



## WOMEN FROM WITCH HUNTING IN THE SEVENTEENTH-CENTURY TO THE TWENTIETH CENTURY: A SOCIALIST FEMINIST CRITICISM OF CHURCHILL'S *VINEGAR TOM*

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### Abstract

As a socialist feminist dramatist of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Caryl Churchill draws attention to women's oppression through *Vinegar Tom* in which she experiments Brechtian theatrical techniques. She shifts in time, from the past to the present, to illuminate the historical context of women's oppression. She combines successfully witch hunting of the seventeenth century because of which many women were executed and social economic conditions of women in the 1970s. The aim of the study is to provide a socialist feminist criticism of Caryl Churchill's *Vinegar Tom*. First of all, the study gives background information about how women were oppressed under the cover of witch hunting in Britain in the seventeenth century. Then, it focuses on their ongoing tough life conditions in the twentieth-century. It also presents socialist feminist views which sought to shed light upon the influence of capitalism in reinforcing the patriarchal oppression over women at those times. After that, the study examines Churchill's *Vinegar Tom* as an example of socialist feminist drama. It reveals that Churchill indicates the role of institutions, men and submissive women in legitimising and perpetuating the patriarchal oppression over women to maintain the social, economic and political status quo of Britain for centuries.

**Keywords:** Caryl Churchill, Socialist Feminism, *Vinegar Tom*, Witch Hunting, Women's Oppression.

### Introduction

#### 1. Witch Hunting and Women's Oppression in the Seventeenth-Century Britain

Women have always been portrayed as more vulnerable to the temptations of the Satan than men for ages as they have been considered to descend from Eve who deceives Adam with the attention of the Satan in religious sources. Accordingly, while Notestein defines "witch" as "one who used spells and charms, who was assisted by evil spirits to accomplish certain ends" (2003, 2), Lea specifies "witch" as a woman who "has abandoned Christianity, has renounced her baptism, has worshiped Satan as her God, has surrendered herself to him, body and soul, and exists only to be his instrument in working the evil to her fellow creatures which he cannot accomplish without a human agent" (qtd. in Notestein, 2003, 4). In this context, those people, especially women, who did not accept the existence of God and who did harm to the others were considered to be witches. This belief was so strong in the seventeenth-century England that hundreds of women were accused of making a pact with the devil by involving in witchcraft. Britain began to persecute women with this claim during Elizabeth I's reign, and from then until the 1750s, about 200.000 women were tortured, burnt, and hung (Ewen, 2011, 24). Furthermore, in the seventeenth century, King James VI was so scared of the threat of evil and witchcraft that he published a book titled *Daemonologia* (*Demonology* in Latin) in 1567 as a guide of detecting witchcraft and ways of protecting from it. His hatred of witches was so well-known that it may not be seen as accident that Shakespeare created witches in *Macbeth* which he wrote during at those times.

Some studies of the seventeenth-century witch hunting revealed socio-political and economic relationship between accusers and accused people. They indicated that accusers were mostly men, whereas accused ones were women (Roper 1969, Keickhefer 1976, Macfarlane 1970). Witch-hunting was, in fact, woman-hunting. The witch referred to the opposite of a good profile of woman, wife and mother. It may be considered to be a warning for women as to what would happen when they behaved as subversive in the patriarchal society. More specifically, according to Jackson's study examining the Suffolk women's witchcraft trials as a sample case about the witchcraft persecution and women's confessions in seventeenth-century England, Anna, who was accused as a witch, was persecuted for her failure to fulfil the expected role of an 'ideal' wife and mother as she had been cursing and shouting at her husband and children (1995, 63). If a woman was married, the accusation towards her were of her wifeness and motherhood, whereas if she was single, she was often condemned as a sexual being tempting men. This indicates that the persecution of witches was, in fact, a kind of control mechanism with regard to women's sexual behaviour. According to Jackson, "[f]emale libido and sexual desire seem to have been associated with the temptings of the devil in Puritan as well as Catholic minds" (1995, 72). In trials, women used to be forced to confess about her pact with the devil. The Suffolk women in Jackson's study who confessed that they were witches also confessed that they were not 'good' mothers, wives and neighbours (1995, 74). Interestingly, in most witchcraft cases, original legal records do not survive. For instance, the trial documents which were published in 1619 did not include original confession records of the accused women (Crawford and Gowing, 2005, 247). Obviously, many

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women were forced to make some confessions about being involved in witchcraft, and some factitious records were saved about them.

Especially in the countryside in the seventeenth-century England, a considerably great number of women were involved in dairying and contributed to economy significantly. Marital status and social class affected working lives of women. Married women would work at different occupations besides maintaining household and child rearing, whereas widows and deserted wives would struggle to take care of themselves and their children. Also, while women from upper classes would not work, but they controlled the servants working at their homes. They would need skilled and experienced servants to look after their numerous possessions. They employed other women even for time consuming tasks such as the washing their silks and lace (Crawford and Gowing, 2005, 74). Thus, women were involved in different labours during a day. Whether it is paid or unpaid, their labour is not valued. Moreover, when something went wrong in dairying, farming or the domestic world, they were suspected of witchery. Therefore, it may be claimed that witch hunting helped to reinforce the social, economic and political status of Britain by extending the authority of the patriarchy "to justify its 'rights' that are not articulated and recognized easily" (Koçsoy, 2013,1257).

## 2. Socialist Feminism in the Fight against Patriarchy in the Twentieth Century

When it comes to the second half of the twentieth century, women still struggled against inequality of sexes in all parts of life. As a feminist critic, Kate Mitchell notes, "patriarchy is a universal (geographical and historical) mode of power relationships" between men and women (1971, 65). In this sense, feminism is an umbrella discourse and practice with regard to the inequalities of the sexes that have existed to some extent in every society for ages. However, there is a variety of feminisms for theorists and activists who regard themselves as feminists. Liberal feminism, radical feminism and socialist feminism may be given as examples. Although it appears to be easy to separate feminisms from each other in theory, it is often tough to do it as they emerge out of different political conditions. Specifically, socialist feminism was born in the 1970s as a response to gender discrimination on the basis of capitalism, racism and imperialism. Accordingly, socialist feminists were concerned with women's oppression in class-based societies as Marxist feminists are. Furthermore, they problematized patriarchal nature of racism and imperialism from which women suffered for centuries. They also exposed that male dominance had shifted in forms such as slavery, feudalism and capitalism throughout history and called for an economic independence for women to get rid of patriarchal oppression. They took women's liberation as "an issue which transcends class" (Connell, 1979, 12) because, as socialist feminist Eisenstein states, patriarchy reinforces the dialectical relationship between capitalist class structure and gender discrimination in a society (1979, 5). Therefore, in contrast to other forms of feminism, which had been concerned only with white heterosexual middle-class women, socialist feminism struggled for a world which would embrace a kind of sisterhood disregarding differences in class, race, ethnicity and sexual orientation. Thus, it aimed at overcoming political differences between working-class women and housewives, black and white women, lesbians and heterosexual women. In this context, socialist feminism may be considered to be a synthesis of marxist and radical feminisms which it regarded insufficient as alone to respond to women's oppression even though it maintains similar goals as the first feminist movements.

In the 1960s and 1970s, patriarchy, that is, male supremacy was considered to be women's enemy which excluded them from power in public and private spaces. For instance, the state and the school system were taken only as some explicit examples of patriarchal capitalist institutions as they impose patterns of uniformity ignoring difference and dissent of discrete sexes and rendering women depend on men in every part of life. Even the socialist program of the period was based on the work of Friedrich Engels (1884) who argued:

...the emancipation of women and their equality with men are impossible and must remain so long as women are excluded from socially productive work and restricted to housework, which is private. The emancipation of women becomes possible only when women are enabled to take part in production on a large, social, scale, and when domestic duties require their attention only to a minor degree. (311)

On the basis of this kind of program, it may be claimed that there was an integrated relationship between profit, capitalism, patriarchy and social control, each of which is essential to one another. Thus, the biological distinction between male and female was used to distinguish "social functions and individual power" (Eisenstein, 1979, 17). Robbing power from female, patriarchy made women dependent on male by defining them as unpaid workers, socialisers of children, reproducers as mothers and stabilisers of other workers at home. Socialist feminists Cox and Federici note that family is an institutionalisation of women's wageless labor, of women's wageless dependence on men, and consequently, an institutionalisation of a division of power which has successfully functioned in disciplining women and men as well (1975, 7). In socialist feminist thinking, family is also a patriarchal capitalist institution which allows the inheritance of



wealth only through the lineage of men, thus, reinforces the male supremacy over women at home. Thus, patriarchy extends its control to the private space of women's life. Women are confined to the home where they give birth to children and raise them, and cope with some gendered duties such as cleaning, cooking and maintaining any other household. Patriarchal limitations such as the lack of child care facilities and the denial of the right to a safe and free abortion restricts women's lives more (Briskin, 1989, 90-92).

Gender discrimination is not limited to the domestic work. Rather, it extends to work life in a capitalist society which enforces lower wages for women than men to keep women dependent on men by encouraging women to marry and thus, confining them to domestic life. Feminist economist Heidi Hartmann argues that married working women must also deal with domestic chores for husbands at home, and this weakens women's role in the labour market; thus, a kind of hierarchal domestic division of labour is created and perpetuated by the labour market, and vice versa (qtd. in Eisenstein, 1979, 208).

For a way out, socialist feminism underlines the necessity for a drastic transformation of all social, political and economic foundations of a society by challenging gender roles with the ideology of "the personal is political." More specifically, they propose the idea that gender roles in education, at work, at home and even sexuality must undergo changes. To achieve this, it is necessary provide to provide women with the same conditions as men in all parts of life, to respect and value women for all types of work within traditionally both male and female fields, and to free them from economic and gender specific constraints at home by reorganizing the family structure even in sharing child rearing responsibilities. Social feminists also suggest making alliances with organisations "such as trade unions and progressive community groups who organize around peace, anti-intervention, environmental issues and if they exist, parliamentary and extra-parliamentary socialist and communist parties" (Briskin, 1989, 92-95).

## Discussion

### Churchill as a Socialist Feminist Dramatist and a Critical Reading of *Vinegar Tom*

Feminist drama emerged as a separate genre of theatre in the 1960s which coincides with political, social and economic disruptions about women as mentioned above. In Britain, especially during the 70s and early 80s, some theatre companies such as the Monstrous Regiment, Red Ladder Theatre, Women's Theatre Group produced feminist plays. Instead of assaulting on men, they problematized inseparable relationship among sexuality, gender and politics in patriarchal societies. To do this, some of them followed Brechtian theatrical style with the faith in the possibility of change in human nature and perspective, thus, violated some dramatic nature of Aristotelian theatre. For instance, they focused on the ordeals of women in relation to each other and men. Rather than revolving around a single character, they presented a variety of equal voices of women to provide different points of view. More significantly, a role or an identity was taken on by different male or female characters to evoke questions about the distinction between gender and sexuality. That is, an actor could also take the role of a female character. Through transformations of gender and variability of role on stage, feminist drama challenged the rigid distinction between men and women and demonstrated the audience the fact that gender roles were socially constructed to allocate power to only men. The most significantly, some of the twentieth-century feminist plays shifted in time, from past to present, to display a critical vision of history throughout which women were oppressed in a way. For instance, Caryl Churchill's *Light Shining in Buckinghamshire* (1976), *Vinegar Tom* (1976) and *Cloud Nine* (1979), Wendy Kesselman's *My Sister in this House* (1980) re-presented history to make the audience interrogate the relationship among sexuality, gender and politics from distinct angles of vision (Keyssar, 1984, 1-6). Historical change with only a few props, a non-psychological depiction of characters and songs that interrupted action on a sudden and comment on it rouse questions in the audience's mind about both the past and present. Through Brechtian techniques, the feminist dramatists aimed to break the illusion of reality on the audience's eye and make the politics of power controlling women's life visible. These techniques were seen on stage in the 60s, but adopted by many feminist playwrights in the 70s and 80s. Caryl Churchill (1938-) is also among them.

Churchill is one of the well-known Second-Wave feminist dramatists who still writes in the Royal Court and the National Theatre. She always takes socialism and feminism as synonymous about which she notes in an interview "I feel strongly about both and wouldn't be interested in a form of one that didn't include the other" (Edgar, 1999, 19). What she would like to live in a world which she describes as "decentralised, nonauthoritarian, communist, non-sexist" (Nightingale, 1998, 17). She is concerned with a socialist feminist criticism of the inequalities resulting from the late twentieth-century capitalism and patriarchy in *Vinegar Tom* (1976), which is the main concern of the study. Written through a collaboration with the Monstrous Regiment, the play is comprised of twenty-one scenes and not divided into separate acts. The play is set in the seventeenth-century England, when women who disobey patriarchal norms were accused of witchcraft and persecuted as mentioned at the very beginning of the study. Shedding light on "a society



whose misogyny is grotesquely expressed in its condemnation of select women as witches” (Keyssar, 1984, 90), but concerning the women’s issues of even contemporary Britain, the play overlaps in spatial terms to question about women’s oppression throughout the history.

Influenced from the ideas of the French philosopher Michel Foucault (1926-1984) considerably, as a socialist feminist, Churchill interrogates the political aspects of gender discrimination on the basis of the reciprocal relationships among power, discourse and knowledge because, for Foucault, “[t]he exercise of power perpetually creates knowledge and, conversely, knowledge constantly induces effects of power. ... It is not possible for power to be exercised without knowledge, it is impossible for knowledge not to engender power” (1980, 51-52). Accordingly, to exercise power, patriarchy made use of discourse and knowledge. In this context, institutions such as family, school and church have been home to justify and perpetuate patriarchal ideology in a society for centuries. In *Vinegar Tom*, by overlapping centuries back to the seventeenth-century England, Churchill draws an institutionalised means that reinforces patriarchy and maintains it throughout the history.

In the introduction of the play, Churchill states that *Vinegar Tom* is “a play about witches with no witches in it; a play not about evil, hysteria and possessions by the devil” (1985, 130), and she adds that it is a play that explores “poverty, humiliation and prejudice, and how the women accused of witchcraft saw themselves” (1985, 130). As she states in the introduction of the play, Churchill associates the early modern-period attitudes to witches and continuing sufferings of women who attempt to revolt against established the conventions of patriarchy (1985, 129). As in the seventeenth-century England, the characters who are accused of witchery are women. In fact, they have nothing to do with witchery. Among them, Joan is an old beggar widow. Alice has already disobeyed patriarchy by going to bed with more than one partner and has a child. Susan is a mother who miscarries. The midwife Ellen treats the other women, and the young lady Betty is an unmarried rebellious girl. These mentioned female characters in the play are socially and economically marginalised, because they do not live in accordance with the conventions and the norms of their society. As can be seen above, in patriarchal thinking, their so-called ‘disobediences’ are as follows: Alice’s having sex with various men, Joan’s being old, poor and alone as a woman, Susan’s choice of abortion, Ellen’s helping other women by healing them with some herbs and Betty’s disobeying her parents. In the play, these disobediences bring about the accusation of witchery leading to the women’s persecution.

Each of the women mentioned above is, in fact, victimized by oppressors. At the very beginning of the play, Churchill asserts the idea that the oppressors are, in fact, men, who are products and perpetrators of patriarchal ideology in a society. Therefore, she creates a male character called “Man” who introduces himself as the devil. She animates a “popularly held belief during the seventeenth century that the devil existed as a material phenomenon and that any individual could meet him in a wood or on a country road. Chance meetings with strangers or animals could be explained in such a way” (Jackson, 1995, 72). The male character says: “I’m the devil. Man in black” (Churchill, 1985, 135). He seduces Alice to have sex at the roadside at night. He is a patriarch who uses and abuses women for his benefits. Although he has sexual intercourse with her, he can refuse her cruelly because he does not feel anything about her. Moreover, for him, Alice who wanders outside alone at night and has sexual intercourse with a man whom she does not know is not a ‘proper’ woman to take or marry to. Therefore, when she asks him to take her to London where he goes, he says: “Take you with me?... A whore? Take a whore with me?” (Churchill, 1985, 137). It is clear that Alice wants to get rid of all oppressions and poverty she suffers from and her “passionate yearning to flee from her village is sanctioned by her abject misery” (Zadeh and Ouliaeinia 2013, 313) because she even thinks of leaving her mother, Joan behind, by assuming that accompanying the man to London will provide new chances for her. She claims: “Any time I’m happy someone says it’s a sin” (Churchill, 1985, 136) because she goes against the conventional sexual norms of her society. Upon Alice’s rejection to being a whore, he raises his patriarchal voice that reflects the patriarchal culture he has been grown in: “What are you then?...You’re not a wife or a widow. You’re not a virgin” (Churchill, 1985, 137). The patriarchy asserts that a woman can have sexual intercourse only with her husband. Otherwise, she is called a ‘whore’. Alice has sexual intercourse and even appears not to consider having sex to be a sin when Man asks her: “...so you think that was no sin we did?” (Churchill, 1985, 135). However, “desire to carry out acts which were considered ‘morally bad’ was associated with evil. What we today might choose to call undesirable thoughts, impulses, or drives were in early modern England seen as external influences on the individual and were associated with the devil. In shorthand, Satan was everything you did not want to admit to” (Jackson, 1995, 74). Therefore, it is not Man who represents patriarchy, seeking to oppress women and label them with negative associations when they display any acts of deviation from their stereotypical identities, but Alice who becomes immoral and accused of being a witch later on. Alice says to Susan: “I hate my body” (Churchill, 1985, 146), and this approves that in a patriarchal society, women have always been othered through sexuality. Thus, the disturbing point is that although it is





Alice as a woman who is sexually abused by men and it is men who satisfy their sexual desires, Alice is the one who is blamed as she has a sexual relationship with a man, to whom she is not married, not the men.

Unlike a woman, it is seen appropriate for a married man to have sex with any women other than his wife. This contradiction is evident in Jack's oppression over Alice. Jack is Joan's and Alice's neighbour and married to Margery. As a married man, he wants to flirt with Alice as he thinks that she is a poor young girl whose father is dead and who has an illegitimate child, so can be prone to have a sexual relationship with him. He even offers Alice financial support for this: "I'd be good to you. I'm not a poor man. I could give you things for your boy..." (Churchill, 1985, 141). As noted by Rowe, his offering apples to Alice "reminds of the story of Eve and the Forbidden Fruit" (2015, 203). The reason is that in order to tempt Eve, Satan appears to her and seduces her by passing the Apple, the forbidden fruit to her. Eve accepts it in order to become an immortal. Churchill makes the audience question about the patriarchal oppression on women's life within the angle of Jack as a Satan-like figure who invites Alice to have sex and Alice who is labelled with negative associations such as witch and whore whether she accepts Jack's offer or not. From the seventeenth-century British perspective, the question which evokes in the audience's mind is who acts in collaboration with the evil: men or women? Considering this, it can be claimed that here, Jack represents the snake offering Alice apples and asking her for a sexual relationship. Because Alice does not accept the apples and refuses him, he later accuses her of a witch causing a problem with his erection. In fact, he cannot have sexual intercourse with his wife for three months because of lack of erection, but he puts the blame on Alice who becomes a scapegoat. These accusations also prepare Alice's death, as she becomes known as a witch in the society. Churchill makes the audience question about the patriarchal oppression on women's life within the angle of Jack as a Satan-like figure who invites Alice to have sex and Alice who is labelled with negative associations such as witch and whore whether she accepts Jack's offer or not. From the seventeenth-century British perspective, the question which evokes in the audience's mind is that who acts in collaboration with the devil: Jack or Alice? Thus, it is obvious that woman is culprit in all aspects, both when she refuses man for the sake of virginity and when she has sex with a single or married man. On the other hand, it is unfair that man has all rights to enjoy himself and establish himself true. Thus, through the plot revolving around Alice and her relation to the man called Man and her neighbour Jack, Churchill blurs the audience's mind to display the reality that it is patriarchy which reinforces men's control over women's body. Among the female characters accused of witchery in the play, it is only Alice who gains strength at the end of the play. She never gives up refusing the accusations that she is a witch and accepts being hanged. She says: "I'm not a witch. But I wish I was. If I could live I'd be a witch now after what they've done...Oh, if I could meet with the devil now I'd give him anything if he'd give me power. If I only did have magic, I'd make them feel it" (Churchill, 1985, 175). She implies her thirst for revenge of all oppressed women from patriarchal forces. Just like many other women, the result does not change for her as well. Her self-control over her own life is defeated by patriarchy which entraps them.

Churchill demonstrates that being from upper-class does not help women in patriarchal societies even though their life conditions are better than poor women, who suffer from both social and economic oppressions. To do this, she creates the character Betty who is introduced to the play after poor Alice's experiences stated above. Betty is the representative of the fact that no matter which class one is from, the woman is after all a woman and inferior to man according to the patriarchal thinking. Moreover, when she does not obey the patriarchal rules by rejecting the "affirmed" roles of women, then she is announced to be a "deviant" and "abnormal", and Betty is one of them. She is an upper-middle class girl representing "many girls who are grown up in patriarchal culture, thus, suffer from being in-between the roles, which their society expects them to adopt and the ones, which they dream to have" (Koçsoy 2010: 93). Specifically, her culture expects her to marry the man her parents wish her to do, but she does not want to do that, thus disobeys her patriarchal culture. She runs away from her house where her parents lock her and goes to Jack's and Margery's house. She says to them: "I'm not let go where I like...They [My parents] lock me up. I said I won't marry him so they lock me up" (Churchill, 1985, 139-40). However, the patriarchal views around her influence her and she feels to be in-between and becomes uneasy. For instance, instead of sympathizing with her, Jack and Margery remind her that she does not have any other choices than marrying that man. Furthermore, Ellen who suffers from patriarchal oppression as she is both poor and single also advises Betty to marry. It is because she realizes that there is no way out of the patriarchy which punishes the women who disobey itself by humiliating in the society. She says to Betty: "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" (Churchill, 1985, 169). It may be claimed that through Ellen's mouth, Churchill demonstrates a socialist feminist criticism of single women's bitter reality. Marrying a rich man and accepting dependency on him secures a woman in comparison to remaining a poor and single woman. This is how marital status and upper-class position affect women's lives.



In Betty's case, in addition to her parents' forcing her to marry the man they have chosen, the doctor who diagnoses her as a hysteric patient is also the representative of patriarchal forces. The doctor says to the young girl: "Hysteria is woman's weakness...because behaviour quite contrary to the patient's real feelings...you will soon be well enough to be married" (Churchill, 1985, 149). In fact, what he says to Betty is the patriarchal interpretation of hysteria. Furthermore, from the perspective of the seventeenth-century Church, [p]ersonal life crises such as suicide attempts and depression were almost always seen as temptations from the devil (Jackson, 1995, 74). Accordingly, in most witch hunters' eyes, she is most likely involved in an interaction with the devil and witchery. Thus, as a deviant and hysteric daughter, she may be labelled as a witch by the society. Obviously, not only the religion but also the medicine is used to enforce patriarchal oppression over women. Considering the doctor's point about Betty's diagnosis, it can be claimed that as Betty rebels against the patriarchal norms, he diagnoses hysteria in her and makes the young girl accept her situation to give in the unwanted marriage. The critic, Diamond, notes the signs of hysteria as follows: "depression, withdrawal, bouts of uncontrollable laughter and crying, muscular tics, shortness of breath, attacks of blindness, cutaneous anesthesia...as hysteria is called 'moral weakness of women'" (1997, 9-10). However, none of the signs mentioned above are seen in Betty. According to the critic, the physicians of the period recommended bleeding in case of hysteria because they considered hysteria as "a deficiency of blood which impeded mental functioning and thus moral development" (1997, 9). Therefore, Betty is tied to a chair to be bled by the doctor for her "irrational behaviours" (Churchill, 1985, 149). In that moment, she questions herself: "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..." (Churchill, 1985, 149). Betty seems to get stuck in the imprisonment of the patriarchal conventions. She ceases going to Ellen as well though she thinks that she finds peace in her house. The reason is that the possibility of her being called a witch. She says: "I'm frightened to come anymore. They'll say I'm a witch...And when I ran out of the house they say where was I going if not to meet other witches..." (Churchill, 1985, 169). It is obvious that Betty is handicapped by many patriarchal forces to which she, then, surrenders.

Another victimised character is Ellen. She represents many seventeenth-century women who were taken to the trials with accusation of non-Christian beliefs and healing practices. Although the women healers claimed that their practice was orthodox as it involved prayers, they could be accused of witchcraft (Crawford and Gowing, 2005, 45). She is a poor and single woman who makes herbal products to heal people and, called a 'witch' serving the Satan. She is labelled so, as she helps other women to abort with some herbal drugs. She is also sentenced to death even though what she does is far from witchcraft, as she states: "I've done nothing...it's healing, not harm. There's no devil in it" (Churchill, 1985, 170). However, from patriarchal thinking, she threatens the stability of domestic reproduction by giving an end to women's pregnancy, thus, she is announced to be a deviant. Ellen's case indicates that the religion and state are in a collaboration to hold the social, political and economic status quo of England under patriarchal authority (Aston and Harris, 2006, 23).

Through *Vinegar Tom*, Churchill also draws attention to how women from upper classes also could contribute to the oppression of poor and mostly single women in patriarchal societies, in which, thus, women are oppressed both by men and women who have internalized the patriarchal norms. For this, she creates female oppressors in the play such as Joan's wife Margery, Alice's friend Susan, the witch hunter Goody and two women professors of theology Kramer and Sprenger. All of them help the patriarchal system roll in the society. Including female oppressors from different classes, Churchill seems to present a correspondence to the oppressed women by asserting that no matter what class they are from, the women who internalize and affirm the norms established by patriarchy in their lives are both oppressed by men in the society and oppress the women around themselves. For instance, Margery is a middle-class farmer, landowner, and a married woman who has a dairy and works in it. Although she is richer than any other women in her surroundings, she is also exposed to her husband's oppression. She becomes frustrated with her boring housework especially when Jack, her husband, says to her: "You're a lazy woman, you know that?" (Churchill, 1985, 145). Ironically, at the same time, as a couple, they are harmonious in other matters, especially while accusing other women of being witches and putting blame on them. Margery convinces Jack that Joan is a witch who has cursed them and their cattle. Margery is a rich woman in contrast to Joan, the working-class woman, who is even in the need of the basic necessities of life, and whose husband, as the head of her family and the one responsible for the economy of the family, is dead. Therefore, Joan is from the subordinate class for Margery, and Margery finds the right to oppress her and accuses her of witchcraft which influences the couple's dairying. When Joan asks Margery: "I wonder could you lend me a little yeast?" (Churchill, 1985, 143), Margery does not help the woman in need, and she even expels her from her house. Thus, she duplicates the oppression over the poor woman in the patriarchal society. According to Jackson examining witch trials of the Suffolk women, nearly 50% of accusers were women in the seventeenth century (1995, 68). This striking percentage indicates the role



of upper-class and mostly married women in duplicating women's oppression as represented by the characters in the play.

Churchill calls the audiences to the action by reminding them of the fact that passivity is a way of perpetuating the patriarchy. Susan in the play is the representative character in this sense. She represents women who accept accusations despairingly. In contrast to landowner and middle-class woman Margery, Susan is a poor housewife, but married just like Margery. Susan has had several miscarriages and she is accused of infanticide, thus, witchcraft because of the abortion she has had with the herbal potion given to her by Ellen. The community seeks to make her feel guilty about what she has done as reflected in the claims made by the male witch hunter Packer: "you went to this good witch [Ellen], and you destroyed the child in your womb by witchcraft" (Churchill, 1985, 167). According to the patriarchy, Susan goes against the concept of fertility by leading to her unborn baby's death. It is obvious that she is a submissive woman oppressed by the patriarchal society which condemns her voluntary abortion and her husband who makes her give birth several times disregarding her health. "With no other language available to describe or explain her feelings, belief in the devil became the only answer (Jackson, 1995, 74) for every woman in the seventeenth century who does not feel herself as capable of overcoming patriarchy. Similarly, the only answer which is left to Susan is "Yes" to all accusations made against her even though she just cannot bear her miscarriages and wants to stop them. However, she hesitates and says: "I don't want it but I don't want to be rid of it. I want to be rid of it, but not to do anything to be rid of it" (Churchill, 1985, 155). She does not complain about her husband because "he doesn't beat" in her words (Churchill, 1985, 147), but rather she thinks that her situation is better than Alice's, because at least she is not known as a "whore" and has a chance of marriage. It also indicates how patriarchy uses marriage as a tool for victimization of women to sustain itself. Also, the women, who do not realize this fact and seek to dominate other women, strengthen the consolidation of patriarchy. That the patriarchal agents succeed to dominate Susan is clear in her respond to the accusations about herself: "I was a witch and never knew it...I didn't know that I was so wicked" (Churchill, 1985, 174). Indeed, her acceptance includes subversion ironically because it reveals how wickedness has become a patriarchal imposed idea to which women are confined. She seems to be a representative of patriarchal femininity because she accepts her "sin" unquestionably and blames Ellen and Alice for making her consume herbal potion for abortion. Thus, she stands for women who find other reasons for their misfortune instead of accusing patriarchy. It is also Susan who is the cause of Alice's and Ellen's deaths because she accuses Alice of being a witch. She says to the witch hunters: "she [Alice] took me to the cunning woman [Ellen] and they made me take a foul potion to destroy the baby in my womb...and she made a puppet...but that was my baby girl, and the next day she was sick...and dies" (Churchill, 1985, 167). Thus, it is so obvious that Susan is not only victimized by the patriarchal society but also the victimizer of other women; Alice, who is her close friend, and Ellen, who tries to help her. Her submissiveness brings her own and her friends' deaths.

As a witch hunter, Goody is also a female oppressor of the women. Her duty is to find and catch the women, suspected of witchery, and hang them with her colleague Packer. In this way, she makes money by serving patriarchy and helping to subjugate other women. The more witches she finds, the more money she gains. Thus, while investigating women to find any traces of the devil in them, she still insists that they are witches even if she is unsuccessful. As a capitalist woman, Goody behaves as a product and perpetuator of the capitalist and patriarchal system in which she has been grown up. She ignores the point that she harms the ones from her sex. She says to Packer in return of his help: "You're a considerate man, Mr. Packer. We earn our money" (Churchill, 1985, 171). It is clear that despite being a woman, Goody does not make any difference from Packer in the terms of oppressing women. Thus, Goody is one of the women in the play through whom Churchill indicates that some women also contribute to the subjugation of the women in patriarchal societies. Therefore, especially through Goody, the playwright draws the image of the fact that capitalism and patriarchy have always been hand in hand for centuries.

As a correspondence to Betty's doctor, Churchill presents two "educated" women oppressors in the play to indicate how education is also used as an ideological apparatus serving for patriarchal ends. They are Kramer and Sprenger, who are professors of theology, make a study about women and they are the authors of a book on witch-hunts entitled "The Hammer of Witches." In fact, the book, the original title of which is *The Malleus Maleficarum* in Latin was written by two German theologians called Heinrich Kramer and Jacob Sprenger in 1486 as a guidebook to detect and punish witches. They wrote the book in a question and answer format to facilitate the interrogation in witch hunting, and it served as a printed version of misogynistic ideas. Remained in print in the early modern period as well, the book lead to the persecution of many innocent women for nearly three centuries. By including these two theologians at the end of the play, it may be claimed that Churchill draws attention to the fact that, through even books, the church functions as an ideological state apparatus in Althusserian words, in facilitating the operation of patriarchal ideology. Althusser claims that





“one Ideological State Apparatus certainly has the dominant role, although hardly anyone lends an ear to its music: it is so silent!” by referring to the church (2001, 104). Thus, the playwright seems to underline “the power relations that govern societies dominated by males in which women are forced to accept marginal gender-roles and gender-identities” (Seal and Das, 2015, 149). Accordingly, although their book is not read most probably by such characters as Jack, Margery, Susan, Betty and her parents, it is so obvious that the patriarchal ideology is placed very well in the society by means of family and school, which Althusser considers much more effective than church as a state apparatus. Furthermore, it is striking that Churchill makes use of women for the roles of Kramer and Sprenger. The characters act as agents helping the patriarchal system to operate by imposing on the society the idea that some women have Devil in them and witchcraft is a sin, so they must be punished for the goodness of the society. Just like Margery and Susan, the theologians seem to have been conditioned by the patriarchal society. They approve witch hunting and persecutions with phallogocentric ideas by defining women as a secondary sex to men. They state women to be “feebler in both body and mind, more credulous, more impressionable, more carnal than a man” (Churchill, 1985, 177), thus, more prone to be witches than men. To hear these misogynistic ideas from the mouth of female actors shakes the audience, thus, the playwright indicates influentially how women could be alienated from their female selves through patriarchal way of life.

### Conclusion

In conclusion, through Brechtian theatrical devices, Churchill both violates the Aristotelian nature of theatre and breaks the illusion of the reality by evoking questions in the audience’s mind. She illuminates the dark sides of the patriarchal British culture throughout the history. Going back to the seventeenth-century England, she deconstructs the whole accepted understanding of sex which has been, in fact, a socially constructed concept; gender for centuries. The study indicates that how women are demonized by men and other women internalizing patriarchal norms, and how their challenge of the gender identities leads them to be labelled as “deviants,” thus, as witches by patriarchal agents. Thus, she indicates the role of institutions such as family, school and church besides men and women, who are either quite submissive or internalize patriarchal way of life in justifying and perpetuating patriarchal ideology to maintain the balance between politics and social and economic conditions of the country.

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