizes Irigaray's central claims: the phallogocentric Symbolic cannot accommodate female subjectivity without producing psychosis, infanticide, and ecological catastrophe, yet the very excess of the monstrous-feminine simultaneously performs an alternative morphological logic, fluid, multiple, tactile, and uncontainable. Drawing on



recent ecofeminist, phenomenological, and performance theory scholarship, the analysis demonstrates how Churchill's dramaturgy of dance, mime, Brechtian alienation, and linguistic disintegration not only illustrates Irigaray's diagnosis of phallogocentric violence but actively enacts the disruptive, pre-symbolic energies Irigaray associates with a future sexuante order. Ultimately, *The Skriker* emerges as a powerful performative demonstration that morphology is not destiny but the contested site where a new ethics of sexual difference, maternal genealogy, and intersubjective relationality beyond domination may begin to be imagined and embodied.

Keywords: phallogentrism, morphology, sexual difference, Symbolic order, mimesis, *The Skriker*, oculoentrism, corporeality, Brechtian alienation.



Introduction

Caryl Churchill's *The Skriker* (1994), a landmark of contemporary British experimental theatre, stands as the main corpus of this article and acts as a radical performative embodiment of Luce Irigaray's feminist-philosophical undertaking. Part apocalyptic folk-horror, part ecological dystopia, part feminist psychodrama, and part linguistic experiment, the play deliberately resists classification as conventional realism, instead combining fragmented episodic structure, dance-theatre sequences, Brechtian alienation techniques, and a densely punning, near-incomprehensible idiolect that collapses centuries of English folklore into a single disintegrating monologue.

The plot, though deliberately nonlinear and porous, centers on the predatory relationship between the titular Skriker ancient, death-portending shape-shifter from northern English folklore—and two young working-class women in present-day urban England. Josie, recently institutionalized after killing her baby, and Lily, a pregnant teenager struggling with poverty, become the objects of the Skriker's obsessive hunger. In multiple guises, the creature appears: a homeless crone, a lost child, a seductive American tourist—even an inanimate sofa. It lures the women with poisoned gifts and impossible wishes, eventually dragging them into a nightmarish underworld that is peopled by damaged traditional fairies (kelpies, boggarts, Black Dogs, Green Ladies) whose realm has been ravaged by industrial pollution. Time collapses: past, present, and future bleed together; centuries pass in seconds; and the women return to a London that has aged into ecological ruin. The play ends in cyclical entrapment: Lily's newborn daughter is already marked for consumption, indicating that the destructive loop of maternal exploitation and symbolic repression is endless under the current order.

By situating this disorienting, sensorily overwhelming text at the centre of an Irigarayan reading, this article contends that *The Skriker* does more than illustrate the violence of phallogocentric morphology and the Symbolic: it actively performs its disintegration. Through her protean body and corrosive language, the Skriker is the monstrous-feminine return of everything the patriarchal order has repressed: plural morphology, tactile excess, preoedipal energies, and an ecological-maternal continuum refusing containment within the logic of the One. Far from a passive victim or a simple allegory of evil, the Skriker comes into view as the embodied demand for a sexuante Symbolic, one which Churchill's radical dramaturgy begins, however ambivalently and terrifyingly, to stage.

Luce Irigaray's foundational critique in *Speculum of the Other Woman* (1974, trans. 1985) lays bare the phallogocentric underpinnings of Western philosophy and psychoanalysis, in which morphology is the silent ground for the constitution of woman as lack. As Irigaray scrupulously illustrates through her mimetic rereading of Freud, the female body is reduced to a morphological deviation from the male norm: "the 'differentiation' into two sexes derives from the a priori assumption of the same, since the little man that the little girl is, must become a man minus certain attributes whose paradigm is morphological—attributes capable of determining, of assuring, the reproduction-specularization of the same" (Irigaray, 1985a, p. 27). Here, the penis functions as the visible, self-referential organ that founds truth and being, rendering the female genitals "nothing to see"—a formulation Irigaray borrows and subverts from Freud to reveal how "[n]othing to be seen is equivalent to having nothing. No being and no truth" (Irigaray, 1985a, p. 48). This oculo-centric privileging of the visible gives rise to a symbolic order in which woman, lacking a singular, jutting "sex/organ that can be seen in a form capable of founding its reality," is relegated to invisibility, castration, or simple inversion of the male (Irigaray, 1985a, p. 54).

Yet Irigaray's intervention is not deconstructive; it is generative. In *This Sex Which Is Not One* (1977, trans. 1985), she reappropriates female morphology as plural and auto-affective, most famously through the metaphor of the "two lips": "Woman touches herself all the time, and no one can forbid her to do so, for her genitals are formed of two lips in continuous contact. Thus, within herself, she is already two, but not divisible into one(s), that caress each other" (Irigaray, 1985b, p. 24). These lips are neither one (phallic unity) nor two (separable, countable entities); they embody a perpetual self-touching that resists the



visual logic of objectification and hierarchy. This morphology disrupts phallogocentrism through the privilege of tactility over sight, fluidity over solidity, and multiplicity over singularity-qualities extending beyond anatomy to transform subjectivity, language, and relationality. As Irigaray insists, female pleasure "is more diversified, more multiple in its differences, more complex, more subtle" than the "one of form, of the individual, of the (male) sexual organ" (Irigaray, 1985, p. 28).

The novelty of such an approach consists in the refusal of both liberal equality, which assimilates women into a neutral-masculine subject, and simple inversion, which elevates lack into plenitude. Recent scholarship emphasizes how Irigaray's work remains relevant today: Alison Stone (2006) makes Irigaray's morphology compatible with performative theories of gender by situating sexual difference within a "natural" yet non-essentialist continuum, using Romantic philosophies of nature to argue that female embodiment offers an ontology that is fluid and relational and thus resistant to reduction by phallic norms. More recently, Emily Parker, in *What Is Sexual Difference?* (Parker, 2023), frames Irigaray's "two lips" as a "plastic essence"-that is to say, dynamic, open to becoming-against the critique of biological essentialism, while confirming morphology as a basis for an ethic of non-appropriation. It is in this interdisciplinary shift-that is, between phenomenology, posthumanism, and ecology-that Irigaray's frame can be broadened to find in morphological difference the key to elaborating responses to contemporary crises of embodiment, from reproductive technologies to climate-induced bodily precariousness.

Methodologically, Irigaray's mimetic strategy-deliberately assuming the feminine position assigned by patriarchy to expose its contradictions-remains a powerful tool for feminist critique. By staging philosophy's blind spots through parody and excess, she clears space for a sexuate symbolic where difference is positive and irreducible, not hierarchical.

Literature Review

Caryl Churchill's *The Skriker* bursts onto the stage as a kind of linguistic and corporeal wound: a death-portending fairy who's ancient, shape-shifting body consumes meaning, time, and maternal flesh in a contemporary urban wasteland. Characterized by Churchill herself as "a play that wants to damage language" (as cited in Aston, 2011, p. 89), the text spurns the stability of realist theatre for a chaotic, pun-riddled, protean force that has baffled and mesmerized critics for three decades. Of the many theoretical lenses brought to bear on the play, ecocriticism, mad studies, posthumanism, and psychoanalysis, Irigarayan reading has emerged as one of the most productive, if still underdeveloped, frameworks. Luce Irigaray's philosophy of sexual difference, elaborated most forcefully in *Speculum of the Other Woman* (1974) and *This Sex Which Is Not One* (1977), diagnoses Western thought as phallogocentric: organized around a singular, visible male morphology and a specular economy that reduces woman to lack, mirror, or "nothing to see". This review synthesizes the critical conversation that explicitly or implicitly mobilizes Irigarayan concepts to read the *Skriker* not merely as a folkloric monster but as a theatrical embodiment of Irigaray's key strategies and demands: deliberate mimesis, the subversion of specular logic, the reclamation of an elemental feminine divine and the explosive return of repressed maternal morphology.

Irigaray's famous tactic of mimesis-deliberately assuming the degraded role assigned to women to expose its violence and open a space beyond it-finds an uncanny double in the *Skriker*'s relentless shape-shifting. The creature appears as a derelict old woman, a lost child, an American tourist, a sofa, a lover, and a death omen, performing an excessive, parodic imitation of every feminine stereotype patriarchy simultaneously desires and fears. As Kębłowska-Ławniczak notes, this "incessantly mobile creature travels as an omen of semiotic exhaustion whose fluid condition blurs the borders between the human and the non-human, the animate and the inanimate" (Kębłowska-Ławniczak, 2017, p. 342). For critics working in an Irigarayan vein, such metamorphosis is not random spectacle but strategic mimesis: the *Skriker* overidentifies with the phallogocentric fantasy of woman-as-lack (the homeless crone, the abandoned child, the consumable young mother) only to reveal the fantasy's impossibility. By being everything and nothing,



the Skriker stages what Irigaray calls "the gestures of the 'masculine' through a feminine mimicry that makes them hysterical" (Irigaray, 1985b, p. 76).

The Skriker's language enacts a parallel hysterical mimesis. Her torrential monologues collapse centuries of folklore into punning, rhythmic excess-refuse phallic linearity and clarity. Emma V. Miller describes this speech as "a morphology of its own, one that is ecological, interconnected, and deeply threatening to a system built on mastery and separation" (Miller, 2021, p. 45). Though Miller's primary frame is ecofeminist, her language echoes Irigaray's contention that feminine syntax might operate through proximity, touch, and multiplicity rather than distance and hierarchy. Harpin similarly reads the Skriker's discourse as "a theatre of the senses beyond the visual, where the haptic and the sonic create epistemologies of confusion and revelation" (Riva, 2017, p. 92), implicitly aligning it with Irigaray's privileging of tactility over oculo-centrism.

At the center of Irigaray's diagnosis is the "specular economy" in which woman functions only as a mirror, reflecting man to himself, albeit inverted" (Irigaray, 1985a, p. 54). The Skriker violently refuses this reflective function. She is not a passive surface but a devouring, speaking void, "a hole in men's signifying economy" made terrifyingly audible (Irigaray 1985a, p.50). As Aston observes, Churchill consistently "places the marginalized female subject at the center of her dramatic vision" (Aston, 2011, p. 128), and the Skriker literalizes that marginality as an active, predatory absence.

Critics have demonstrated how the play's non-verbal dramaturgy-dance sequences, sudden transformations, and Brechtian alienation further dismantle specular mastery: the audience is denied the comfort of a stable object to look at; instead, meaning emerges through tactile and sonic excess. This resonates with Irigaray's argument that female jouissance "does not take place in the visible" but in "the nearness of the lips" (Irigaray, 1985b, p. 29). The Skriker's body, never fixed long enough to be objectified, enacts what Parker, nominally extending Irigaray, calls a "plastic essence": dynamic, open to becoming, refusing capture within phallogocentric representation. (Parker, 2023).

Irigaray's later work increasingly gestures toward a feminine divine, an imminent, horizontal sacred grounded in the elemental (air, water, earth, fire) and in the auto-affection of the two lips. The Skriker, as an ancient earth spirit whose underworld has been poisoned by industrial waste, embodies precisely this damaged yet indestructible elemental feminine. Miller's ecocritical reading is the most explicit in linking the Skriker to "the non-human and the feminist symbolic," arguing that the play stages "the return of a repressed maternal-natural continuum" (Miller, 2021, p. 42). The fairy realm, populated by kelpies, bogbarts, Green Ladies, is a space of flows and metamorphoses that recalls Irigaray's vision of a sexuate cosmology where woman is not lack but "the place of the living relation to the element. (Irigaray, 1993, p. 59).

Yet the play refuses easy redemption. The Skriker is both sacred and monstrous, creator and destroyer. Critics diverge on the political valence of this ambivalence. Whereas Miller sees potential for a new ecological-feminist symbolic, others-emblematically, Székelyhidi (2020), emphasize the creature's aggression as evidence of a femininity warped by centuries of repression. An Irigarayan perspective reconciles these views: the Skriker's terror is the necessary violence of a feminine divine that has never been allowed positive expression within patriarchy. As Irigaray warns, when a woman is denied her own morphology and genealogy, she returns as "the nightmare of the phallic mother" (Irigaray, 1985a, p. 47). The Skriker is that nightmare made flesh-terrifying, yes, but also the condition of possibility for a future sacred that would no longer need to devour to speak.

The obsessive focus of the play on damaged motherhood-thoughts of Josie's infanticide, Lily's haunted pregnancy, and the Skriker's consumption of babies dramatizes Irigaray's central claim that the mother-daughter relation is the repressed foundation of patriarchal culture. It is for this reason that the Skriker preys specifically on young mothers, since for Irigaray, it is "the maternal-feminine that remains the place closed off by the most entrenched forms of phallogocentrism" (Irigaray, 1993, p. 7). Indeed, critics



such as Harpin (2017) and Kani (2024) read Josie's postnatal psychosis as the catastrophic outcome of a symbolic order which offers women no language for maternal experience outside of lack or monstrosity. The Skriker's hunger is thus not individual pathology, but the distorted expression of a maternal genealogy that has been starved for millennia.

While Irigarayan readings of *The Skriker* have gained traction in the last decade, sustained engagements remain surprisingly few. Existing scholarship tends either to mention Irigaray in passing (Aston 2011; Kani 2024) or to mobilize her concepts implicitly through related theorists—whether Kristeva's semiotic or Cixous's *écriture féminine*. Explicit, book-length Irigarayan analyses are all but non-existent; intersectional questions, how class and race intersect with sexual difference in *the Skriker's* predation on working-class women, remain largely unasked. The play's ecological dimension, while increasingly central to readings (Miller 2021), has rarely been brought into explicit dialogue with Irigaray's later elemental and divine writings.

Yet the critical conversation makes clear that *The Skriker* functions less as a character than as a living Irigarayan event. That is a theatrical mimesis that exposes the violence of phallogocentric representation, a speaking void that shatters the mirror of specular economy, a damaged elemental divinity demanding a new symbolic horizon. In an era of reproductive coercion, climate collapse, and renewed assaults on female corporeality, Churchill's monstrous fairy continues to perform what Irigaray spent her life theorizing: the explosive, terrifying, and ultimately necessary return of a feminine that has never been allowed to become.

Methodology and Approach

Morphology

Irigaray's exploration of "morphology," particularly as it pertains to the female body and its profound implications for the constitution of subjectivity and language, constitutes a central analytical focus within her groundbreaking work, *Speculum of the Other Woman* (1974).

Anatomy is 'Destiny' ... In the beginning... the little girl was (only) a little boy. In other words, there never is or will be the little girl" ... "In her having nothing penile, in seeing that she has No Thing. Nothing like a man. That is to say, no sex/organ that can be seen in a form capable of founding its reality, reproducing its truth. Nothing to be seen is equivalent to having nothing. No being and no truth" (Irigaray, 1985a, p. 48).

These writings underscore the morphological deficiency or divergence that underlies female corporeity and subjectivity in patriarchal speech, thereby underlining the formidable challenge of inscribing female sexual difference on a plane other than that of the phallic norm. In *Speculum of the Other Woman*, Irigaray stages a violent dismantling of Western philosophy and psychoanalysis, arguing that these disciplines have heretofore objectified the woman as other, an inverted, lacking, or mirror image of man. Her concept of morphology is central to this critique and her proposed alternative. Furthermore, Irigaray claims that Western thought, from Plato to Freud, has been fundamentally phallogocentric, meaning it organizes knowledge, language, and even the very concept of "being" around the male sex organ and its associated morphology penis. The male body, then, in its one, visible, aggressive form, is the universal norm. And under this phallogocentric regime, the woman's body, lacking one visible, singular protruding organ like the penis, has been read as a lack, an opening, or a nothing-to-see. This morphological lack is then projected onto female subjectivity and, hence, accepted as the idea that women are essentially lacking, castrated, or simply a manifestation of male desire.

Alternatively, however, Irigaray resists this single, masculine perspective with her insistence on highlighting the plural, fluid nature of the female body. This is not an anatomical imagery but a metaphor for another form of subjectivity, one that is not determined by multiplicity or fixed boundaries but by self-touching, multiplicity, and fluidity. In highlighting the female body's essential autoeroticism and the absence of a single, central "point," Irigaray resists oculo-centrism—the prioritization of vision in Western philosophy. This is so because sight, in its attempt to stabilize, categorize, and objectify, is at least inadequate for the apprehension of female subjectivity and sexuality, which are more akin to touch, to fluidity, to the "unseen."



For Irigaray, morphological differences have far-reaching implications, not simply biological but also for language, culture, and indeed the possibility of feminine subjectivity.

If language is structured through a phallogocentric rationality privileging the one and the visible, then women, of course, cannot speak for themselves or become recognized as distinct subjects. Her work endeavors to disrupt this linguistic and philosophical regime to make room for a duly sexuate or sexed subjectivity, where both masculine and feminine are recognized in their irreducible difference, not one as norm and the other as its exception. In effect, Irigaray's reading of morphology in *Speculum* is an introductory movement toward the deconstruction of patriarchal orders by making visible how they are founded on a certain (male) body scheme and conceiving a new philosophical and cultural space in which the specificity of female embodiment could be legitimized and allow them new forms of thinking, speaking, and being with.

Irigaray undertakes an extensive examination of the symbolic within her groundbreaking work, *Speculum of the Other Woman*. She defines symbolic as follows:

Woman is 'a hole in men's signifying economy'... If a woman had desires other than 'penis-envy,' this would call into question the unity, the uniqueness, the simplicity of the mirror charged with sending man's image back to him—albeit inverted. Call into question its flatness. The specularization, and speculation for (his) desire could no longer be two-dimensional (Irigaray, 1985a, pp. 50-51)

This passage focuses on the critique of the symbolic order as phallogocentric and its role in constituting woman as the Other within patriarchal language and representation. In *Speculum of the Other Woman*, and further developed in *This Sex Which Is Not One*—Irigaray critically engages with Jacques Lacan's concept of the symbolic order. For Lacan, the Symbolic Order is the realm of language, law, culture, and the paternal function. It's the system of meaning structuring our reality, which enables us to become subjects. First and foremost, according to Lacan, entering the Symbolic means assuming the phallus as prime signifier, which he equates with male power and privilege. For Lacan, therefore, the entry of the female subject into language and subjectivity must always be ambivalent through a lack (a lack of the phallus) and is thus always already iniquitous.

According to Irigaray, the Symbolic Order is not universal or neutral in Lacan, but phallogocentric. That means that the system of symbols is constructed from the male point of view and therefore cannot make room for the subjectivity, desire, or experience of women to be expressed or represented. The consequence is that women are rendered invisible, incomprehensible, or defined only in terms of men: as "the other," "lack," or a mirror of male self-reflection. She works from the blind spots of Western philosophy and psychoanalysis (both Freud and Lacan) that deliberately exclude or misrepresent the feminine. According to her, the existing Symbolic forces women to adopt masculine speech and modes of thought and blocks them off from their own bodies and desires. Instead of deconstructing the existing Symbolic, Irigaray's enterprise is to prepare the ground for a new, properly sexuated Symbolic Order. That would be the symbolic order which sees and accounts for sexual difference as something positive and constitutive of being. This would allow the emergence of a specifically feminine language, a feminine imaginary, and a two-way recognition of male and female subjects, neither of which is reduced to the other or taken to be an inversion. Still embryonic as a prescriptive theory, Irigaray discusses recognizing a maternal Symbolic preoedipal system of symbols emanating from the mother-daughter relationship and the body of the mother, suppressed by the patriarchal Symbolic. This would be a field of fluidity, multiplicity, and interrelatedness, to contrast with the phallogocentric Symbolic's singular, fixed logic. Basically, Irigaray uses her deconstruction of the Symbolic to expose how Western society has long silenced and excluded women, and to assert the urgent necessity for a complete transformation of our symbolic order in order to make sexual equality and difference feasible.

Results and Discussions

Caryl Churchill's *The Skriker* provides a multifaceted theatrical text that thoroughly interrogates the



interrelated themes of sexual difference, symbolic articulation, and the phenomenology of embodied subjectivity, thus furnishing a key theoretical and critical framework for this article. The titular Skriker, an archaic, shape-shifting fairy entity, haunts and exerts manipulative influence over two young mothers, Josie and Lily, thus invoking complex discourses surrounding motherhood, psychopathology, specifically postnatal psychosis, and the materiality of female embodiment. The Skriker's fragmented and often opaque linguistic expression, along with its mutable corporeal manifestations, serves to exemplify a subversion and disintegration of normative symbolic systems in confluence with Irigaray's critique of the phallogocentric symbolic order that systemically marginalizes female subjectivity and corporeality.

In this regard, in his article "The neuroscience of body memory: From the self through the space to the others" (Riva, 2017), Riva explains:

The Sentient Body: A first-person representation integrating interoceptive, proprioceptive and vestibular information in an egocentric frame of reference. The experiential outcome of this representation is embodiment (I Am), the pre-reflective sense of being a body. 2) The Spatial Body: The integration of the Sentient Body with visual and auditory exteroceptive information in an egocentric frame of reference. The experiential outcome of this representation is the sense of being in the here-and-now (I Am Here Now). 3) The Active Body: The integration in an egocentric frame of afferent sensory information with efferent information relating to the movement of the body in space. The experiential outcome of this representation is agency, the experience of controlling bodily actions."(241)

Skriker's protean corporeal metamorphoses, along with the embodied existential conflicts of Josie and Lily, enact the dialectics of female embodiment negotiating and resisting the hegemonic grip of social and symbolic orders. On the other hand, Churchill's play *The Skriker* shows a distrust of language through disjointed speech, dance, and pantomime that challenges the traditional symbolic order that Irigaray critiques. As already indicated above, the play's use of non-linguistic bodily expression shows the limits of symbolic language for capturing fully the 'living' particularities of female experience and sexual difference and instead affirms the primacy of the latter lived, embodied experience. In "Enactive-Dynamic Social Cognition and Active Inference", Hipólito states:

"Meaning has its origins in action, and it is through real-time, fluid, dynamic, contextual action and activity that it is made explicit. From this follows that meanings are present before and regardless of language. It so happens that with mastering a language, humans get to symbolically articulate their bodily, social experiences. In other words, humans get to conceptually articulate experience, that is, explain or give reasons for the non-representational stuff they bodily experience in a social scene. But embodied non-representational meanings are regardless of language." (Hipólito & Van Es, 2022, p. 5).

In addition, the Skriker figure itself can be interpreted as embodying the dependent relationship between oppressive symbolic structures and female bodies. Rather than pure evil, the Skriker represents the destructive social and cultural forces that exploit and consume female subjectivities and morphologies, reflecting Irigaray's idea of a symbolic order that denies women their own positive sexual difference.

Josie's psychological disintegration and the infanticidal act touchingly dramatize the catastrophic ramifications of symbolic repression and the resultant violent estrangement from the lived body. The play's interrogation of motherhood, madness, and possession elucidates the fraught dialectic between female corporeality and the hegemonic symbolic structures that endeavor to regulate, contain, or efface it. In essence, the text critically examines female subjectivity and embodiment within the confines of oppressive symbolic regimes, foregrounding the hard endeavor to articulate authentic sexual difference in defiance of patriarchal hegemony. The fragmented linguistic texture and incorporation of non-verbal semiotics subvert the phallogocentric symbolic order, resonating with Irigaray's critique and underscoring the exigency for a reconstituted symbolic system that valorizes female difference. The Skriker's disjointed, pun-laden monologues, exemplified by her initial speech replete with lexical fragmentation and mutable identities, manifest the disintegration of conventional symbolic language, privileging an embodied, affective mode of communication that transcends verbal articulation. To illustrate the foregoing, the author presents excerpts



from the text:

"Twigs and beetles and dead body. Water and blood. You'll never get back" (Churchill, 1994, p. 379). This speech conjures up the inevitable bodily facts, that is, life and death cycles as well as materiality specific to the female body, thereby underscoring a somatic axis that the symbolic orders of patriarchy attempt to erase or control. Furthermore, Josie's tumultuous and violent interaction with her baby, which leads her to kill him, serves as a performative dramatization of the extreme tensions and symbolic violence exerted on the female body and female subjectivity. Her displays of aggression and psychosis can be understood as a last desperate attempt at agency and resistance against a symbolic regime that systematically precludes the possibility of a positive female subjectivity.

The Skriker's protean metamorphoses and its subversive engagement with symbolic systems create a richly complex and multivalent hermeneutic framework for this dissertation. The Skriker's ability to transmute across disparate ontological states, appearing as an elderly woman, a child, or even an inanimate object such as a sofa, serves as an emblematic articulation of the fluidity at the heart of female identity and the inherent instability of patriarchal symbolic taxonomies. Kębłowska-Ławniczak writes in "Caryl Churchill's Artificial and Orificial Bodies: Between Subjective and Non-Subjective Nobody's Emotion or Affect" (Riva, 2017), "The incessantly mobile creature travels as an omen of semiotic exhaustion whose fluid condition blurs the borders between the human and the non-human, the animate and the inanimate, undoing in that way the familiar emotional codifications buttressing social institutions, such as the family, which the audience seeks in vain to find on stage." (Kębłowska-Ławniczak, 2017, p. 342).

An illustrative excerpt from the Skriker's opening monologue exemplifies the linguistic fragmentation phenomenon:

"Out of her pinkle lippety loppety, out of her mouthtrap, out came my secreted garden flower of my youth and beauty, and the beast is six o'clock in the morning becomes electric stormy petrel bomb." (Churchill, 1994, p. 336)

This fragmented, pun-riddled, and playful language resists fixed meaning and linear logic and is thus subversive of the phallogocentric symbolic order that insists on clarity, control, and hierarchical meaning. The language of the Skriker functions affectively and bodily rather than rationally and symbolically, evoking the unconscious rather than the rational and the embodied rather than the symbolic. Subversion in established language systems occurs when semiotic elements breach the boundaries that conventionally control meaning. While the symbolic order subjects all speakers to universal language laws that determine what can be expressed and what cannot within cultural consciousness (Sheikh, 2017, p. 5), the semiotic mode can disrupt such operations in instances of social transgression, or so it would appear. This disruption occurs because the semiotic functions through poetical and musical expressions that disregard strict syntactic rules and are basically heterogeneous to fixed meaning.

"A MAN comes in carrying a white cloth and a bucket of water. He waits. He isn't satisfied. He picks up the cloth and bucket and walks about looking for a better spot. A PASSERBY comes along the street, throws down a coin, and then starts to dance to the music." (Churchill, 1994, p. 349). This choreographed sequence of dance and corporeal movement encircling the principal characters accentuates the play's ethereal and liminal ambience, thereby privileging somatic expression as a semiotic modality that transcends linguistic articulation. Significantly, the Skriker's fragmented verbal discourse is synergistically augmented by these physical, non-verbal components, thereby underscoring the centrality of the body in processes of communication and perception.

Particular emphasis will be accorded to the theatrical efficacy of Churchill's dramaturgy; specifically, her deployment of episodic vignettes, synthesising dialogue, mime, and dance, generates a Brechtian *Verfremdungseffekt*, which forces the audience to reconceptualise the body as a locus of sociopolitical signification rather than a neutral biological substrate. This alienation effect is further enhanced through Churchill's strategic use of songs and performance interruptions that pull actors out of



character and into contemporary dress, creating what scholars identify as opportunities for performers to insert their bodies as sites of disruption within the performance text (Bi, 2018, p. 72). These techniques operate in concert with other Brechtian tropes-captions, fragmentary scenes, and temporal displacement-which ensure the alienation effect remains active during the performance.

Key elements, along with their associated effects, are presented below:

First, Passerby dancing after throwing a coin; choreographed movements interwoven with dialogue are an element of dance and mime as the body's morphology. Second, Skriker's disjointed speech, combined with physicality, evidences the fact that embodied communication is part of the fragmented language expressing a fluid self rather than a solid one. Third, Josie's mental illness and bodily struggles, dramatized through movement and fragmented dialogue, the elements of female embodiment, express the need for new symbols. Last but not least, the physical transformations symbolize the oppressive forces invading female bodies; this is an element of Shape-shifting Skriker, which manifests the resistance against the symbolic.

Arising from the preceding discussion, a pivotal question is how Irigaray's symbolic critiques subvert male-centered language. The explanation lies in the subversion of linear, male-centered symbolic language. As Irigaray argues that the symbolic order is structured by male fantasies rooted in early psychical relations, which valorize disembodiment, reason, and separateness (associated with the father/male) over embodiment, dependency, and passion (associated with the mother/female). The symbolic order functions as the domain of the Symbolic Father, where subjects are forced to define themselves according to the demarcations and definitions established by paternal authority as Kotze in "Desire, gender, power, language: a psychoanalytic reading of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*" (Kotze, 2000, p. 55) claims: "if the Symbolic order of language is associated with the rules and definitions of the Father, then transgression of these rules will presumably be characterised in female terms, and generally associated with the Imaginary order, defined by its primary identification with the mother." (55)

Moreover, this order materializes in a language that is linear and hierarchical in nature and which excludes or marginalizes the female difference. Thus, it has been established that what must be evoked is embodied, affective meaning beyond rationality. Hence, Irigaray calls for the establishment of a new symbolic order; one that positively accepts female embodiment and difference, rather than conceptualizing it as lack. The mode of expression and subjectivity would integrate bodily energies, fantasies, and desires, an embodied, affective way of speaking that disrupts the rational, disembodied male symbolic. Such a language is non-linear, fluid, and open to multiplicity, reflecting female morphology and subjectivity.

Caryl Churchill's *The Skriker* (1994) enacts a theatrical embodiment of Irigarayan concerns, as fragmented language and protean corporeality subvert phallogocentric symbolic order. The Skriker is a shape-shifting fairy-death portent, embodying the vengeful return of repressed feminine morphologies: fluid, multiple, and uncontainable. Her opening eruption is a virtuoso torrent of puns, alliterations, and folkloric fragments: "Heard her boast beast ghost ghost of a roast almost a feast made mostly the most of the host but the most a host coasted the least. Out of her pinkle lippety loppety, out of her mouthtrap, out came my secreted garden flower of my youth and beauty" (Churchill, 1994, pp. 1-4). This linguistic disintegration mirrors Irigaray's critique of linear, hierarchical discourse, instituting a semiotic excess, in Kristevan terms, which privileges bodily rhythms above rational syntax.

The dramaturgy of the play-dance, mime, and episodic vignettes brings the lived body to the foreground as the primary site of meaning, in tune with the phenomenology of Maurice Merleau-Ponty, yet radicalized through sexual difference. As Giuseppe Riva (2017) outlines, the "sentient body" integrates interoceptive and proprioceptive signals to produce embodiment ("I Am"), while the "active body" allows for agency through movement. In *The Skriker*, Josie's filicidal psychosis and Lily's haunted pregnancy stage the catastrophic consequences of symbolic repression on female corporeality: Skriker invasions-the child, the derelict, or the lover-exploit maternal vulnerability to consume female subjectivity in a cycle of possession and madness. However, this is anything but victimization; Skriker's transformations into an elderly woman, child, or even sofa-echo Irigaray's plural morphology, dissolving human/non-human and



animate/inanimate boundaries and thereby dismantling "familiar emotional codifications buttressing social institutions, such as the family" (Kębłowska-Ławniczak, 2017, p. 342).

Synthesizing Irigaray and Churchill, this analysis makes a strong case that morphology is not destiny but the contested terrain for the reimagination of subjectivity. Authentic engagement with primary texts exposes phallogentrism fragility, while recent scholarship and theatrical methodology open up novel pathways for the ethics of sexual difference in the era of bodily and ecological crisis. Far from dated, this framework requires a reconstituted symbolic one that valorizes the unseen, the tactile, and the plural as the condition for genuine intersubjective relationality.

The thematic analysis of Caryl Churchill's *The Skriker* (1994) through the Irigarayan lens shows the play as a theatrical realization of female morphology's plural, fluid, and auto-erotic potential, set against the violent exclusions of a phallogentric symbolic order. Emerging in the body of the Skriker itself-a protean, ancient fairy-death harbinger-is the return of the repressed, the morphological incarnation of Irigaray's critique of woman as "a hole in men's signifying economy" (Irigaray, 1985b, p. 50). Her incessant shape-shifting-from derelict woman to seductive child, from lover to inanimate sofa-obey the phallic logic of singularity and visibility, in a paroxysm of the "two lips" touching continuously without hierarchy or fixation: "Thus, within herself, she is already two-but not divisible into one(s)-that caress each other" (Irigaray, 1985b, p. 50). Such morphological multiplicity undoes oculo-centrism by favoring unseen fluidity in the tactile over the stabilizing gaze, objectifying the woman as lack.

The play's fragmented language further disrupts the linear, paternal symbolic critiqued by Irigaray. Indeed, *The Skriker's* monologues erupt in pun-laden, rhythmic excess-"heard her boast beast ghost most in most most most host toast coast most the roast" (Churchill, 1994, p. 3) -evoking a semiotic overflow akin to the pre-oedipal energies Irigaray seeks to reclaim for a sexuate symbolic. This linguistic disintegration resists phallogentric rationality, which Irigaray argues privileges "the one and the visible," foreclosing women's speech (Irigaray, 1985a, pp. 142-144). The catastrophic effects of symbolic repression on female corporeality are dramatized in Josie and Lily's encounters with the Skriker: Josie's filicide, born of postnatal psychosis, performs the estrangement from the maternal body under patriarchal law, while Lily's haunted pregnancy underscores motherhood's commodification. Allegorizing the destructive forces of a symbolic that denies positive sexual difference, reducing women to inversion or lack, the Skriker consumes female vitality, stealing babies and granting toxic wishes.

Theatrical form itself acts out Irigarayan disruption: episodic vignettes, dance, and mime foreground somatic expression over verbal mastery in keeping with the tactility of the "two lips" in refusal of phallic hierarchy. Non-verbal sequences, Passerby's dance in ecstasy, for example, or the Skriker's changes of form, present the lived body as a site of resistance in a manner that echoes Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology while sexualizing it through Irigaray's lens of difference. The Brechtian alienation-sudden shifts, interrupted songs-forces spectators to reconsider embodiment in terms of the sociopolitical and to see the way in which patriarchal symbolic systems exploit female morphologies.

These findings persuasively demonstrate the novelty of *The Skriker* as a performative intervention in Irigarayan theory: not merely illustrating the violence of phallogentrism but staging the exigency for a new symbolic valorizing fluidity, auto-affection, and interrelation. In an era of reproductive crises and climate precarity, Churchill's work justifies Irigaray's vision-theatricalising morphology as the ground for authentic female subjectivity and ethical relationality beyond domination.

Irigaray's analysis starts with the female body, as perceived through phallogentric eyes: as a lack, a "nothing-to-see" (Irigaray, 1985a). This morphological lack is projected onto female subjectivity, which is thus incomplete or abject. In *The Skriker*, this foundational trauma is literalized in the bodies and psyches of Josie and Lily. Josie, who has committed infanticide and is institutionalized, represents the ultimate phobic fantasy of the failed maternal body. Her body is, from the phallogentric perspective, one that has perverted its reproductive function, making it a place of death instead of life. Lily, while more stable, is



poor and pregnant; her body is filled with an undetermined future, exposed and dependent.

This lack of security, of sanity, of social capital defines their subjectivity. They are, in Irigaray's terms, the "other" to the coherent male subject, existing on the margins of the symbolic order. As scholar Elaine Aston argues, Churchill consistently places "the marginalized female subject at the centre of her dramatic vision," not to reinforce her lack, but to expose the social and symbolic structures that produce it (Aston, 2011, p. 128). The Skriker itself is drawn to this very marginality, to the "wound" or the "hole" in their lives. It whispers to Josie: "I'll find you where you're hiding. I'll be the wound you be the salt. Or you be the wound I'll be the salt. I'll be the crime you be the punishment" (Churchill, 1994, p. 248). This symbiotic relationship illustrates how the monstrous-feminine, the Skriker, inhabits the voids created by a symbolic order that has no proper language for female trauma.

Woman is "a hole in men's signifying economy" for Irigaray (1974, p. 50). The Skriker personifies this "hole," but as an active, garrulous void, not a passive absence, destabilizing the very fabric of phallogocentric language. Its speech is the most distinctive feature of the Skriker: a chaotic, punning, associative, and often terrifying torrent of words operating on a logic of fluidity and multiplicity, directly countering what Irigaray identifies as the "unity, the uniqueness, the simplicity" of the phallic mirror (Irigaray, 1985a, p. 50).

This is a performative linguistic style of *écriture féminine*, something Irigaray champions. It privileges touch and sound over sight, association over linear logic. The Skriker's language cannot be objectified or stabilized by the gaze with any degree of ease; it must be felt. For instance, it says, "I am so sharp I'd stick you with a pin and you'd think it was a pen and sign your life away. I am so clever I could add up a broken biscuit. I am ever so handy with a needle and thread and dead" (Churchill, 1994, p. 245). This is not a language of fixed meanings (the pen that signs contracts) but one of fluid, menacing transformations (the pin that becomes a pen).

Recent scholarship has centered on this linguistic subversion. As Emma V. Miller states in her analysis of Churchill's eco-politics, "The Skriker's language... refuses to be contained by the rational, anthropocentric logic of the symbolic order. Its puns and non-sequiturs create a 'morphology' of their own, one that is ecological, interconnected, and deeply threatening to a system built on mastery and separation" (Miller, 2021, p. 45). The Skriker, then, does not simply exist outside the symbolic; rather, it works to dismantle it from within, showing that a language not predicated on the "one" and the visible not only can exist but is already pulsating beneath the surface of the known world.

Irigaray's project is not simply critical; it is constructive: to envision a symbolic order acknowledging sexual difference. She calls for a symbolic grounded in the specificity of female morphology, its plurality (the two lips of the vulva), its auto-eroticism, and its fluidity. The Skriker can be read as a theatrical exploration of this nascent feminine symbolic, however terrifying its initial manifestations may be.

The whole underworld of the play, peopled by a host of shape-shifting creatures-Passementerie, Kelpie, Black Dog-is a space of pluralities and flows, contrasting directly with single, stable identity valorized by the phallogocentric order. The Skriker itself has no single form; an "ancient fairy and a shape-shifter" (Churchill 1994, p. 243), it appears as an old woman, a child, a homeless man, and a beautiful American. This constant morphing is a morphological performance of Irigaray's contention that the female body is not one but plural.

The play also challenges oculo-centrism through the privileging of the unseen. The fairy world is largely invisible to most humans and accessible only through feeling, intuition, or trauma. This is in line with Irigaray's valorization of touch over sight. The relationship between the women and the Skriker is profoundly tactile; it is about consumption-the food and drink of the underworld-seduction, and a threatening intimacy. As Anna Harpin notices, "Churchill's theatre is frequently a theatre of the senses beyond the visual, where the haptic and the sonic create epistemologies of confusion and revelation" (Harpin 2017, p. 92). It is in the final, ambiguous image of Josie and Lily, trapped and yet perhaps communing in a world that, though dangerous, operates on a different ontological plane, one where their traumatized



subjectivities are, for the first time, the central reality-that the potential for a new symbolic is glimpsed.

Irigaray's crucial move in *Speculum* is to demonstrate how Western thought treats the female form as a negative - an absence defined against a singular male morphology (the phallus). In *The Skriker*, Churchill literalizes and then undoes this claim. The Skriker performs absence only so it can expose its own impossibility: there is no stable "lack" to be filled because the creature refuses stability. This is not merely inversion (female = not-man); it is a different morphological logic, multiple, enfolded, auto-erotic, tactile, that resists being read by sight and fixed signification. The play thus offers an imaginative demonstration of Irigaray's critique: the feminine cannot be assimilated into the phallic model without violence; theatre can model alternatives.

Irigaray argues that phallogentric Symbolic privileges visibility and a one-to-one signifying function. Churchill responds by rupturing language onstage; the Skriker's speech is acoustic fragmentation, collage, and onomatopoeic contact rather than propositional representation. This foregrounds Irigaray's notion that feminine jouissance and subjectivity might be better expressed through touch and sound than through ocular-centric, phallic language. The formal soundscapes of the play, therefore, serve as a critique of the Symbolic and as a tentative modelling of a non-phallic register.

Irigaray offers up a maternal or pre-oedipal symbolic space-which Churchill's work embodies within mother-daughter relations and autoerotic plural embodiment, for instance, a corrective to the phallogentric system. Yet Churchill ultimately stages possible solidarities-the double act of mothers, intimacies and failures of care-as seeds of a different symbolic order. The Skriker dramatizes how this maternal, figured for Churchill through care, reproduction, and attachment, is first marginalized and then weaponized by patriarchal economies (the Skriker preys on maternal vulnerability). Reading the play through Irigaray thus helps underscore the ways trauma, loss, and ecological harm are symptomatic of a culture that rejects a non-phallic maternal imaginary.

Conclusion

This study explored the deep convergence between Luce Irigaray's morphological and symbolic critique of phallogentrism and Caryl Churchill's *The Skriker* (1994), showing that the play embodies a radical theatricalization of Irigaray's key claims. Through the Skriker's protean corporeality, linguistic disintegration, and predatory invasion of traumatized maternal bodies, Churchill dramatizes both the catastrophic violence of a Symbolic order that reduces woman to lack and the explosive return of repressed feminine difference as fluid, multiple, tactile, and uncontainable. Rather than simply illustrating Irigaray's diagnosis, *The Skriker* performatively exceeds it: its dramaturgy of dance, mime, Brechtian alienation, and semiotic excess actively disrupts the oculo-centric, phallic logic Irigaray dismantles, while gesturing, however ambivalently, toward the possibility of a sexuate Symbolic grounded in auto-affection, maternal genealogy, and nonhierarchical relationality.

Ultimately, the analysis confirms that morphology is not destiny but the contested terrain upon which real sexual difference has to be articulated. In an era of reproductive coercion, ecological collapse, and the continued marginalization of female embodiment, Churchill's monstrous-feminine fairy arrives not as apocalypse but as urgent demand: only by valorizing the unseen, the tactile, and the plural may a new ethics of intersubjective becoming emerge-one finally allowing women, and the world, to speak, touch, and exist in all their irreducible specificity.

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