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FEMINISTIC APPROACH OF CARYL CHURCHILL

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ABSTRACT

Caryl Churchill, a socialist feminist writer of the twentieth century, employs Brechtian theatrical strategies to illustrate women's oppression in her play Vinegar Tom. She travels back and forth in time to provide insight on the history of women's enslavement. She deftly combines the seventeenth-century witch hunt, which resulted in the deaths of a huge number of women, with contemporary events. The economic and social standing of women at the time of the execution is detailed. This study tries to provide a “socialist feminist criticism of Caryl Churchill’s Vinegar King & Tom Churchill”. The study starts by setting the stage for the tyranny of witch-hunted women. Hunting was a popular pastime in seventeenth-century Britain.

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The book then shifts its focus to the challenges they encountered throughout the twentieth century. Furthermore, the viewpoints of socialist feminists are provided in order to illustrate the role of capitalism in perpetuating patriarchal dominance over women from the time. The study then moves on to “Churchill's Vinegar Tom as an example of socialist feminist theatre”. That is what it indicates. Churchill demonstrates how institutions, dominating men, and docile females work together to sustain patriarchal rule. For hundreds of years, women have helped to maintain Britain's established order in politics, economy, and society.

Key Words Socialist, Caryl Churchill, Feminism, Witch Hunting, Vinegar Tom, Women’s Oppression.

INTRODUCTION

Oppression of women and the practise of witch hunting in seventeenth-century Britain

Women always is been portrayed in religious texts as more susceptible to Satan's temptations than males ever since the Bible's creation story of Adam and Eve. One definition of a witch is a woman who “has abandoned Christianity, renounced her baptism, worshipped Satan as her God, 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” (Notestin 2003, 2). In this setting, the term “witch” was used to refer to anybody who did evil and did not believe in the presence of God, particularly women. Hundreds of women in seventeenth-century England faced accusations of witchcraft because of this widespread belief. Women were first persecuted in Britain on the basis of this accusation during the reign of Elizabeth I; the persecution continued until the 1750s, during which time about 200,000 women were tortured, burned, or hanged. Furthermore, “King James VI in 7th century” was so concerned about the dangers of evil & witchcraft that he

wrote a book called “Daemonologia (Demonology in Latin) in 1567” to help people recognise the signs of witchcraft & defend themselves. Shakespeare's notorious antipathy for witches suggests that their presence in Macbeth was no coincidence.

There was a social, political, and economic connection between the accusers and the accused, according to certain studies of the witch hunts of the seventeenth century. Roper (1969), Keickhefer (1976), and Macfarlane (1970) found that males made up the majority of accusers while females made up the majority of those who were accused. Actually, what were being called “witch hunts” were attacks on women. The witch was describing the antithesis of a better woman, mother & wife. It might serve as a cautionary tale about the repercussions of disruptive behaviour by women in patriarchal societies. According to Jackson, whose research into witch “persecution & women's confessions in 17th century England” used the Suffolk women's witchcraft trials as an example, the accusation that Anna was a witch arose from her failure to live up to the standard of a “ideal” wife and mother by, among other things, cursing and shouting at them (1995, 63). A married woman was frequently criticised for only caring about her husband and children, while a single woman was generally seen as little more than a sexual monster out to seduce men. This evidence points to the persecution of witches as a means of regulating women's sexual behaviour. As he puts it, “female libido and sexual desire appear to have been connected with the tempting of the devil in Puritan as well as Catholic minds” (1995, 72). During trials, women were allegedly coerced into admitting they had made a pact with the devil, as claimed by Jackson. All of the women in Suffolk that Jackson interviewed who acknowledged to being witches also said they were not “nice mothers, wives, or neighbours (1995, 74)”. The original court paperwork in most witchcraft cases have mysteriously disappeared. For instance, the first confession recordings of the accused ladies were not included in the 1619 trial papers provided to the public (Crawford & Gowing, 2005, 247). Many women were clearly pressured into making false confessions about their involvement in witchcraft, and some fabricated records were preserved on them.

Many women in seventeenth-century England, especially in rural areas, participated in dairying and made significant economic contributions. Employment opportunities for women varied depending on factors including marital status and economic standing. Widows and abandoned spouses would have a far harder time providing for themselves and their children than married women, who would work outside the house in addition to caring for their families. Furthermore, upper-class women did not work, but they did have control over the household staff. They would need highly skilled staff to take care of their vast estate. Their silks and lace were cleaned by other ladies since it took too much time (Crawford & Gowing, 2005, 74). Therefore, women were doing a wide range of tasks throughout the day. Whether they are paid or not, their work is not valued. In addition, they were suspected of witchcraft if anything untoward occurred in the realms of dairying, farming, or domestic life. By extending the authority of the patriarchy “to justify its 'rights' that are not easily articulated and recognised (Koçsoy, 2013)”, some have suggested that witch hunts helped to solidify “Britain's social, economic & political status”.

THE ROLE OF 20TH-CENTURY “SOCIALIST FEMINISM” IN THE STRUGGLE AGAINST PATRIARCHY

The second part of the twentieth century saw little change in the widespread discrimination women experienced. According to feminist researcher Kate Mitchell (1971, 65), patriarchy “is a universal (geographic and historical) mode of power relationships between men & women”. Feminism, in this sense, is both a vocabulary & a set of practises that cover the sex differences that have existed in every society for ages. However, feminist intellectuals and activists may choose from a number of different feminisms. Some variants of feminism include the liberal, radical, and socialist varieties.

Despite how easy it may appear in theory, feminisms may be difficult to categorise due to their varied political origins. “Socialist feminism”, in particular, developed in the 1970s as a response to capitalist, racist, and imperialist ideologies that promoted gender

inequality. So, much like Marxist feminists, socialist feminists worried about women's oppression in a capitalist society.

The nature of patriarchal racism & imperialism, which women have endured since centuries, was also called into question. They exposed the many manifestations of male superiority throughout history, from slavery to feudalism to capitalism, and they pushed for women's economic autonomy as a means of ending patriarchal rule. "Because, as socialist feminist Eisenstein argues, patriarchy reinforces the dialectical relationship between capitalist class structure and gender discrimination in society (1979, 5)", these individuals saw women's liberation as a "classless issue" (Connell, 1979, 12). "Socialist feminism" advocated for a society that would accept a kind of sisterhood regardless of class, colour, ethnicity, or sexual orientation, in contrast to earlier versions of feminism that were only concerned with white heterosexual middle-class women. With this goal in mind, it attempted to unite women of all socioeconomic backgrounds, races, and sexual orientations. "Socialist feminism" may be seen as an amalgamation of Marxist & Radical feminists, both of which were rejected by "Socialist feminism" since they were insufficient in combating women's oppression on their own.

Male dominance, or "patriarchy," was seen as the adversary of women in the 1960s and 1970s because it denied them access to positions of power in both the public & private spheres. Patriarchal capitalist institutions, such as the state and the educational system, were used as examples because they promote uniformity while disregarding the uniqueness of each gender and teaching girls to rely only on their male counterparts.

"...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)

“Profit, capitalism, patriarchy, and social control” are all interconnected and crucial to one another in this kind of plan. Therefore, “social functions and individual power” (Eisenstein, 1979, 17) were classified according to biological gender differences. Patriarchy stifled women's agency by relegating them to unpaid domestic labour, child care, child socialization, reproduction, and workforce stability. Socialist feminists “Cox & Federici” point out that the family structure institutionalizes the subordination of women to males and the division of work that has historically served to discipline both sexes (1975, 7). According to socialist feminist theory, the family is a capitalist institution that promotes patriarchy by allowing wealth to be passed down only via male heirs and therefore maintaining male dominance in the household. Consequently, patriarchy has more influence over women's personal life. Women have little freedom outside the home and must undertake traditional female roles such as childbirth, childrearing, and domestic work. Women's lives are further confined by patriarchal restraints such as a lack of child care facilities and the denial of the right to a safe and free abortion (Briskin, 1989, 90-92).

The practise of discriminating against women in the workplace is not exclusive to the home-based sector. Instead, it permeates all aspects of life in a capitalist society, where women are expected to labour for less pay than men in order to force them into marriage and therefore confine them to the house. Heidi Hartmann, a feminist economist, argues that the labour market creates and perpetuates a kind of hierarchical domestic division of labour, and that this in turn diminishes women's role in the workforce (qtd. in Eisenstein, 1979, 208).

“Socialist feminism”, which challenges gender conventions with the idea that “the personal is political,” sees a complete overhaul of society's social, political, and economic foundations as the only viable alternative. In particular, they advocate for a change in traditional gender roles across a variety of settings, including the classroom, the workplace, the family, and even the bedroom. To achieve this goal, the traditional gender roles within the

home must be re-evaluated, and women must be freed from the economic and gendered constraints that have held them back from achieving their full potential. This includes the responsibility of childrearing. Feminists who identify as social often support working with other groups, including “trade unions and progressive community groups that organise around peace, anti-intervention, and environmental issues, as well as parliamentary and extra-parliamentary socialist and communist parties, if they exist” (Briskin, 1989, 92-95).

VINEGAR TOM & CHURCHILL: A “SOCIALIST FEMINIST DRAMATIST ANALYSIS”

British writer Caryl Churchill is well-known for her thought-provoking plays that often tackle divisive social and political issues. The play “Vinegar Tom,” for instance, is widely regarded as one of her most illustrious works because of her exploration of feminist and socialist principles in that piece. The play set in 17th-century England, combines historical drama with contemporary themes such as sexism, patriarchy, and oppression to raise important questions about these issues. In its original form, “Vinegar Tom” skilfully intertwines the struggles of women in an unjust society with the ongoing resistance to patriarchal institutions. The story's protagonist, Vinegar Tom, is a metaphor for the way women who were considered non-conformists or outcasts in the past were treated by society. Using a variety of theatrical techniques, including music and song, Churchill exposes the systemic oppression and persecution that women, especially those who are branded as witches in a culture ruled by males, experience. This is done in order to call attention to the situation.

Churchill's socialist feminist worldview is on full display in her portrayal of women as helpless victims of a society that devalues and marginalises them. By focusing on the economic, social, and gender-based power differentials that supported the trials, the play makes linkages between the witch trials and contemporary societal inequalities. Churchill illustrates how accusations of witchcraft were often motivated by prejudice against

independent women who dared to challenge social norms. Churchill's example of how charges of witchcraft were frequently based on fear of powerful women who opposed the existing standards reflects the difficulties faced by women struggling for independence and equality in Churchill's present day. The socialist and feminist issues that Churchill explores extend beyond those of "Vinegar Tom." Her body of work consistently challenges conventional wisdom and societal norms. Her works, such as "Top Girls" and "Cloud Nine," probe gender norms, societal stratification, and the impact of political ideology.

Churchill's approach is unique in that it incorporates disjointed narratives, non-traditional structures, and a playful spirit. She does more than just describe the issue; she dissects and reconstructs it to provoke thought and present a new take on the story. Churchill, a socialist feminist playwright, uses her plays to force audiences to confront the patriarchal systems that keep women in the margins and perpetuate inequality. She achieves this goal by employing forms of media that force viewers to face down repressive regimes. Her works are not didactic but rather meant to spark discussions about the interconnectedness of gender, social standing, and political power. Finally, "Vinegar Tom" by Caryl Churchill exemplifies her socialist feminist playwriting style. By depicting the nuanced relationship between gender, power, and societal structures, she challenges the injustices women have faced throughout history and the present. Her unconventional approach to the stage has earned her a prominent place among feminist thespians for the way in which she challenges her audiences to re-evaluate long-held assumptions and the status quo. Her body of work continues to be an important addition to the feminist discourse and the theatrical landscape, encouraging introspection and discussion of the nuanced relationships between privilege and oppression.

CONCLUSION:

In summary, by employing Brechtian theatrical techniques, Churchill subverts the traditional structure of theatre and dismantles the audience's perception of reality, prompting them to question ingrained beliefs. She sheds light on the darker aspects of patriarchal British

culture spanning history. Journeying back to 17th-century England, she challenges the longstanding societal constructs around gender, revealing it as a socially constructed idea. Her work highlights how women are often demonized by both men and women who have internalized patriarchal norms. Their resistance to societal gender norms leads to their vilification as “deviants,” ultimately branded as witches by those upholding patriarchal values. This exploration underscores the significant role played by institutions such as family, schools, and the church, alongside both compliant individuals and those who have internalized the patriarchal way of life. They collectively uphold and perpetuate patriarchal ideology, thereby maintaining a delicate balance between politics, social structures, and the economic conditions of the country.

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