

# A NOTE

ABOUT CARYL CHURCHILL

“Violence is not the answer” is an optimistic phrase we often lift up in defiance of what we have known to be true. Violence has long been both question and answer, an irreconcilable debate. When the argument grows tired, we name it *myth*. When we are feeling brave, *history*.

**In these four plays by the inimitable and foundational playwright Caryl Churchill, our human legacy of violence is plucked from the safe distance of myth and laid at our feet.**

The gods are pleased to be our scapegoats; the shard of glass is pleased to cut you; the bottle is pleased to be uncorked; the present pleased to have no duty to the past or future. Churchill reveals these figures as talismans we ourselves construct to absolve our own weaknesses, our dark impulses and “necessary evils.” Each play demands we see through these convenient narrative defenses to witness human action and human intent as the driving force of human misery.

**This should come as no surprise to those familiar with Churchill’s work, which has over the past half century anticipated each successive step on our stroll towards apocalypse.**

From *Top Girls*’ critique of capitalist feminism leading women to adopt the same violent individualism that drives patriarchy, to *Love and Information*’s very structure predicting TikTok and the attention economy, to *Escaped Alone*’s horrifying expression of apathy in the face of economic and climate catastrophe. While *Cloud Nine* presents a radical understanding of gender and sexuality as fluid within what is societally permissible, and does so a decade before the foundational texts of queer theory would be published, it also stands as one of Churchill’s many plays warning of the continued presence, influence, and danger of colonialism.

This chilling foresight is no magic trick. **It is the result of her unflinching ability to see the present for what it is, to peel back the hasty bandage and report that the infection has not been cut out.**

The treatment is ours to manage. Churchill, a deeply political writer, denies us utopia, denies us myths and stories and phrases of hope, because palliative art asks nothing of us. Instead, she leaves us with questions as vital as they are discomfiting: What do we want from our future? With what will we shape it if not our past? Who will we see there, and who will we grieve when we intone *if only*?



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