



ISSN: 1999-5601 (Print) 2663-5836 (online)

Lark Journal

Available online at: <https://lark.uowasit.edu.iq>



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Keywords:

Feminist, Churchill, Vinegar

Tom, Oppression, Sexuality.

A R T I C L E I N F O

Article history:

Received 20 Apr 2023

Accepted 8 May 2023

Available online 1 Jul 2023

Gender and Authority in Caryl Churchill's Vinegar Tom (1976)

A B S T R U C T

This article gives a feminist examination of Caryl Churchill's Vinegar Tom (1976). This play is in reality, Churchill's feminist lens through which the playwright offers an account of interactions of gender and authority via the 17th-century witchcraft trials in England from a distinctly feminist standpoint. It is – as a research article – a freshly developed consideration of that age that might build a different sort of history to the authorized male-made. In a significant way, part from this article, is to assess Churchill's in terms of form and substance. The dramatist personifies revolutionary ideas presented in a fresh and original way. She majorly concentrates on the female-subjective status via her dramatic depiction and also builds a new women's portrayal through the eyes of women instead of men. Janelle Reinelt (1989)'s feminist theory and the problem of performance is adopted to set a focus on two major concepts, namely gender and class. The subject of Vinegar Tom deals with extremely sensitive themes such, subjugation of women within a masculine society, rights, gender formation, women identity and sexual orientations. Such controversial issues are depicted via the employment of several inventive instruments and approaches. The majority of Churchill's use of theatrical elements consists of doubling, monologues, music, and songs. Taking everything into consideration, this article searches in Churchill's Vinegar Tom dramatically, theatrically, and historically. Using a variety of theatrical approaches to historical reconstruction, it portrays Churchill as a self-identified socialist feminist.

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.31185/>

الجنس والسلطة في مسرحية كاريل تشرشل فينيكر توم (1976)

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الخلاصة:

يستعرض هذا المقال العلمي دراسةً نسويةً لمسرحية كاريل تشرشل فينيكر توم (1976). ويُشار الى أن هذه المسرحية هي في الواقع عين الكاتبة المسرحية النسوية كاريل تشرشل والتي من خلالها يقدم الكاتب المسرحي سرداً لتفاعلات الجنس والسلطة عبر المحاكمات التي تعرضت لها الساحرات في انكلترا أبان

وقائع المؤتمر العلمي السابع تحت شعار (العلوم الانسانية بين التحديات الراهنة والافاق المستقبلية) الذي اقامته كلية الآداب في جامعة واسط بتاريخ 2023/7/1

القرن السابع عشر من وجهة نظر نسوية واضحة. وإنه - كمقال بحثي - يعتبر حديث الطور لهذا العصر والذي بدوره قد يبني نوعاً مختلفاً عن التاريخ الذي يُشار أنه من صنع الذكور. وبطريقة أخرى فإن جزء من هذه المقالة هو عملية تقييم الكاتبة كاريل تشرشل من حيث الشكل والمضمون لما كانت تتعرض له النسوة حينذاك. كما وأن الكاتبة المسرحية - ومن خلال النص - يجسد الأفكار الثورية المقدمة بطريقة جديدة ومبتكرة والتي تركز بشكل اساسي على الوضع الذاتي الأنثوي من خلال تصويرها الدرامي وتبني صورة جديدة للمرأة من خلال وجهات نظر النساء بدلاً من الرجال. وقد تم تبني نظرية جانيل رينلت النسوية (1989) ومشكلة الأداء للتركيز على مفهومين رئيسيين، وهما الجنس والطبقة. وهنا يتناول موضوع المسرحية فينيكر توم أفكاراً جُ حساسة مثل إخضاع المرأة داخل مجتمع ذكوري، وحقوقها، وجنسها، وهويتها، بالإضافة إلى توجهاتها الجنسية. وهنا يتم تصوير هذه القضايا المثيرة للجدل من خلال استخدام العديد من الأدوات والنهج الابتكارية والتي تركز اساساً على طريقة استخدام كاريل تشرشل للعناصر المسرحية من المضاعفة والمونولوجات والموسيقى والأغاني. ومن خلال النظرة الشمولية لهذه المقالة، فإن مسرحية فينيكر توم لكاريل تشرشل تبحث وبشكل درامي ومسرحي وتاريخي وبأستخدام مجموعة متنوعة من الأساليب المسرحية تبحث لإعادة البناء التاريخي والذي بدوره يصور كاريل تشرشل على أنها كاتبةً نسويةً اشتراكيةً تعرّف عن نفسها بعملها.

الكلمات المفتاحية: النسوية ، تشرشل ، فينيكر توم ، القمع ، الجنس.

Introduction

Historiography preoccupies the feminist academicians and dramatists' imaginations. It is deemed of more significance as to undergo reexamination, rereading, and re-vision of historiographical issue(s), that is known as the philosophy of historical techniques. It might also refer to the act of creating historical events. In her article, Janelle Reinelt (2000) discusses Second-Wave Feminist scholars' contribution in the process of creating history, saying that: "At Oxford, women formed a group and challenged male hegemony with regard to the production of history" (p:21).

Literature Review

Vinegar Tom is about a 17th-century English village featuring working-families' community of women "in which economic disparities combine with random misfortune to produce a witch hunt." (Kritzer, 1991, 87). A location by which even a faultless deed might be considered a fault

during a fight can be considered a sinful incantation. (Shahnazari, 2000). The drama examines the connections of impoverished less-paid-working-class women in a tiny contained community dominated by patriarchal disparities for the period of witches' trials. The drama focuses on patriarchal forces torturing these women. Because they do not follow society's rules, disadvantaged women are economically and socially marginalized. Disobedience includes having sex without a spouse, being elderly, destitute, and alone, employing abortion, healing other women, and disrespecting parents. Their unusual conduct leads to witchcraft accusations and punishment. (Shahnazari, 2000, 77) In *Vinegar Tom*, Churchill shows how women have been scapegoated and given subordinated societal positions. Silvia Walby (1992) claims,

“the concept of [the] theory of patriarchy is essential to capture the depth, pervasiveness and interconnected of different aspects of women's subordination and can be developed in such a way as to take account of the different forms of gender inequality over time, class, and ethnic group” (p:2).

Such claims show how patriarchy, class, and gender are interconnected. This chapter investigates further. The word 'stereotype' will emphasize that these witches are not real but are labelled as such by patriarchy and capitalism.

Rewriting history challenges the male-dominated narrative. These academicians even prefer “herstory” over ‘history.’ Feminist playwrights like Caryl Churchill find ‘herstory’ inspiring. (1938). Reinelt (2000) states that "herstory" is important,

“One of the buzz-words of the time.....herstory, which emphasized the exclusions from history of the agency of women and the importance of their roles, the neglect of research on ordinary women and the dearth of material about their everyday life, and the significance of sex and gender differences to the conceptualization of socio-political life in any era” (p:21).

Nevertheless, feminist scholars do not restrict themselves to the community arena and the past records of women who held prominent positions; rather, they expand the histories to encompass

women's private experiences, indicating that the motto of the whole movement is correct. Reinelt (2000) states that, "Personal, subjective experiences, domestic sphere activities and practices of reproduction and kinship systems are central to historical investigation" (p:21). For instance, the body of work that Churchill produced is reflective, in some manner, of the many features of feminist historiographical studies. *Vinegar Tom*, which was published in 1976, delves into topics such as gender roles, power dynamics, and the history of witch trials involving women in England. Caryl Churchill is the author of this play, which is significant since it provides as an example. In it, Churchill portrays the formation of women's identities through the wars and crises that occurred in England during the 17th century. In this context, Churchill is meant to represent everyday women rather than historical personalities. Churchill used the technique of dramaturgy in order to reevaluate history in service of a definite goal. Such a goal is proved as Helene Keyssar (1984) argues that Churchill prefers to concentrate on women's concerns. This objective is demonstrated "challenge perceptions of rigid distinctions between men and women" (p:178). The assertions made by Churchill call into question the male-dominated notions such as women's inability to historically record other women's stories.

Such an important remark to be noted us that the significance of the word 'make' in this context. Men are the ones that 'make' historical events like wars, revolutions, and the social and legal systems that govern institutions, which ultimately become known as history. On the other hand, considering that females do not take part in any of these activities, it is not surprising that they are never given their deserved recognition. As for Parson's standpoint, who is prejudiced towards men. For Apetrei (2007: 19):

"A reading of the seventeenth-century 'feminists' brings us right to the heart of that encounter. We find them struggling, within the limits of early modern theological discourse, to relieve the tension between the open heaven of their spiritual and intellectual experience and the narrowness of their horizons as early modern women. Out of this struggle emerged a remarkable critique of women's subordination. What is challenging about these women, however, is not merely that they were politically confrontational or that they transgressed cultural boundaries."

Writers who are getting on in years have the opportunity to do a Caryl Churchill and reinvent themselves. The majority of contemporary playwrights are female. The notion that female writers are underappreciated is no longer prevalent. For instance, the Soho Theatre Company produced only plays written by women all of last year. This was not done as part of a plan; rather, it was done because those were the best pieces the company had. The young writer of the year has the emotional force and a sensibility of the 1990s. There are a lot of women that write, but in the middle of the 1990s, the classic genre was dominated by males such as the boyish play. That was partially a reaction towards masculinity, and somewhat a reply in contrast to the feminist writers during the eighties. (Aragay, et al, 2007:146). According to Eckert & McConnell-Ginet (2013) the term gender is defined as:

“is embedded so thoroughly in our institutions, our actions, our beliefs, and our desires, that it appears to us to be completely natural. The world swarms with ideas about gender – and these ideas are so commonplace that we take it for granted that they are true, accepting common adage as scientific fact. As scholars and researchers, though, it is our job to look beyond what appears to be common sense to find not simply what truth might be behind it, but how it came to be common sense.” (p:1)

Methodology

For analyzing this play, Janelle Reinelt (1989)'s feminist theory and the problem of performance is adopted to set a focus on two major concepts, namely gender and class. The patriarchal issues of western thought are used to demonstrate the intertwining patriarchy with gender in analyzing the play. Terms like these are seen as the reason why women are oppressed, since men being of authority have power over the opposite sex (women). This male dominance makes women feel inferior. People think that gender also refers to the power that men have over other groups in a society where men are in charge. In a gendered society, problems related to men and manhood are given more attention than problems related to women and femininity. As a result, women are always at a disadvantage and are victims compared to men. (Ramazanoglu, 1986; Klein, Rowland, & Harris, 1995). So, in *Vinegar Tom*, male relationships are used to talk about how

women are treated unfairly. In this way, gender equality should be shown through class battles that focus on how men oppress women and how women oppress each other.

Churchill Caryl (1938 – onwards)

Caryl Churchill is a dare writer who takes on the politics of sexuality. She put on the first performance of *Downstairs* in 1958 while she was studying English at Lady Margaret Hall, Oxford. She wrote drama for radio, TV, and the stage. Her settings were straight and difficult, and her humour was biting. In her early 30s, when she was raising her children, she pushed the best women playwrights of England with her strong feminism. She did this starting with the teleplay '*The Judge's Wife*', that became a widow who exhibited sympathy for her. In *Owners*, the butcher Clegg wants to kill Marion, a famous real estate agent. This shows how successful men are afraid of a competing wife. (1972). *Objections to Sex and Violence*, Churchill's feminist project from 1975, was against sexism. In *Vinegar Tom* (1976), a musical about witch burnings led by men, she honed her message in favour of women. The people who are hurt are outsiders and artists who do not follow Christian teachings that say women should obey their church and husbands.

Churchill, unlike the other writers in this collection, has used feminism and socialism to build her career as a screenwriter and her political views. In an interview in the late 1980s, Churchill said that socialism and feminism are not the same thing, '*I feel strongly about both and wouldn't be interested in a form of one that didn't include the other*'. (p:1) Thus, her 1970s and 1980s plays portray a socialist and feminist criticism of late twentieth-century western capitalism and patriarchy's injustices and disparities. She attempted to reveal power and societal control via the sexual guidelines (*Cloud Nine*, 1979), land-living (*Light Shining*, 1976), possessions (*Owners*, 1982), and retribution. (*Soft Cops*, 1984). Her global capitalism and cultural values dramatizations (*Fen*, 1983; *Serious Money*, 1987) showed the danger to "future histories." (*Ice Cream*, 1989).

Contrarily, Churchill's former work, which staged politics of in terms of society and femininity using Brecht's feminist production, Churchill's later work has tested with technical registers and incorporated dance and music. Notable are her dance-theater collaborations with choreographer Ian Spink and *Second Stride*. Churchill collaborated with Spink on *A Mouthful of Birds* (co-

written with David Lan) in 1986 and with *Second Strike* on *Lives of the Great Poisoners*, *The Skriker*, and *Hotel* in 1991, 1994, and 1996, respectively. Such collaborations demonstrate Churchill's determination to continue testing with form, which has inspired fresher writers and earned the respect of stagecraft veterans. Churchill, described by Sarah Daniels as the 'Picasso' of theater, in which Martin Crimp (1998) (as quoted in Egan) says that, "never loses sight of the playfulness of form" (p:13).

The formal experimentation of Churchill is also politically entangled. The likelihood of rebellion and societal change has been a recurring motif in her theatre *The Hospital* (1972), *Light Shining* (1976), and *Mad Forest* (1990), but the realization that social democracy and women's rights have been behind reality; has had a substantial impact on her canon of the 1990s. *Owners* (1972), *Light Shining in Buckinghamshire* (1976), *Vinegar Tom* (1976), and *Cloud Nine* (1976) are examples of Caryl Churchill's 1970s works that show she has been strongly committed to both social democracy and women's rights. Through such works Churchill has analyzed oppression in terms of gender and economy in modern Britain. (1978). Churchill's message was that the world should become a better place. In 1982, her introduction of the societal characteristics that appeared in her desire to define her ideal world:

[I know] quite well what kind of society I would like: decentralized, non-authoritarian, communist, non-sexist – a society in which people can be in touch with their feelings and control of their lives. But it always sounds both ridiculous and unattainable when you put it into words. (Aston, 2010: 3)

Since that time, she has been forced to write or perform in a society in which her ideal of more democratization and equality is gradually becoming impossible. This has made it difficult for her to realize her vision.

Characteristic of Churchill's Playwriting in The 1990s

Caryl Churchill gives listeners a stern speech on the perils of capitalism in the late 20th century. Within this dramatic setting, the lives of women are most likely to be put in jeopardy and destroyed. In a social and cultural economy that places a higher value on manufacturing than

reproduction, her feminist critique focuses on the bonds between mothers and their children. Churchill's mother opposition is examined in the 1991 restoration of *Top Girls* and *The Skriker*, which both provide evidence in favour of this claim. (1994). Churchill discusses the break between personal satisfaction and society and politics obligations in both *Blue Heart* (1997) and *Far Away* (2000). Both books were written by Churchill. (Aston, 2003)

The seriocomic experimental play *Cloud Nine* (1979), which is about shifting cultural expectations for female sexuality, is becoming increasingly popular on both sides of the Atlantic. Betty, a dedicated housewife who is represented by males, has a repetitive rhyming pattern in her speech. Betty asserts that she is a creation of man and that she rejects natural will in favour of "what men want." (Churchill, 1995, p. 1). Her robotic behaviour brings to mind Nora Helmer's infantile responses and folkloric dancing for Torvald in Henrik Ibsen's *A Doll's House*. Nora Helmer's character was written by Henrik Ibsen. (1879). (Churchill, 1979).

After that, in 1982, Churchill directed the topical drama *Top Girls*, which won the Obie Award for Best Drama and was about the societal and emotional repercussions of a competitive woman's climb to money and authority. The first scene of the play is a spoof on Plato's all-male symposia, and it is a fantasy feast scene. The heroine, Marlene, who has just been promoted to be the head of an occupation agency, finds herself in a difficult situation as a consequence of the decisions that domesticity forces upon her. (Fletcher, 2001). She has found that surrounding oneself with voices from the past provides her with the steadiness she seeks. The infamous Pope Joan, the Japanese courtesan Nijo, Geoffrey Chaucer's patient Griselda, and Dulle Gret, a character from a painting by Breughel, are all seated at the table. Gret visualises the Hellmouth paintings from the Middle Ages, which depict a scene that encapsulates the unavoidable perspective that is shared by all women: "We come into Hell through a big mouth." (Churchill, 1982: *Top Girls*, Act I: 27-28).

Churchill pointed out that *Top Girls* is a reflection on the techniques and perspective of Margaret Thatcher, one of Britain's former prime ministers. Thatcher contributed to the continuation of the male-dominated authority as she has neglected the demands of women and by impeding the woman-engineered collectivism by which women were the main promoters. Churchill pointed

out that the play is a criticism on her methods and view. (Kolbenschlag, 1988; Sexton, 2001; Destafano, 1991; Tatar, 2002).

Vinegar Tom (1976), written by Churchill four years after *Owners*, revisits the misogynistic witch hunt trope. *Cloud Nine* (1979), a satirical work about a woman's servitude to a vapid husband, confronts challenges in the home in a manner that is humorous. The Obie Award⁽¹⁾–winning play *Top Girls* (1982), written by Churchill, addresses *Owners'* worries about the earning potential of women. (Snodgrass, 2014)

Churchill was accused of contradicting herself by inventing a ghost realm in *Vinegar Tom*. Janelle Reinelt calls the Skriker 'part witch,' but she and the other spirits do not perpetuate *Vinegar Tom's* demonization of women. They represent the shattered semiotic – the marginalized 'other' that haunts the symbolic order – an unseen, suppressed reality rendered manifest. *Cloud Nine*, not *Vinegar Tom*, provides a better grasp of *The Skriker's* underground politics and its spirits. (Aston, 2003:29)

In her 1976 play *Vinegar Tom*, Churchill surpasses Apetrei's class-based history that focuses on centralizing usual women as related to history. She depicts how women oppose a male-dominated court system in her two plays. She also shows the religion-state alliance that oppresses these women. She explains how this causes women to create a weak friendship despite their miserable surroundings.

Churchill's oral history drama *Fen* (1983) is based on Mary Chamberlain's Fen-women interviews. *Cloud Nine* (1979) also exposes colonization and its effects on gender and sexual discrimination today. Churchill's 1982 play *Top Girls* uses history to criticize Margaret Thatcher's capitalism principles and individualism. Keyssar (1984) calls Churchill's dramaturgy a "accelerating project to revise the history of the past and the present" (p:100) that "makes a new kind of history-of the theatre and of society- appear not just possible but necessary." (p:100-101). Churchill's *Vinegar Tom* depicts this new history. (1976). *Vinegar Tom* is a historical work concerning women. Such a work sets a comparison between reproductions of women's roles in the past and now.

(1) The Village Voice promoted downtown theatre in 1956. The periodical fostered creative debate and enthusiasm about the new theatrical movement. The American Theatre Wing and Village Voice co-presented the 2015 Obie Awards, honoring off-Broadway and off-off Broadway theatre.

Churchill's *Vinegar Tom* (1979)

This study analyzes Churchill's *Vinegar Tom*'s themes and methods. *Vinegar Tom* is set in 17th-century England. Churchill clearly uses history to address current social and political challenges. The author, like many female playwrights that revise history, is greatly inspired by Bertolt Brecht (1976) and the idea of "revision of historicization" created his epic theatre. Churchill's playwriting career changed with *Vinegar Tom* with the Monstrous Regiment. Churchill proudly mentions working with the Monstrous Regiment in her play's introduction:

"Though I still want to write a lone sometimes, my attitude to myself, my work and others had been basically and permanently changed" (Churchill,1985:131).

It dramatically portrays the oppressed women from a historical side, Churchill emphasizes the current conflict of modern women and the way it is the straight upshot of their stormy past. Zahra Khozaei Ravari (2015) explains, "The blatant abuse of women in male dominated societies had resulted in a continuous struggle by women throughout history who fought and are still fighting for equal opportunities as they attempt to improve their positions in the society they live in" (p:409).

Churchill's first collaboration with feminist theatre, the Monstrous Regiment, was *Vinegar Tom* in 1976. The drama takes set in the 17th century during witch-hunting, which killed many innocent individuals, mostly women. Churchill writes,

"Early in 1976 I met some of the Monstrous Regiment, who were thinking they would like to do a play about witches; so was I ... I think I had already read *Witches, Midwives and Nurses* by Barbara Ehrenreich and Deirdre English. Certainly, it had a strong influence on the play I finally wrote" (Churchill, 1985:129).

Vinegar Tom's characterisation and speech are the playwright's save for the concluding scene, which uses lines from Heinrich Kramer and James Sprenger (1971) comment Churchill believes that her thinking changed after reading the aforesaid literature,

"I rapidly left aside the interesting theory that witchcraft had existed as a survival of suppressed Pre-Christian religions and went instead for the

theory that witchcraft existed in the minds of its persecutors, that “witches were a scapegoat in times of stress like Jews and blacks” (Churchill, 1985:129).

Churchill considers “witchcraft” as a fable fabricated by its persecutors. She even compares witches to women. She thinks patriarchy’s “witches” are women. She also “discovered for the first time the extent of Christian teaching against women and saw the connections between medieval attitudes to witches and the continuing attitudes to women in general” (Churchill, 1985:129). Churchill utilizes history to represent modern women's socioeconomic predicament. The drama takes place in 17th-century England. The drama is not historically-based event. Churchill (1985) claims that she:

“didn’t base the play on any precise historical events, but set it rather loosely in the seventeenth century, partly because it was the time of the last major English witch-hunts and partly because the social upheavals, class changes, rising professionalism and great hardship among the poor were the context of the kind of witch-hunt [she] wanted to write about...” (130).

This is due to the play is based on a real event, many reviewers consider it a historical record of what women have been through and still on.

Churchill's play exhibits his form and structural innovation. It has 21 scenes. All save the final scene are set in 17th-century England. Seven modern-dressed singers perform. In this drama, Churchill portrays history in a unique way. In *Feminism and Theatre*, Gillian Hanna and Hulton (1978) explain why a new drama structure is needed:

“We had a very real feeling that we didn’t want to allow the audience to get off the hook by regarding it as a period piece, a piece of very interesting history. Now a lot of people felt their intelligence was affronted by that ... [however] I believe that the simple telling of the historical story, say, is not enough” (p:10).

This is again shows Churchill's response to reality and good plays as they exhibit Churchill's and other playwrights' views of women are suffering from because of the oppression caused by males.

Churchill's play *Vinegar Tom* combines gender and power in 17th-century England. The play's history of women's marginalization is fascinating. Thus, it concerns both past and present women. It was a 1970s British shout against gender bias. Churchill's depiction of 17th-century English witchcraft trials highlights women's oppression throughout history. Churchill attacks patriarchy in all its guises in this drama. Although women's subordination is cultural and context-specific, it is universal and appears to continue forever. Churchill compares 17th century ladies to 1970s English women to show the universality of pain and persecution. Churchill (1985) states that,

“The women accused of witchcraft were often those on the edges of society, old, poor, single, sexually unconventional; the old herbal medical tradition of the cunning woman was suppressed by the rising professionalism of the male doctor”. (p:130).

As a drama, it deconstructs women's enslavement to males while addressing economic concerns. Through her unique framework, she controls time. She establishes her female characters as subjects and gives them distinct identities by manipulating time.

Vinegar Tom calls women witches for defying patriarchy. These ladies lack money, riches, education, property, etc. Poverty hurts them. Their subordination is mostly due to their financial situation. Two of four women are hung because they are poor, with a low matrimonial status, age, and unorthodox sexuality. The final song shows how the four purported witches affected 1970s English women, *Lament for the Witches*, which is found in Scene XX. The song is spoken to the audience to:

“Look in the mirror tonight. Would they have hanged you then? As how they are stopping you now. Where have the witches gone? Who are the witches now? Ask how they are stopping you now. Here we are.”
(Churchill,1985:176)

Particularly, such a song, pushes women audience to contemplate matters that they encounter during the seventies in Britain.

Second Wave Feminism addresses these issues in detail: property ownership, low-paid works, gender roles of women as professions rather than workers, education, birth control and abortion rights, etc. Second-Wave Feminism focuses on women's health and bodies. In “*On Feminist and Sexual Politics*,” Reinelt (1985) writes,

“In the 1960s, innovations in contraception and the right to legal abortion (1967 Britain) led to the recognition that, as Juliet Mitchel put it in 1966, “once childbearing becomes totally voluntary...its significance is fundamentally different. It needs no longer be the sole or ultimate vocation of woman: it becomes an option among others” (p:22).

Churchill’s *Vinegar Tom* (1976) and Gender Politics

Alice loves sex with any male she likes. She has an illegitimate kid and is uninterested in marriage. She continuously opposes society’s sexual roles for women. She had sex with a stranger in the first scene and does not seem to care when the guy asks her about her guilt:

Man: So you think that was no sin we did?

Alice: If it was I don’t care.

Man: Don’t say that.

*Alice: You’d say worse living here. Any time I’m happy someone Says it’s a sin.
(135-36)*

Thus, Alice disregards patriarchal values. She is unsatisfied with patriarchal society and asks the ‘Man’ to accompany to London, somewhere, when he informs her, “Each man has his own religion nearly, or none at all, and there’s women speak out too” (136), She requests his company. Prostitution disqualified her:

Man: A whore? Take a whore with me? Alice: I'm not that. Man: What are you then? What name would you put to yourself? You're not a wife or a widow. You're not a virgin. Tell me a name for what you are. (137)

The “Man’s response to Alice’s plea reflects his patriarchal upbringing. Churchill’s unidentified guy embodies any patriarch’s response, proving the point. Susan informs Alice that her local reputation as a prostitute is similar., “no one’s going to marry you because they know you here” (p:147). Thus, society echoed her denunciation of patriarchy and its gender norms. Her unusual sex views have earned her the moniker “whore.”

Jack accuses Alice of bewitching his sexual organ after failing to seduce her. Jack, sexually unsatisfied after three months without sex with his wife due to erectile dysfunction, approaches Alice, who even in dreams can stimulate him, and demands sex. He even bribes her with apples and money Alice really needs. After being rejected, he accuses her of being witch. Awkwardly, Susan falsely accuses Alice of witchcraft to protect herself from the witch hunters. Susan was tortured and imprisoned for seeing and aiding Alice’s witchcraft. Poor housewife Susan. She gets 3 children and multiple failures. Though her well-being is terrible, her spouse makes her pregnant every year. Susan's situation shows her spouse views her as an item. She can only submit to her spouse and procreate in society.

Yet, Susan does not complaint against her spouse as “he doesn’t beat” (p:147). She sees herself as better than Alice, a “whore” with little hope of marriage. Again, patriarchy has used marriage to victimize women to survive. Women do not recognize this and control other women, reinforcing patriarchy. Susan's words don't affect Alice. Instead, she faces arguments and brings her to Ellen, the herbal healer to “be rid of it” (p:155).

Susan’s abortion is denounced. She feels terrible for breaking maternal norms. In reality, Packer, the witch finder, convinced Susan of witchcraft: “you went to this good witch, and you destroyed the child in your womb by witchcraft” (p:167). The patriarchies thrive to force Susan to confess: “I was a witch and never knew it.. I didn’t know that I was so wicked” (p:174). Thus, Susan yields to male-imposed evil that women cannot protect their bodies. Blaming both Ellen and Alice for her ‘sin’ of drinking herbal medicine. Thus, Susan symbolizes defenseless women undergoing being ignored and patriarchally dominance by men.

Working-class midwife Ellen “earns her own living outside of the monetary system and worked outside the sanctioned medical/male establishment” (Reinelt, 1985: 32). She has shunned for her single-mother income. She is accused of witchcraft for helping women flee bad circumstances. Her charge shows that society dislikes her as a lone woman working outside patriarchal income standards. She defies the monetary-based socio-economic system by asking for tiny presents instead of getting paid money for her works. Her counsel to Betty, the wealthy landowner’s daughter of and the only stayer of the witch-hunting, to get married reveals the difficulty of living under patriarchy. Betty’s counsel:

“You get married, Betty, that’s safest... left alone for what? To be like me? There’s no doctor going to save me from being called a witch. Your best chance of being left alone is marry a rich man.” (169)

Ellen is not a witch who harms others. She is a flesh-and-bones lady who cares about others. Susan chose to terminate her kid. Ellen just assisted Susan escape her suffering and illness. Nevertheless, she is tormented, humiliated, and hung in a public plaza.

Betty, the daughter of the landowner, avoids this catastrophe partly because she is part of the upper-middle class and partly because she marries and accepts the traditional position of women. Betty was first portrayed as a rebellious girl. She refuses her parents’ request to marry a wealthy guy and wanders the hamlet at night. Her parents consider her isolation crazy. Betty says:

“Why am I tied? Tied to be bled. Why am I bled? Because I was screaming. Why was I screaming? Because I’m bad. Why was I bad? Because I was happy. Why was I happy? Because I ran out by myself and got away from them— and Why was I screaming? Because I’m bad, Why am I bad? Because I’m tied. Why am I tied? Because I was happy. Why I was happy? Because I was screaming.” (149)

Betty’s statements indicate her condition’s inevitability. She tries to escape but fails. Her parents restrict her. Instead, she is treated as a hysteric by a male doctor who tortures her into accepting the forced marriage. Betty regularly flees her residence to Ellen’s. She eventually gave up to the patriarchal agents for fear of being suspected of witchcraft.: “I’m frightened to come anymore.

They'll say I'm a witch" (p:169). Betty marries and avoids the village's four women's fate. Betty eventually succumbs to patriarchy's gendered expectations.

Conclusion

Vinegar Tom (1976) highlights how patriarchy limits women's independence. Women must conform to stereotypes, and any divergence is penalized. They are thieves, prostitutes, forced to confess, depressed, or shackled to bleed. If this fails, women are suspected of being witches and allotted to witch finders, patriarchal operatives established to torment unusual women, and executed. Thus, *Vinegar Tom* highlights the authority dynamics in male-dominated civilizations that drive women to adopt marginal gender roles and identities. Women who leave this community are shunned and punished. These feminist ideals may seem outdated to modern audiences, but they force them to rethink their power relations and body control. Theatrical representations of plays like *Vinegar Tom* empower women by creating new venues for them to discuss their bodies and sexuality. Feminist theatre may aim towards this. The feminist theatre RC (Raising Consciousness) Project matches the show perfectly.

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- وقائع المؤتمر العلمي السابع تحت شعار (العلوم الانسانية بين التحديات الراهنة والافاق المستقبلية) الذي اقامته كلية الآداب في جامعة واسط بتاريخ 2023/7/1
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