

SOCIAL LIMITATIONS OF
WOMEN AS A SECOND SEX IN
CARYL CHURCHILL'S PLAYS

Thesis submitted to the
Institute of Social Sciences
in partial fulfilment of the requirements
for the degree of

Master of Arts
in
English Language and Literature

by
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September 2012

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To All Women

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AUTHOR DECLARATIONS

1. The material included in this thesis has not been submitted wholly or in part for any academic award or qualification other than that for which it is now submitted.

2. The advanced study in the English Language and Literature graduate program of which this thesis is part has consisted of:

i) Research Methods courses both in the undergraduate and graduate programs.

ii) British Drama as well as French Feminism including gender studies based on Simone de Beauvoir's *Second Sex*, and examination of psychoanalytical theories as well as critical approaches, which have contributed to this thesis in an effective way.

3. This thesis is composed of the main sources including several books by the major authors discussed in comparison; and secondary scholarly sources from academic as well as newspaper articles journals and theoretical books on the history of gender roles and women studies.

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ABSTRACT

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SOCIAL LIMITATIONS OF WOMEN AS A SECOND SEX IN CARYL CHURCHILL'S PLAYS

Gender is not related to one's sex but formulated according to one's culture. From the earliest years of a little girl, she is doomed to a feminine character and roles by the influence of other people and she gets conquered with the maternity because she is born as a female. She is not born with the idea of being a woman but she acquires it gradually. This thesis aims to examine the gender issues and patriarchal aspects of *Vinegar Tom* (1976) and *Top Girls* (1982) by Caryl Churchill to demonstrate gender role problems which has been experienced from past to present. Churchill illuminates the social limitations of women in society by hinting different women types from different classes. In *Top Girls*, there is a prostitute and a loyal mother character. In *Vinegar Tom*, there is a liberated woman who is fond of her sexuality and a loyal mother with three children. These characters and more have different lives but deal with the same problems that stem from being the second sex as a woman.

Key Words:

Gender issues, Feminist Plays, Second Sex, Social Construction of Gender Roles, patriarchal society, Self-Identity

KISA ÖZET

Ayşe Nuriye KARACA

Eylül 2012

CARYL CHURCHILL OYUNLARINDA KADINLARIN İKİNCİ CİNSİYET OLARAK TOPLUMSAL SINIRLANMALARI

Toplumsal cinsiyet kişinin biyolojik cinsiyetine göre değil kültürüne göre belirlenir. Küçük bir kız hayatının ilk yıllarından itibaren diğer insanların etkisiyle kadınsı bir karaktere ve role mahkum edilir ve kadın olarak doğduğu için annelik içgüdüleriyle kuşatılır. O, kadın olma fikriyle doğmamıştır, bu düşüncüyü zamanla edinmiştir. Bu tezin amacı Carly Churchill'in oyunları *Vinegar Tom* ve *Top Girls*'ü ele alarak cinsiyet meseleleri ve ata erkil açığı inceleyerek geçmişten günümüze gelen cinsiyet problemlerini örneklerle göstermektir. Churchill toplumun farklı kesimlerinden farklı kadınları ele alarak kadınların sosyal kısıtlanmalarını ortaya çıkarıyor. *Top Girls*'te bir fahişe ve sadık bir anne varken, *Vinegar Tom*'da cinselliğine düşkün özgür bir kadın ve yine üç çocuklu sadık bir anne var. Bu karakterler ve dahası farklı hayatlar yaşarken kadın olmaktan ileri gelen aynı problemlerle uğraşıyorlar.

Anahtar Kelimeler:

Toplumsal Cinsiyet Sorunları, Feminist Oyunlar, İkinci Cinsiyet, Cinsiyet Rollerinin Toplumsal Yapımı, ata-erkil toplum, Öz kimlik

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First of all, I want to dedicate my thesis to my family. I am very grateful to my loving parents, İnci and İrfan KARACA whose words of encouragement and push helped me complete my work. My special thanks to my sisters Sümeyra, İkra and Esra for their beliefs, prays, supports and love during the thesis period.

A special feeling of gratitude to my gracious friends Nadide KARAMEMİŞ and Ayla YAĞMUROĞLU who always support me both in personal life and in academic life. They really helped me very much to complete the thesis.

With all sincerity, I want to thank my thesis advisor Assist. Prof. Dr. Kimberly Anne Brooks-Lewis for advising me on this thesis, and for her endless guidance and support. She encouraged me to finish the thesis, and thanks to her I tried to do my best.

Finally, I want to thank to all my other close friends for their lasting help, belief, prayer, support, and love. I am lucky and happy to have them.

INTRODUCTION

The social position of women has throughout history been an important topic in society. The secondary status of women has been argued and developed, but has never completely changed. In some strict patriarchal societies women are still not considered to be individuals and their skills and abilities are not seen to be important as men's. The roles given to women depend on their sex (gender) do not offer the opportunity to develop their individual interests, a problem that is not recognized. Although society is unable to interfere with one's "sex", it defines a person's gender and roles.

In Modern Feminist drama in British literature, the problems that women face in real life are shown to the audience in order to make them realize how women have been controlled from the beginning of time. For over thirty years, Caryl Churchill has carried forward the feminist perspective and brought to light gender problems in patriarchal societies with her plays, such as *Owners* (1972), *Light Shining in Buckinghamshire* (1976), *Vinegar Tom* (1976), *Traps* (1977), *Cloud Nine* (1979), *Top Girls* (1982), and *Fen* (1983). Her two plays *Vinegar Tom* and *Top Girls* are the most attractive feminist dramas since they highlight women's suffering as a "second sex" and show how society and its norms impose roles on women.

The purpose of this thesis is to focus on the socially oppressed female characters of *Vinegar Tom* and *Top Girls* struggling in a patriarchal society where a woman takes on male roles or else continues performing her socially gendered roles in order to be accepted by her male dominated society. This thesis also looks into why

women in the plays must sometimes act like men in order to maintain the life they desire.

Even though Caryl Churchill is known as a socialist feminist playwright, she does not see herself as a feminist. In fact, Churchill's aim is to point out that gaining an individual victory by imitating males as depicted in *Vinegar Tom* and *Top Girls* is not a real success for women's social advancement.

Although the sources used in this thesis were written at different times, they are related in representing the continuing problem of gender roles in today's patriarchal societies. For instance, Simone de Beauvoir, a French feminist, wrote her book *The Second Sex* (originally in French *Le Deuxième Sexe*) in 1949. Although it was written more than sixty years ago, today's feminist critics such as Judith Butler and Judith Lorber benefit from de Beauvoir's work. Thus, *The Second Sex* is an important piece in this thesis in exploring how one becomes a woman and why Churchill's female characters in her two plays suffer from social limitations because of their gender.

I analyze female characters from *Vinegar Tom* and *Top Girls* by focusing on gender issues in the light of psychoanalytic theory and from a feminist perspective in order to demonstrate how Churchill, as a British playwright, draws attention to gender problems in her society. These plays focus on gender relations, oppressed and liberated women by mixing different eras and bringing a wide range of women together. Churchill illuminates the social position of women by portraying different types of women from different social classes. For instance, in *Top Girls* both a prostitute and a loyal mother character are portrayed together. Similarly in *Vinegar Tom* a liberated woman who is fond of her sexuality and executed for it is portrayed.

In the first chapter of this thesis, the psychoanalytic theories of Sigmund Freud, Jacques Lacan, and Robert S. McElvaine are introduced in order to analyze the difference between gender and sex, and the ways in which gendered roles are traditionally forced upon people. In the process, feminist viewpoints are introduced to reveal and explore the construction of identity based on the unconscious which have increasingly been used in psychoanalytical theories. de Beauvoir's explanation of women as a second sex in French society is also used to show how and why one takes on the gender of woman in the minds of others.

The second chapter includes a literature review of dramas that are based on gender issues. In the first part, the history of woman as a second sex in different nations and cultural traditions is explored. From ancient times, women's situation has not been altered enough to say that a man and a woman have equal social positions in all societies. By looking at plays written by different playwrights from different nations and times the history of previously constructed gender roles in drama is shown as well.

In the third and the fourth chapters I focus on Caryl Churchill's two plays *Vinegar Tom* and *Top Girls*, looking at female characters from the perspective of gender roles. In the concluding chapter, I summarize how these two plays are contemporary examples of how women are seen as a second sex by comparing and contrasting the two main characters of the two plays.

CHAPTER I

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

1.1 Gender Identity as a Discourse

In this section I will explain gender, its restrictions on women, and the psychological background of gender identity. Human beings are not born as Turkish, African, American, British, Indian, or Russian. However, our minds are shaped according to culturally constructed identities. Culture institutes the gender roles of its members. Gender roles are not explained; rather they are unconsciously absorbed and performed without questioning by most people. There are three levels of gender: sociocultural, interactional, and individual.

At the sociocultural level, gender governs access to resources (for instance, in determining occupations that remain largely segregated and stratified by sex). At the interactional level, women and men (and girls and boys) are treated differently in ordinary everyday interactions, and they come to behave differently in return. At the individual level, women and men come to accept gender distinctions as part of the self-concept. They ascribe to themselves the traits, behaviors, and roles that are the norm for people of their sex within their culture. (Mary Crawford and Roger Chaffin 87-88)

The question to be asked is how and why women and men differ from each other. Women, because of their physical and psychological nature, are different. Thus, defining women based on men's physical and psychological features is insulting because a man is not superior to a woman. Only the societal constructed roles of gender, which are mostly connected to a patriarchal mentality, bring out

the differences of men and women. This patriarchal assignment limits women socially, generalizing them as imperfect men, giving women a secondary place as “the second sex.” As Judith Lorber points out, “...men set the standards and values, and women are the Other who lack the qualities that the dominants exhibit. Men are the actors, women the reactors. Men thus are the first sex, women always the second sex” (Lorber 3).

First, I would explain the meaning of “gender”, why we needed to create it while we have the word “sex”, and when and how it first appeared. Gender is basically the social identity of individuals, determining how women and men are supposed to behave according to their sexes. Sex determines gender and gender determines the lines of women and men on the stage of life. Judith Gardam and Michelle Jarvis define gender as “the socially constructed roles of women and men ascribed to them on the basis of their sex, [which] refers to biological and physical characteristics” (qtd in Kinsella 165). In another words, gender is like the clothes we wear. It is a social status of individuals that is established by the norms and roles of society (Lorber 15).

In some societies, parents and teachers react toward children according to their “gender”. Hence, socialization according to sex differences is begun as the child is conditioned by the people around him or her. As Margaret Mooney Marini argues, gender is one of the permanent facts of humankind throughout their lives as “gender role socialization continues in adulthood via experiences in the workplace, interaction with family and friends, and the ongoing influence of the media” (Marini 109). Everything around us teaches us our gender roles, determining our socially-constructed gender identity and how we act.

Even though boys and girls are born without stereotypical ideas about the sexes, in due time they split apart from each other with the rules of society and the differences of biology. Simone de Beauvoir suggests that “one is not born, but rather becomes, a woman” (de Beauvoir 295), a situation that can be applied to men as well. Thus, it is safe to say that, as Judith Butler denotes, “gender is an aspect of identity gradually acquired” (Butler 35). From the earliest years, a little girl is restricted into a feminine character through the influence of other people. She is not born with the idea of being a woman, but gradually acquires it because of her society’s expectations.

A little boy, from the beginning of his life, has something “extra” (a genital organ) to integrate his identity while the little girl does not have anything to do so. De Beauvoir observes the issue of dolls for a little girl that;

... while the boy seeks himself in the penis as an autonomous subject, the little girl cuddles her doll and dresses her up as she dreams of being cuddled and dressed up herself; inversely, she thinks of herself as a marvellous doll. (de Beauvoir 306)

According to Roland Barthes, toys always mean something in a child’s world and they form a ‘microcosm of the adult world’: “Toys basically represent the institutions of our societies: the Army, Broadcasting, The Post Office, Medicine” (qtd in Caldas-Coulthard and Leewun 93)

Toys are the models of real world, and children grow up by imitating this, which includes gender roles. The girl child plays with Barbies and a boy child chooses to play with Action Man or Iron Man. While a Barbie is associated with beauty and calmness, Action Man symbolizes manliness.

A person's sex is biological, yet gender identity is formed by society. Sex does not determine the roles of individuals, but gender does. According to gender, different roles are assigned to, and society expects people to follow those roles in order to their gender to be a member.

1.2. Gender as an Unconscious Behaviour

The most significant issue about gender and male/female relations is that every act we do as a female or male has a psychological background. Why would a girl usually like to play house rather than be a warrior in a war play? Why is she mostly dressed in pink rather than blue or any other colour during her childhood? In most societies, pink is used for baby girls and blue is for baby boys, as Crawford and Chaffin explain, "The pink or blue blanket that soon enfolds the baby represents gender. The blanket serves as a cue that this infant is to be treated as a boy or a girl, not a generic human, from the very start" (Crawford and Chaffin 89).

Usually, women's status is related to social class, political and economical power. If she has economic independence, she is counted as being in a better position than a man in society. This is surprising, but it shows that if a woman gains some properties, she puts on herself male roles and acts like a male because all the vital necessities for survival such as agriculture, animal husbandry, industrial facilities and so on are all controlled by men. But there are some societies which women do not have the right to have economic power. This has been the same in politics, as Marini indicates "there is also no concrete evidence of any society in which women have held of the political power or more than a

small percentage of the power of force” (Marini 97). There are only a few examples of the social equality of women and men in the past, (such as in an Israeli Kibbutz or in the U.S.S.R.) (Marini 97). In most societies there is inequality between the two sexes. As Judith Lorber explains that,

The major social and cultural institutions support this system of gender inequality. Religions legitimate the social arrangements that produce inequality, justifying them as right and proper. Laws support the status quo and also often make it impossible to redress the outcomes - to prosecute husbands for beating their wives, or men for raping vulnerable young girls. In the arts, women's productions have been ignored so often that they have been virtually invisible, leading Virginia Woolf to conclude that Anonymous must have been woman. (Lorber 6)

Gender may restrict both sexes, but it is specifically a limitation for women.

From the beginning, gender identity is engraved on one’s subconscious. Rosalind Minsky interprets Sigmund Freud’s definition of the unconscious,

... what is most distinctive about unconscious is that although it is constructed in early childhood out of our earliest desires and losses, its system of frozen meanings influences everything we do, whether we are five or eight-five, without being aware of it. (Minsky 3)

We are not born the way we are brought up. Even though the biological differences between the two sexes leave individuals some lack of choice about ground duties; such as a man is inability to children, and it is in some societies expected that a woman at work outside the home or do a job that requires muscle power, such as building a construction. In

... all societies label some tasks as 'men's' work and others as 'women's' work. Although there is a great deal of variability in the tasks that are assigned to each sex across societies, whatever is labeled 'women's work' is usually seen as less important and desirable. (Crawford and Chaffin 90)

The socially constructed roles of the two sexes mean that gender makes individuals feel, both consciously and subconsciously separated, and in a way unequal to each other.

Freud claims that each person is born with certain instincts. She or he intends to satisfy their feelings and wishes such as the need of food and a warm place to feel safe and sleep. Freud names this satisfaction sexually. There are three stages of childhood. The last stage involves this thesis' topic, the first one. Freud intentionally names this stage as *phallic* instead of genital because he considers the penis is important, not the vagina. In this stage, the Oedipus complex occurs. The Oedipus complex is the sexual desire of the child toward its mother in basic words. The boy sees his mother as the 'love object' and the girl gains the 'homosexual' desire towards her mother unconsciously. She gets confused when she cannot find any differences between her mother and herself as a result she turns her feelings to the father, which is resulted as penis envy in accordance with Freud's claims.

Jacques Lacan, just like Freud, emphasizes the importance of the pre-Oedipal stage for the child. But, according to him, the sexual identity is built before the Oedipal period and he does not associate desire with sexuality. He thinks that Desire and Law are the structural cornerstones of any identity. Identity is built on neither genetic tendency nor unfolding psychological development. Thus, when the baby is born, it knows nothing about "being self". At the age of six months, it starts to reflect

its own image to the other objects and sees its projection on them like in a mirror. Lacan names this period as the “Mirror Stage”, the baby gets the sense of separation from the mother. If this mirror stage is adapted to patriarchal societies; while the girl child sees and identifies herself through a mother who has been degraded by her own society, she unconsciously acquires the same manners as her mother.

In opposition to what Freud and Lacan put forward, Karen Horney as a feminist psychoanalyst has established a new understanding of a person’s gender development. She believes that since parents who have the basic views of Freud where the father is in a more desirable position in society; ignoring women’s actual place in the world is inevitable bring us up. However, Horney brings up the question of why women are subjugated to the idea of being deficient and incomplete. She asks:

How is it that we can observe this penis envy occurring as an almost invariable typical phenomenon, even when the subject has not a masculine way of life, where there is no favoured brother to make envy of this sort comprehensible and where no “accidental disasters” in the woman’s experience have caused the masculine role to seem the more desirable?

(Horney 38)

In fact, there is womb and vagina envy rather than penis envy, Horney proclaims. Robert McElvaine interprets and supports Horney’s theory by indicating that males have fears of feeling biologically inferior to females in society and propounds the idea of penis envy was initiated to put women into a secondary place in society. He believes that since a man is unable to give birth and nourish a baby, he feels insecure and tries to assert superiority himself over a woman.

Because of this relative incapacity, many men suffer, largely subconsciously, from what might be termed “womb envy” and “breast envy.” So, while making the claim that women are “by nature” inferior, many men have actually harboured a fear that women are, in certain respects, by nature superior. (McElvaine 3)

Thus, men have created a social superiority over women, in order to repress their own deficiencies.

What is important about these theories is that in Caryl Churchill’s plays *Vinegar Tom* and *Top Girls*, there are different kinds of women that fit de Beauvoir’s analyse of women’s position in society and Lacan’s and Freud’s female definition. If Freud’s theory is embedded into Churchill’s play *Top Girls*, the fictional/historical masculine character Pope Joan is an example. She is a symbolically castrated female figure that wants to be a male in the society, getting education and a higher status, but she fails at the end because she gives birth during a religious procession. Marlene in *Top Girls* is also a woman who has been presented with masculine manners because she is in the position of management of an Employment Agency. In her society, having a success like that is attributed to the “first sex” which is man. In *Vinegar Tom*, women’s need of a man in their lives or their acceptance of witchery accusations made by the male-centred society show that each female character in each play has acquired a male view of themselves. Thus, this situation can be related with the Lacan’s Mirror Stage, since it suggests that to gain an identity, the baby identifies itself by reflecting its own image on the other as it happens to Margery and Susan in the plays. Hence, a woman who is raised under male dominance can hardly obtain a

female identity free of male oppression since she is unable to see herself through a female aspect.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. The History of Being Woman as a Second Sex

Gender difference has existed since the beginning of human life. In the Bible, the beginning of gender roles is seen through the words of God. He created man and woman as Adam and Eve. After Eve ate the forbidden apple, God told her: “I will greatly multiply thy sorrow and thy conception; in sorrow thou shalt bring forth children; and thy desire shall be to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee” (Genesis 3:16). As de Beauvoir indicates, “St Thomas for his part pronounced woman to be an ‘imperfect man’, an ‘incidental’ being. This is symbolized in Genesis where Eve is depicted as made from what Bossuet called ‘a supernumerary bone’ of Adam” (de Beauvoir 16). Also, as it is told in ancient Greek mythology, evil comes to the world through the hands of a woman, Pandora. Before her, there was no malignancy in the world, but when she opened her box, people became aware of evil. From the first, women have been associated with evil and imperfection, and their roles in society have been built on these so-called misdoings. That is why some male-centered societies have deemed women to be the second sex.

A woman as the second sex has been an issue in many patriarchal societies for centuries, where, as Luce Irigaray points out, how many women have been limited to being only mothers and daughters, prostitutes or wives in society:

Mother, virgin, prostitute: these are the social roles imposed on women. The characteristics of (so-called) feminine sexuality derive from them: the valorisation of reproduction and nursing; faithfulness; modest, ignorance of and even lack of interest in sexual pleasure; a passive acceptance of men's 'activity'; seductiveness, in order to arouse the consumers' desire while offering herself as its material support without getting pleasure herself. Neither as mother nor as virgin nor as prostitute has woman any right to her own pleasure. (Irigaray 186-87)

According to Irigaray, women are like commodities to be used for pleasure and reproduction, and regardless of her title in society, they must be passive under male dominance.

Some communities buried baby girls alive and some counted them as a symbol of embarrassment because femininity was considered as a kind of birth defect. For instance, in ancient China, the duty of women was to bear sons to continue their husbands' lineage. Most Chinese women did not have any names. They were the servants in the community, fulfilling their fathers', husbands' or sons' needs. Lui Meng explains that,

Chinese culture emphasises the hierarchical order within the family, with the senior male at the top and juniors and females at the bottom. The patriarchal ideology regards women (wife, daughter and even mother) and children as dependents and as the property of the men (father, husband and son). (Meng 301)

Since women and men were not in an equal social position in ancient Chinese society, women were not allowed to have education or even a name.

Ancient China was not the only society that saw women as incomplete men. Although the samurai family were famous for the strong female characters in the feudal period of Japan between 1603 and 1868, women still did not have any rights. In other words, those famous female characters were no different from ordinary women in their society. There were three major duties that a female should follow: When she was a young girl, she complied with her father's wishes; when she was a married woman, she complied with her husband's demands, and when she was widowed, she complied with her son's desires.

In ancient Greece, what is known about women is through male voices. Though there were lots of strong goddesses, the most famous of them were depicted as being jealous, cruel, and unjust. As Sue Blundell states, in "Homer's *Odysseys* or the plays of fifth-century Athenians tragedies" (Blundell 10) women are seen as an image shaped in males' minds, they are "in some sense male inventions" (Blundell 10). Through mythological goddesses and their features, men connected women with sexuality, virginity and giving birth. Women in those times were all about this trinity, thus the image of woman in males' minds was related to her sex, not her personality.

In today's world, women can be still seen as a tool for the reproduction of humankind in some societies. De Beauvoir explains this by labelling woman according to patriarchal societies' perspective as a "womb", not actually a real human being but just a tool for reproduction (de Beauvoir xli). As De Beauvoir indicates, the nature of the woman limits her and "there is an absolute human type, the masculine" (de Beauvoir xliiv). The woman "... has ovaries, a uterus: these peculiarities imprison her in her subjectivity, circumscribe her within the limits her own nature." (de Beauvoir 15). She is seen as a tool for reproduction

and she should not want the same opportunities as men. If she opposes her duty, she automatically becomes a man.

Mary Childers explains the need of sameness between the two sexes and says that "... we live in a [modern] culture that makes it seem as though having contradictions is bad--- most of us try to represent ourselves in ways that suggest we are without contradictions" (qtd in Barbara Johnson 3). The effort of resembling the opposite sex makes the place of women in some patriarchal societies more complex. Men do not like the idea of sharing their gender position with a female. In modern societies women try to develop their social status by having an education, a job, and being more active in politics more than in the past. Yet, some patriarchal men hinder women from getting in a higher position than a man since they are too proud to be under female dominance.

Johnson interprets the struggle of women about gaining a notable, important place in the society as a utopian alternative if the patriarchal system continues to decide her roles;

The cost of [women's] attaining a valued status in the world is to become an object in someone else's reality and, hence, to have, in fact, no status in the world. If woman's value is only assured by the place assigned to her by patriarchy, then the alternatives can only be utopian.

(The Feminist Difference Johnson 28)

A woman cannot think of anything else but accepting the roles of patriarchy since she has no other choice to have a valued status in her society.

Over time, some women take on a position where they have to forgo the right of being as free as men. This mostly happens when a woman chooses the marriage

path and bears child/ren. These things can mean that the woman is leaving her individuality and becoming a wife or mother. This is not a bad choice or situation, but it makes the woman's life harder because her burdens become heavier.

If a woman does not choose the traditional path, it seems that she takes on a male character, according to some patriarchal societies. Although she might be appreciated for striving for what she has dreamt, she is perceived as a half-woman for she does not perform as a full time traditional female figure. If she wants to do what traditionally a man does, she is sometimes not welcomed by society. As Johnson argues that no matter what she chooses or does, she

... is not allowed to have mixed feelings, to be 'composite' or 'interwoven.' She must renounce everything about which she has negative feelings, even when those feelings are internalized from the opinions of others. Ultimately, the thing about which she feels ambivalent, and which she renounces, is herself." (*The Feminist Difference* Johnson 28-29)

What is not expressed and disclaimed, but wished inwardly by the woman is real to her, not the gendered duties and roles she performs. However, she has to give up her silenced wishes.

As a conclusion, because of gender roles, a woman as the second sex has been expected to fulfil previously constructed duties, even though the ones who are out of this frame according to some patriarchal societies. Unless a woman performs her social duties as a female, she is questioned and judged by others. If she tries to establish an individual world outside of social expectations, she is not accepted as a woman but thought of as being a half-man.

2.2. Women as a “Second Sex” in Drama

Literature uses everything about society as a source; and the gender issue is one of the most attractive subjects. The voiceless status of woman and her place in patriarchal societies has attracted many playwrights from different regions. Their mutual understanding and way of explaining and defining the woman are that she is seen as being weak and in need of male protection.

One of the best-known playwrights of English literature, William Shakespeare (1564-1616), comes to mind when the topic is about love, politics, and contrivances between men and women. Shakespeare breaks traditional norms of playwriting by mixing tragedy and comedy altogether in his plays. Hence, while handling with the traditional issues in his plays, he also gives sub-plots for another hidden problem in society. He approaches the gender issue intensely in his plays, especially in *Much Ado About Nothing* (1600), uncovering the powerlessness and silenced position of women during the Renaissance. The predominant concern in the play is about being cuckolded, and it exposes much about suppressed anxieties about women’s freedom within a patriarchal cultures. The word “nothing” in the title of the play might refer to a woman’s vagina, mocking the stereotype of woman, because in the play “nothing” is everything in men’s lives.

Men have a fear of being cuckolded and this fear makes them accuse women of being untruthful and unfaithful. In the play, only women are associated with bad features of humankind. However, men who are staged as toys of women are presents as being naïve and easily deceived. The different descriptions of the two

sexes basically stem from that culture's gender-biased ideas. For instance, Benedick in the play does not want to marry because of this fear. Men treat women as possessions. As conventional female character Hero is the pioneer representative of the possessed woman. She is accused of being unfaithful to her intended husband, even though she has been a conventional, docile, demure, passive, and not an argumentative woman, she is victimized and shown as a woman without virtuous. Despite the insults of her lover and father, Hero still marries Claudio and deceives herself by thinking that she is the happiest woman in the world.

On the other hand, in the play there is an unconventional female character, Beatrice. She is rebellious, free to express her feelings and is clever enough to make decisions on her own. She does not marry just because she is expected to, but her decisive actions are stopped when she accepts marriage. This automatically means that she submits to the patriarchal society's rules, thus she loses the freedom to speak out in the name of women, or even for herself. In fact, it is seen that the woman's only freedom in this patriarchal society is to cuckold her lovers and husbands.

The German playwright Berthold Brecht (1898-1956) wrote *The Good Woman of Szechwan* (1943) as an example of gender differences and the stereotypical power of gender identity in society. The play takes place in an Asian environment and it is about a prostitute named Shen Te. Shen Te gains some money from the gods in return for her hospitality. She uses it to open a humble tobacco shop. However, as a compassionate and soft woman character, she is unable to run the tobacco shop successfully and creates an alter ego (a second

male personality) for herself. The play criticizes not only the capitalist system and materialism, but also the patriarchal parts that related to capitalism. Patriarchy plays a significant role in the play in that a woman is shown as a vulnerable person, and only men can handle the tough situations in the market. She has to behave like a man because of the life's rules. As a lonely woman, Shen Te is not capable of dealing with the capitalist system's problems. For this reason, in order to be rigid, ruthless, selfish, self-centred, materialistic and no more generous, she turns into a male. Consequently, she starts to exploit other people. The woman should be soft and good towards other people in order to earn a good reputation in the eyes of others, and the man should be the one who shoulders the physical burdens.

An American feminist playwright Marsha Norman's (1947-) play '*night Mother*' (1983) is about how patriarchy affects women's lives physically and psychologically depending on the social, psychical and emotional restrictions with the example of Jessie (daughter) and Thelma's (mother) lives. The play includes the effects of male characters on females such as Dawson, Ricky, Cecile, Jessie's husband and father. Norman uses a different way to free a woman from an oppressive society; suicide.

Jessie is a failed mother, wife and daughter figure in the play because of patriarchal society. She is a victim of her gender identity. Men cause all of her failures in her past. She knows that she will never be happy because of her social identity. Additionally, she is aware of her situation which is she cannot be freed from her chains. For this reason to take control of her own life she decides to commit-suicide. Jessie needs an alteration in her life and she knows that there is

no choice but to end her life in order to provide a difference in her life. She cannot do anything either as a woman, about her life, to change it, make it better make her feel better about it (Norman 26). The conditions of Jessie's life are not suitable for a change. Karan Keeter Rogers writes that "the necessity for women to act in this life to change the conditions of their lives" (Rogers 21).

Thelma is unlike her daughter. Even though she is a patriarchal woman, she is also trapped into social limitations created for women. Thus, Jessie sees her mother's conditions in a patriarchal society and she sees her reflection on her mother. She does not want to be passive like her mother anymore. Thelma is married to a man whom she does not love and she is not loved deeply by her children either. She has no aim and no gain, in short. Both Thelma and Jessie are in fact unhappy so much that Thelma does not want her daughter to kill herself because she is afraid of being alone. Yet, Jessie feels ensnared into her socially gendered roles that she regards suicide as the only way to take her own autonomy.

The choreopoem play *For Colored Girls Who Have Considered Suicide When The Rainbow is Enuf* (1975) by Ntozake Shange (1948-) is a good example of depicting female gender problems combined with those of being black.. As Mark Fortier says, Shange explains the play as "a young black girl's growing up, her triumphs and errors, our struggles to become all that is forbidden by our environment, all that is forfeited by our gender, all that we have forgotten" (Fortier 121). Each color/each performer speaks out a poem and each poem includes the pain, hope and anguish of the speaker. The black women are faced with the attacks of insensitive males and they do not represent a real identity in the play because of their gender and color.

Vinegar Tom is one of the most important Caryl Churchill's plays written in 1975 for Monstrous Regiment, a theatre company that focuses on issues related to women and feminism. The play is about witches with no witches in it. Its characters are symbols of every type of woman in a patriarchal society and they all perform or do not perform their gendered roles. The play takes place in seventeenth-century England, when male domination was at its strongest.

Top Girls is a play about a successful woman in business and the price she has to pay for her success. She abandons her illegitimate child, family, and hometown. She considers herself a free woman, but she does not have some things that other patriarchal women have in the play: motherhood and sisterhood. Churchill elaborates what a successful woman means and the roles of women in society by using Brechtian style like in *Vinegar Tom*. Since the play examines the position and roles of women in past and present societies, it includes other female characters with different stories. However, all of them represent a part of Marlene's life.

As a contemporary feminist playwright, Churchill uses gender issues in her many plays. While writing her plays, she benefits from real female characters' experiences to create her own fictional women, but she mostly uses other literary works and her imagination. She states in one of her interviews that in *Top Girls* "quite a few of the things Win tells Angie about her life are things different people said to me. And of course the dead women at the dinner all based on someone [from art, literature or history]. But apart from that, it's imaginary" ("Caryl Churchill" 5). Churchill as representation of gender biases in the past and present together shows a continuous oppression of women.

CHAPTER III

VINEGAR TOM

“Evil women
Is that what you want?
Is that what you want to see?
In your movie dream
Do they scream and scream?
Evil women
Evil women
Women.”

Vinegar Tom

3.1. The Structure of *Vinegar Tom*

Vinegar Tom is about gender biases and power relations in seventeenth-century England up to the present. Churchill challenges traditional plots by mixing history and the present in showing the lasting male domination over women. The play includes oppressed female characters that go through difficult experiences during their lives. While their experiences are being shown to the audience, the play is punctuated by modern songs that show the women’s social limitations and their ordeals because of their gender. This is the most important remarkable structural theme of *Vinegar Tom* that the songs interrupt the play hereafter in an important patriarchal scene. The songs are not put in the play only to support the action, but also with the intent of awakening the audience and giving them a commentary upon

the action. Via this way, the play refuses the linear structure, which does not encompass women's experiences.

By interrupting the play with contemporary songs, Churchill creates a feminist drama in the style of Brecht's epic theatre, which was popular in the mid-twentieth century. In Brechtian theatre the aim is to make the audience think critically about the situation. Lisa Merrill explains Brechtian style:

According to Brecht, epic-style acting, with a direct address to the spectator, and the use of songs which comment upon rather than support the action of a play, serve to awaken an audience from what Brecht regarded as a false emotional empathy with the characters and theatrical illusion. Instead, these techniques encourage a critical and rational response to the conditions portrayed. (Merrill 68)

Hence, Churchill's intention of using Brechtian theatre is to create this kind of alienation and separation. The songs are about the present and sung by singers in modern dress while the play is performed in seventeenth century style in England. This situation distances the audience from the emotions of the characters and makes them think about how and why women were treated as the "second sex" in the past.

There are seven songs in the play and each one urges the audience to commentate on the interrupted scenes. The songs "Nobody Sings" and "Oh Doctor" are about the invisibility of woman and the way she drifts from herself through the oppression of male dominance. In scene three, when Joan Noakes, feels desperate and whines about her age, as a description of womanhood is given in the song "Nobody Sings":

Nobody ever saw me,

She whispered in a rage.
They were blinded by my beauty, now
They're blinded by my age.
Oh nobody sings about it,
but it happens all the time. (*Vinegar Tom* 142)

Aging makes a woman invisible because she is not attractive anymore. In some societies, women are categorized by their age, class and beauty. Nobody mentions the short sexual life of a woman. It starts with menstruation –described in the song as “blood on the sheet” in the morning-, and stops after menopause. These changes in a woman’s life are not talked about by people and moreover many women are not willing to mention about them.

The song “Oh Doctor” criticises the disappearing image of women. The singer of the song begs for the help of her doctor to cure her visibility and to not lose her self-identity. In this scene, a female character refuses an arranged marriage, and is being cut and bled by a male doctor in order to make her “well enough to be married.” She asks: “But why is my heart is on the other side? Why are you putting my brain in my cunt?” (*ibid*: 150). She wonders why a woman is only integrated with her sexuality not with her personality. The character, Betty, is complaining about not being classified with her personality by the male dominated society. In this song, physical torturing is the symbol of the psychological oppression of patriarchy on women, making them “the hysteric woman” accept the norms. She cannot be identified as an individual; she should be shaped in the hands of a man to become a puppet-woman- self for patriarchy by accepting the arranged marriage. Then, slowly she starts to lose herself:

I want to see myself.

I want to see inside myself.

Give me back my head.

I'll put my heart in straight.

Let me out of bed now.

I can't wait

To see myself. (*ibid*: 151)

During the bleeding, Betty begs the doctor to “stop looking up me [her] with your [his] metal eye” (*ibid*: 150). This suggests that men do not see a woman as a person but a legged womb, and a piece of meat which is desired by men. The woman pleads to be cured quickly and to understand why she is sick or what is wrong with her or “What is wrong with me the way I am?” (*ibid*: 150) remarks that the natural way of being a female is definitely unacceptable by patriarchal society. Either she will transform into her constrained female roles or she will suffer of being labelled as an ill woman forever.

Unlike these songs, “Something To Burn” mocks the idea of fighting against a hypothetical witch, who is in fact a harmless poor old woman.

What can we do, there's nothing to do,

about sickness and hunger and dying.

What can we do, there's nothing to do,

nothing but cursing and crying.

Find something to burn.

Let it go up smoke.

Burn your troubles away. (*ibid* 154)

“Something” here refers to the patriarchal people’s need of a scapegoat for their sufferings. The word “something” is also used to identify lunatics, witches, and others who are not the same as the ideal English society in the play. That is to say, poor women -hypothetical witches- and lunatics are not counted as human beings, and they are ostracized as being “something” dangerous for the existing order. The line “We’d all be quite happy if they’d go away” (*ibid*: 154) makes it clear for the audience that “others” is seen as a threat to the order of male centred society. Later, there is a lament for the witches sung after Joan and Ellen are hung. This song, like “Something To Burn”, raises the question of “Who are the witches now?” (*ibid*: 175). Churchill directs this question to the modern women to make them notice similarities in present times.

The song, “If Everybody Worked As Hard As Me”, defines the women’s place in the patriarchal society and at home. “Oh, the country’s what it is because the family’s what it is because the wife is what she is to her man” (*ibid*: 160). Everything depends on the husband and home. If she stays silent “so nobody comes knocking at your door in the night. So the horrors that are done will not be done to you” (*ibid*: 161). Thus, it can be said that if the woman accepts her second place in the family, she will see value among others and will not be harmed/executed by male centred society.

The other song, “If You Float” criticizes the way patriarchy works. It is assumed that there are some ways to find out a witch: “if you float you’re a witch. If you scream you’re a witch. If you sink, then you’re dead anyway” (*ibid*: 170). There is no way to escape the accusations of patriarchy when the woman is once seen to be non-traditional. “Whatever you do, you must pay”, the people who believe in male

domination will accept any kind of silly marks as a sign of witchery (*ibid*: 170). In any case, the woman ends up a loser because she is not given the chance to speak for herself.

Churchill, in the last song “Evil Women” asks a question: “Evil woman, is that what you want to see on the movie screen?” (*ibid*: 178). Since these songs are placed in the present, “evil woman” can be interpreted as a referent to women who exhibit their bodies to arouse sexual feelings of men, and also to the so-called witches in society because evil women or witches are associated with the devil. The audience is aroused to see this evil woman image in their fantasies, in everywhere; however, they are also primed to accuse her of being immoral, to take the blame, and of having an agreement with Satan. Killing her is the easiest way to get rid of the guilt which does not belong to only the woman but to the whole society.

In the first scene of the play, Alice, who shares the same curiosity with the audience about witches, asks her mysterious lover questions about what happened when he has seen a witch execution. “Did the spirits fly out of her like bats? Did the devil make the sky go dark? ... Did she fly at night on a stick?” (*ibid*: 136). Alice has the same biases as the others- the people in her society and the audience. However, ironically, she ends up being accused of performing witchcraft. As a result, Churchill blames the spectator for causing a woman to be categorized as evil. Only women could be witches, and this therefore can be seen as a gender bias of patriarchal society.

In conclusion, these are put into the play to draw attention to the reality of societies about gender issues, showing that women have been threatened, silenced and abused physically, economically and psychologically throughout history.

Thereby, the songs can be interpreted as a reaction to what has happened to women who rebel against society's norms, consciously or unconsciously, even to the present.

3.2 Oppressed Women Figures in *Vinegar Tom*

If a group of people does not treat another group or a person fairly and prevents them from having equal rights, then this means that the latter is under political, sexual, racial, and/or economical oppression. Gender is not born within the person, it is created by society, but unfortunately, gender usually serves males, not females, in some societies. Allan G. Johnson explains ;

A society is patriarchal to the degree that it promotes male privilege by being male dominated, male identified, and male centred. It is also organized around an obsession with control and involves as one of its key aspects the oppression of women. (*The Gender Knot* Johnson 5)

In *Vinegar Tom*, there are female characters that are oppressed and abused sexually, economically, and socially. They do not have equal rights with men nor autonomy. They are treated unfairly. These situations are shown by the male characters, and sometimes even by the female characters who accept male dominance. Churchill, in this play, exposes the smug façade of gender in patriarchy which is also embraced by its female characters both consciously and unconsciously.

Alice Noakes is the most important female figure in the play because she feels the society limitations in spite of her reckless actions. She is a rebellious person by her outrageous behaviours. She is the only character who celebrates her sexuality in the play. However, she cannot escape from the punishment of the society for being a non-traditional woman figure. Alice only wants to be with a man when she desires

him sexually, but actually she is not allowed to do so because of the sexual restrictions that her society imposes (*ibid*: 147).

The play opens with the scene of Alice on the roadside after illegitimate intercourse with “a man in black”. The man tries to arouse fear in Alice by asking her questions about his manhood because it is important for him to leave a lasting impression. As Judith Butler emphasizes, “...the social constraints upon gender compliance and deviation are so great that most people feel deeply wounded if they are told that they are not really manly or womanly, that they have failed to execute their manhood or womanhood” (Butler 41). That is why the man asks Alice: “Is my body not rough and hairy?”...“Didn’t I lie on you so heavy I took your breathe? Didn’t the enormous size of me terrify you?” (*ibid*: 135). The man is in need of feeling superior to Alice by showing her his masculinity. Meanwhile, Alice wants to get away from her current life and she hopes for help of the man in black. As a man, he wants to take advantage of this situation.

The man in black relates women to witches and himself to the devil. A witch is occupied by the devil; it is a kind of master for her.

Alice: I’ll never get away from here if you don’t take me.

Man: Will you do everything I say, like a witch with the devil her master?

Alice: I’ll do like a wife with a husband her master and that’s enough for man or devil. (*ibid*: 136)

As Danielle Rowe elaborates, “In *Malleus Maleficarum, The Hammer of Witches*, it is claimed that a common practice of all witches is carnal copulation with devils” (Rowe 13). This suggests that the devil is not the witch but the one who sleeps with her. Alice, a victim of male dominated society, is not a harmful person

here, however; the man who relates himself or at least tries to emulate the devil is the defacer. Although the man in black seems to like committing adultery, he is astonished and frightened by Alice's opinion about it. She does not regard sexual intercourse as a sin, yet he does. "Anytime I am happy, someone says it's a sin" (*ibid*: 136). However, because of having an illegitimate child, Alice is the one who is to blame for sinning. The double standard of society and religion performed in the play give a man the right of talking to a woman as he wishes. Indeed, the need of labelling Alice as a whore stems from being unable to categorize her. She is sexually liberated and breaks the stereotypical woman figure in a traditional male society. She is not a wife, not a widow, not a virgin, or not exactly a whore who earns her life by selling her body. That is why when the man is done with Alice, he gets rid of her to leave his sins behind.

Alice's anatomy and her gendered roles limit her way of life. The man in black symbolizes the society in the play and its views about gender relationships. This is shown by the man not having an actual name: only his gender is known. However, when the reality is considered, it is the woman who does not have a name, which means that she does not actually own an identity without a male character. As Elin Diamond explains that Alice "...hates her body because in the play's fictional seventeenth-century village, where poverty and terror are displaced into misogynist scapegoat, her body is materially and sexually abused, her desire inexpressible" (Diamond 189). For instance, the man in black does not even condescend to tell his name. When Alice asks his name, he says, "Lucifer, isn't it, and Beelzebub. Darling was my name, and sweeting, till you called me devil." And he continues, "...you won't need to know it. You won't be seeing me" (*ibid*: 138). According to this line,

a woman is a commodity for him, and while adultery is a mutual sin, only Alice gets punished– named as a prostitute and losing the chance of having a normal life in society.

Alice's gender identity lets her down in every step of her life. Even though she states her desire for a man, she also points out her hatred for her body.

I hate my body. Blood every month, and no way out of that but to be sick and swell up, and no way out of that but pain. No way out of all that till we're old and that's worse. I can't bear to see my mother if she changes her clothes. (*ibid*: 146)

She both enjoys her sex yet knows her limitations as well. She hates it because whatever she intends to do she needs a man, but men want to abuse her sexually without her consent. There is no way out of it. She dreams of being male and says: "If I was a man I'd go to London and Scotland and never come back and take a girl under a bush and on my way" (*ibid*: 146).

The age of a woman makes it difficult to be accepted by a man. If a woman is old, she is not useful for him and she is not even counted as a female any more. Joan Noakes is Alice's mother suffers from ageing. She does not attract males anymore. In other words, she is the emblem of another fate of genderizing women. The song "Nobody Sings" explains that nobody sees a woman when she is too old to be a sexual object. "They were blinded by [her] beauty, now they're blinded by [her] age" (*ibid*: 142). Despite it all, Joan wishes for a man to get rid of her poverty. After Alice spends a night outside, her mother expresses her desperate wish to have a man by saying, "Who wants an old woman?" (*ibid*: 141). Joan is not useful for anyone and no one can bear her existence. Even her daughter Alice does not want to look at her

old crinkled skin while she is changing her clothes. Joan becomes a scapegoat for her poverty and old age.

Alice reminds her mother of the bad days with her father. She says that “Think how he used to beat you” (*ibid*: 141). This line explains the abusive behaviour of Alice’s father towards Joan. It can be assumed that Alice implies to her mother that it is better to live in poverty than to be a slave to a man. Nevertheless, Joan cannot get rid of the idea that she is in need of a man from every aspect. For instance, Susan’s sayings about her husband “he doesn’t beat me” (*ibid*: 147) does not persuade Alice that marriage is a “must”. She still thinks that Susan is under control and in fact, Susan is not happy. Not beating a wife does not make a man a good husband. It is not a favour for a woman; it is something ‘must be’. People already labelled Alice as a bad woman not suitable for marriage because of her active sexual life. She is even blamed by her closest friend, “No one is going to marry you because they know you” (*ibid*: 147).

Another form of oppression of women shown in the play is that the only way to be identified, realised and accepted by society and to carry on a good life is to take a husband and be a wife-slave to him. The song “If Everybody Worked As Hard as Me,” affirms the “sex-role chauvinism.” Alice, her son and her mother, Joan are not counted as a family without a man. As Kimball King states, “without a man, they [women] are perceived as a threat to society” (King 67). The reason is that a single mother or an unmarried woman may seem as a threat for a married woman’s marriage because the single woman is sexually active and can seduce a married man easily. Churchill introduces a couple to the audience, Margery and Jack, the patriarchal nuclear family neighbour of Joan and Alice Noakes. This couple works

hard to obtain their economical freedom. Margery is an economically oppressed female figure because she works more than her husband but is never appreciated. She is a traditional woman who follows every duty of her socially constructed female roles. She is afraid of her husband and wants to be loved by him, but even if when she performs her social roles, she is economically abused by her husband. She always tries to satisfy the needs of her husband and obey him. However, her husband desires Alice.

Jack, as an emblem of patriarchal, dignified, hardworking male figure and a good husband to his wife, proposes a sexual relationship to Alice. She is so young, yet he lusts after her because he thinks he is only good to Alice as a man. He wants to convince Alice with two apples, the symbol of the fall of Eden. The paradox here is the man offering the sin, not the woman. Jack tries to take advantage of Alice's poverty and he proffers material things in exchange of sexual intercourse. "Alice, I'd be good to you. I'm not a poor man. I could give you things for your boy ..." (*ibid*: 148). He uses Alice's maternity in order to gain what he wants. Ultimately, a poor woman is much weaker than a poor man, and there are biases that a poor woman can only earn her money by taking prostitution as a profession. Alice's condition is an example for this situation. Her poverty and marital status arouse men's interests.

But Alice rejects Jack, and being rejected by a poor single mother makes him feel humiliated. He asks questions why Alice refuses him: "Am I not handsome enough, is it that? No one is to know. Alice you must. I have dreams. I'm no good to my wife. I can't do it. Not these three months. It's only when I dream of you or like now talking to you ..." (*ibid*: 147). Jack thinks Alice is the only one who can give him his manhood back. He offers Alice a deal that he will support them financially

but she refuses him. He gets frustrated and curses her, even though he is the ethically guilty one, he scapegoats Alice for his loss of potency.

Despite of Margery's patriarchal submission, she is treated as a worker. She churns the butter and chants as "Come butter come, come butter come. Jack's standing at the gate waiting for a butter cake. Come butter... It's not coming, this butter. I'm sick of it" (*ibid*: 144-145). Her complaints point that a sexual imagery is one of the major issues of the play. She, as a wife, is loyal to her husband and she does not seek for another spouse for her needs. Even if she does, she knows that it would be a way for her social execution. On the other hand, Jack is thinking and dreaming about Alice. He finds the right of adultery for himself because of his gender superiority. He does not feel ashamed or he does not consider it as a sin. He has his own needs and every way is licit because he is a man.

Margery's riddle includes her husband's name, which suggests Jack as the super ego of Margery. She knows if the butter does not come, she will have trouble with her husband. Jack has her as a labourer in the field and when he sees her talking to a neighbour, he calls her as a "lazy slut" (*ibid*: 145). Therefore, it is clear that the basic element of Margery's oppression economically is Jack as if being a housewife is a job for her without getting paid. Here, she is the worker, she is the wife; he is the husband, he is the boss.

Margery is a victim of her society; however, as a female character she victimises her female neighbour, Joan by blaming her for the bad things happened to them. The dying of cattle, the butter that does not come, Margery's headache, Jack's impotency and his losing one of his hands' ability of usage. First, Jack accuses himself and says "it's my sins those claves shaking and stinking and swelling up their bellies in there"

(*ibid*: 152). Yet, for Margery her husband is not a sinner. It is not possible to be punished by God for such a man, who is “a good taskmaster”. Only being bewitched can be the reason for things to deteriorate. These are considered as coming from evil and the only way is to be bewitched. In order to justify themselves, their sins towards the poor, old and unprotected women – Alice and Joan – they declare that Joan, the old poor woman, bewitched them. They have found their scapegoat and this is a woman who is impotent because of her economic situation. This idea relaxes Jack and he immediately accepts that “Then it’s not my sins. Good folk get bewitched” (*ibid*: 153). To fight back, they go to Ellen the wise woman, who is the healer character of the play, to confirm their reasoning. Only the persecutors in the play believe witchcraft exists and Churchill shows this by displaying Margery’s and Jack’s failing to see themselves in the mirror that Ellen gives. Thence, Margery and Jack scapegoat Mother Noakes to justify their own failures in life.

If one uses magic for the sake of patriarchy, it is seen as good magic. If it is used for the sake of women then it is bad magic. Jack does not like going to Ellen to get rid of Joan’s so called black magic. Margery says, “Come on, Jack, don’t be afraid. It’s good magic to find a witch” (*ibid*: 157). Churchill displays how people direct themselves to see what they want to see. What you know might be wrong, what you hear is mostly untrue but what you see is the best way to persuade yourself about a thing. Ellen does not show anything to them in the mirror. Jack and Margery “saw what [they] come to see” (*ibid*: 158).

Susan, a weak female character, is afraid of losing her status in her society. She is the symbol of reproduction, the mother of three and pregnant again. Unlike Alice, she does not seek freedom. However, she complains about her femininity and

fertility, and Alice comes up with a solution for Susan's unexpected pregnancy, telling her to take control of her own body. Nevertheless, Susan refuses and returns to the limits of her gender identity. She can neither leave her gendered duties nor is willing to carry out them anymore. When she goes with Alice to get an abortion, she 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 do anything to be rid of it" (*ibid.*: 155). These lines refer to women who accept the roles that male dominance bestows upon them. Ellen, as an opposing character to Susan, answers: "If you won't do anything to help yourself you must stay as you are" (*ibid.*: 155). Churchill is showing that women should not complain about their place and situation in the family if they do not want to take a chance for their freedom.

Susan's husband is apathetic towards her feelings. He does not care if she wants another baby or not. His priority is to prove his virility and another baby means that he is a strong man. After intercourse, he says "...let's hope a fine child comes of it" (*ibid.*: 145). This line also politically shows that a woman is a tool for the reproduction of humanity, and man is the one who governs this tool. As Adrienne Rich remarks, "...the woman's body is the terrain on which patriarchy is erected" (Rich 55). The desire of men to have more children is another way of oppression on women.

Religion is an important element in this play. Churchill points out the position of women in society by using religious perspectives towards them. Susan and Margery are two symbolic female characters that both of them have their own beliefs. Susan thinks the pain women suffer every month and in pregnancy is for their sins:

They do say the pain is what's sent to a woman for her sins. I complained last time after churching, and he said I must think on Eve who brought the

sin into the world that got me pregnant. I must think on how woman tempts man, and how she pays God with her pain having the baby. So if we try to get round the pain, we're going against God. (*ibid*: 146)

Susan's attempted abortion and Alice's child out of wedlock are threats for patriarchy from the religious stand point. Rich further observes that "...the experience of maternity and the experience of sexuality have both been channelled to serve male interest; behaviour which threatens the institutions, such as illegitimacy, abortion...is considered deviant or criminal" (Rich 42). Even Susan takes the potion herself for abortion, but later denies it, saying to the witch finder Alice "...took me to the cunning woman 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 she died" (*ibid*: 167). Susan lets all women down by refusing to take responsibility for her actions and blames Alice for it. Her behaviour shows that having an individual identity is very difficult. Hence, Churchill sets out the scene of a woman's victimizing herself and the other women in order to remain indifferent to escape from the burden.

Another oppressed character, Betty, is in a higher place in her society than the other women. Margery welcomes her in scene two by saying, "I hear you're leaving us for better things" (*ibid*: 140), signalling that marriage is counted as a better thing than being single. Betty is of a good family but she does not want to marry. Even though her wealthy family prevents Betty from being accused of witchcraft for this, she is esteemed as mad. "They lock me up. I said I won't marry him so they lock me up" (*ibid*: 140). She is restricted because of her sex. In this point, "sex" turns into "gender" on behalf of society rules. She cannot go out alone, she cannot go where

she wants and she cannot take decisions about her life because of her gender. If she wants to live on a normal life in her society, she has to get a husband, but without her own autonomy, she refuses to live on according to the others:

Margery: You want to get home before dark.

Betty: No, I don't. I want to be out in the dark. It's not late, it's late in the day time. I could stay out for hours if it was summer.

Jack: If you want to come and see the farm, Miss Betty, you should ask your father to bring you one morning when he's inspecting the estate.

Betty: I'm not let go where I like. (*ibid:* 139)

It seems that marriage is a prison for a woman that patriarchy builds. Betty is both metaphorically and literally constrained into that prison. In scene six, Betty is tied to a chair and a doctor is there to cure her from being "free". Either she accepts an arranged marriage for her, or she will be labelled as insane.

Hysteria has been seen as a female illness throughout history. Elaine Showalter asserts that "...madness, even when experienced by men, is metaphorically and symbolically represented as feminine: a female malady." (Showalter, 4) Betty's madness is related to her femininity in the play, as her doctor explains her condition by saying:

Hysteria is a woman's weakness. Hysteron, Greek, the womb. Excessive blood causes an imbalance in the humours. The noxious gases that form inwardly every month rise to the brain and cause behaviour quite contrary to the patient's real feelings. (*ibid:* 149)

Showalter interprets this situation as seeing

...hysteria within the specific historical framework of the nineteenth century as an unconscious form of feminist protest, the counterpart of the attack on patriarchal values carried out by the women's movement of the time. (Showalter 5)

Thus, Betty's hysteria can be seen as a representative symbol of a rebellious woman against male sovereignty to get rid of painful treatment.

Another oppressed woman in the play is the cunning woman, a healer and adviser of the villagers. She continues her life without being in need of a man since she can work outside of a male area. Earning money is counted as a thing only men can do, all she can do is help women by offering them a potion for deep sleep, a temporary escape from male dominated society. She says to Betty: "The best thing I can do for you is help you sleep" (*ibid*: 156), and to Alice: "For your heartache I'll give you these herbs to boil up in water and drink at night. Give you a sound sleep and think less of him" (*ibid*: 155). She is not a witch or doctor but a consultant for women in her society. Sleeping here is a reasonable advice to other women to be silent and compatible with the society in order to stay safe.

Ellen can only give advice to troubled women who are in need of help. When Betty comes to her to evade marriage, she asks "Do you want a potion to make you love the man?" (*ibid*: 156) and then adds "You get married, Betty, that's the safest... your best chance of being left alone is marry a rich man ..." (*ibid*: 169). Churchill shows the audience the importance of free choice by pointing out Ellen's choices. She is the emblem of self-autonomy and wants to teach what she knows to Alice but this is up to Alice. "There's no hurry. I don't want you unless it's what you want" (*ibid*: 156). She does not force Alice to learn healing (which was called witchery in

that time), and this is important in the name of free choice. According to her, even if you want to live under pressure, it must be your own choice not the choice of others.

The situation of women is identities and women's position in society because of gender roles are shown in the play. Alice and Betty are in two ways opposing the rules of the patriarchal society and one is excluded from their societies and accused of being a witch. Susan is a classical traditional woman character who is supposed to be happy because of the image she draws; however, she is not happy in her marriage. Her husband uses her to prove his manhood as if she is not a human but a machine. As a second sex, the women characters of the play are in misery as a result of strict gender stereotypes.

3.3. Churchill's Witches in *Vinegar Tom*

Caryl Churchill does not use real historical characters in *Vinegar Tom*. She cares about the context more than the theme. She states in the introduction of the play "I discovered ... the women accused of witchcraft were often those on the edges of the society, old, poor, single, sexually unconventional; the herbal medical tradition of the cunning woman was suppressed by the rising professionalism of the male doctor" (*ibid*: 130). That is why, *Vinegar Tom* is "a play not about evil, hysteria and possession by the devil but about poverty, humiliation and prejudice, and how the women accused of witchcraft saw themselves" (*ibid*: 130). There are so-called witches in the play but in fact none of them perform witchery. Without using a real witch in the play, Churchill leaves the point of witchcraft to the audience's understanding.

Having read different books on witches, she constructed her characters based on real historical witches, which capitalizes on the audience's knowledge and understanding of witches. For example, she depicts Joan, the first notable witch in the play, as a poor old woman with a big cat. Joan's name was based on the names of the real witches in history such as Joan Williford and Joan Cardien who were convicted of witchcraft and executed in the sixteenth century (C. L'Estrange Ewen) (Ravari 154).

Neither Joan, the old poor woman, nor Ellen the cunning woman are real witches. Because of being in lower class, both of them appear as witches in the play. Ellen talks to herself while waiting to be accused of witchcraft: "I've done nothing... it's healing, not harm. There's no devil in it" (*ibid*: 170). She points out that what she has done is not related to magic or something like that. It is a cure. However, her freedom is a threat for men. As Helen Keyssar denotes:

Turning again to seventeenth-century England for her setting, Churchill this time shines her light on a society whose misogyny is grotesquely expressed in its condemnation of certain women as witches. In *Vinegar Tom*, a pervasive and complex terror of women by both men and women, what Dinnerstein asserts as 'the crucial psychological fact... that all of us, female as well as male, fear the will of woman,' defines the informing centre of the persecution of women as witches. The women accused in *Vinegar Tom* are "guilty" of healing, choosing to live without men, aborting a foetus, and taking pleasure in sexual intercourse. For these crimes they are first shunned and made objects. (Keyssar 210)

The meaning of witches is also important because the play is all about them even though there are none. The definition of a witch and witchcraft in the seventeenth century England is to be known in order to understand Churchill's perspective in the play. In those times, in the countries like England or Scotland, people who were interested in sorcery got punished by authorities and the Church by being burnt at the stake or hanged; because they were assumed that the evil bought their souls in exchange for some abilities.

Wallace Notestein defines a witch as "one who used spells and charms, which was assisted by evil spirits to accomplish certain ends" (Notestein 2). Another definition of witch, by Henry C. Lea, is as a person 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. (Notestein 4)

It is an interesting point that Lea uses the female pronoun for witch, because it is understood that women are witches. That is why witchcraft is identified with females in *Vinegar Tom* as well.

Even though Churchill does identify witches with females in her play, she shows that those women are harmless. The point is that in the past, witches meant to damage other people but Churchill's contemporary play displays something different. Ellen, Alice, Susan and Joan do not intend to harm anyone. They do not even have enough power or self-confidence to get over men who accused them of being wicked because they are oppressed by male dominance.

Churchill, at the end of the play, uses the writers of *Malleus Maleficarum: The Hammer of the Witches* as witch-hunter male characters in her play. They complete each other's sentences in telling the audience how they "...discover witches and torture with no hitches" (*ibid*: 176). These explain who witches are women:

Why are a great number of witches found in the fragile feminine sex than in men? 'All wickedness is but little to the wickedness of woman.' Ecclesiastes. Here are three reasons, first because woman is more credulous and since the aim of the devil is to corrupt faith he attacks them. Second because women are more impressionable. Third because women have slippery tongues and cannot conceal from other women what by their evil art they know. Women are feebler in both body and mind so it's not surprising. (*ibid*: 177)

Female characters in the play have to be stereotyped. If a woman rejects even one of her roles, she is accused of being witch or mad. For instance, Alice and her mother are accused of being witches for an incident that happened to their neighbour. The reason is why especially Alice is seen as a witch and a whore that Jack could not obtain what he wants from her. Having a lover is a normal thing for a man but if a woman has a lover then she is labelled as a prostitute. Alias Solomon in "Witches, Ranters and the Middle Class: The Plays of Caryl Churchill" (1981) asserts that:

Vinegar Tom concerns the violent expulsion from a repressed society of women who will not conform to acceptable social patterns. Hence, the women who do not fit into the expected female roles are the ones declared as witches. They are condemned to torture and hanging because of their

rejection of the society's values through their lower class life style, and their acknowledged sexuality. (qtd in Ravari 156)

If a poor woman wants something different from what her society wants, she gets punished because of being abnormal in her society.

Churchill displays Alice as a castrating figure when Jack's failure to seduce her leads him to accuse her of being a witch. She makes a mud man, to take revenge for being sexually lonely. The mud man is her lover who left her and never came back. Alice says: "We know who though we don't know his name. Now, here's a pin let's prick him. Where shall I prick him? Between the legs first so he can't get on with his lady" (*ibid*: 162). Jack appears and accuses Alice of removing his potency. "He grabs her round the neck and Alice puts her hand between his thighs" and says: "There. It's back" (*ibid*: 164). Jack thanks her but also says "I wasn't sure you were a witch till then" (*ibid*: 164). The viewer of this event, Susan, believes in Jack's claim: "Don't touch me. I'll not be touched by a witch" (*ibid*: 164).

Joan, Alice, Susan and Ellen are accused of being witches and being responsible for killing slaves, stopping butter, having abortions, rebelling against the social norms and helping other people by using good magic. If you are sexually active or a grouchy poor old woman or willing to take control of your own body or capable of doing what a man can do, you are a witch. Under any circumstances, the double standard works for men. Packer, the witch hunter, thinks he is chosen to kill witches by God. "For God in his mercy has called me and shown me a wonderful way of the witch made insensitive to pain by the devil. So that if you prick that place with a pin no blood comes out and the witch feels nothing at all" (*ibid*: 165).

Important aspects of the play are humiliating women as sexual objects, considering them to be inadequate and evil, and believing that men have right to punish them as a god figure. These are the results of constructed gender identities by male centred societies. As it is seen in the play the women think that they need men to survive in their lives, and the ones who try to establish their lives on their own are not allowed to because of gender restrictions.

CHAPTER IV

TOP GIRLS

“**Nell:** I don’t like coming second.

Marlene: Who does?”

Top Girls

4.1. The Structure of *Top Girls*

Top Girls is included in this thesis to further demonstrate the rooted place of gender roles in a woman’s life. If the socially constructed roles of a woman are not performed correctly, then the woman begins to be seen as adopting male characteristics. This situation is interpreted as a cause failure, even if she is successful in a patriarchal society. Churchill uses an innovative drama style in this play, which is said by some to have a confusing structure for the reader or the audience, yet is praised by others as having a distinctive way of telling a story. *Top Girls*, like *Vinegar Tom*, has three acts written in Brechtian epic structure. The play does not follow a linear time line, space, and coherence between acts resembling the characters in it.

The first act is the longest and most absurd one since it has fictional characters in it. The main character, Marlene is emotionless toward these fictional characters, which prevents the audience from focusing on the extraordinary dinner, but lead it to centre on the women and their periods. Churchill sets Marlene into an historical context and does not give any specific time, place, or person. These real and unreal characters give the sense of credibility and uncertainty. She welcomes each fictional female character as an everyday friend. She talks to them as if everything is normal.

The real intention of Churchill is to draw attention to the celebration of Marlene's success with different women characters from different times.

The second act is formed with three scenes. The first scene takes place in the office of *Top Girls* Employment Agency while Marlene, the head of the agency, interviews a girl named Jeanine. This is the shortest scene of all and the second scene immediately jumps into the back yard of Joyce, Marlene's sister, and the audience meets Angie, who is sixteen, and Kit, who is twelve. After observing Angie's admiration to her aunt, Marlene, Churchill switches to the office again where Nell and Win are first seen and then Marlene shows up. In this scene, there are two interviews and two unexpected guests of Marlene come up. Sudden changes between scenes and places prevent the audience from being besotted with the play's flowing story. In this act, the important thing is to catch the idea of women's suffering throughout history while they are still to some extent suffering from not being treated equally, even though in today's world women are given some positions in business life.

By breaking linear structure of a well-made play, Churchill emphasizes how the main character, Marlene, is in position of both being condemned and praised by the audience for the sacrifices she made in her past. The play does not have a traditional structure and a language in order not to imitate a play written by a man. In the first act, each character interrupts the other's speech but the interrupted lines are meaningful. There is not a climax or dramatic resolution in the play. Churchill commentates on the structure of the play as:

I remember before I wrote *Top Girls* thinking about women barristers – and how they were in a minority and had to imitate men to succeed – and I

was thinking of them as different from me. And then I thought ‘wait a minute, my whole concept of what plays might be is from plays written by men...’ And I remember long before that thinking of the ‘maleness’ of the traditional structure of plays, with conflict and building in a certain way to a climax. (Lizabeth Goodman 232)

Hence, there are two voices in writing: one is feminine and the other one is masculine. Helene Cixous, a French feminist professor, claims that men and women differ in writing as a woman writes with her whole body, infusing it with her femininity. (Cixous and Clement 92) As a female, Churchill avoids in *Top Girls* writing from a male perspective to present a real female aspect to the audience. It is obscure that whether she writes for sexual pleasure, yet she writes to uncover the hidden restrictions of women in today’s some patriarchal societies. As she mentions in her statement, Churchill intentionally sets out a female performance in writing by breaking the linear time in the play.

The play opens with an impossible dinner party to celebrate Marlene’s success as a managing director, a feminist victory. The guests are five fictional female characters from history. They are introduced as

(...) Joan who was Pope in the ninth century, and Isabella Bird, the Victorian traveller, and Lady Nijo from Japan, Emperor’s concubine and Buddhist nun, thirteenth century (...) and Gret who was painted by Brueghel. Griselda’s in Boccaccio and Petrarch and Chaucer (...) (*Top Girls* 74)

Each woman is from a different nation, class and historical period. They are not the same but their stories are parallel to each other. While one is telling her life story, the

others interrupt but all of them in a way understand one another. Churchill marks interruptions with a /, and the conversations which are disrupted but continued with a * (Appendix).

Each woman shares her own experiences and life story in the table. The women do not compete with each other but want to tell what has happened to them in past. Since six women in the table want to explain what they have passed through, the audience learns not only about their life experiences of being mothers, daughters, wives and mistresses without involving to the play, it also gets a realistic effect by reading / watching an overlapping dialogue.

Churchill uses Brechtian style in her two plays *Vinegar Tom* and *Top Girls*, not to create a new style but to break the chains of patriarchy which have indwelled to every part of many societies. Even though her usage of epic theatre is somewhat confusing for the audience, it is a very modern writing way to break the already constructed gender identity and to have the same opportunities with the male sex in a patriarchal society.

4.2. Fallacious Sacrifices of Women in *Top Girls*

Generally accepted gender roles restrict women in patriarchal societies. Because of these restrictions, many women have suffered from problems, such as having no identity without having a man. Caryl Churchill wrote *Top Girls* in the aim of confronting the audience with the complexities of women's lives. All the characters in the play are women, and the play is performed only by women. Thus, the problems, anxieties, restrictions of *Top Girls*' female fictional characters and their patriarchal way of thinking in terms of gender will be examined in this section.

Churchill emphasizes how she sees the artificiality of stereotypical sex-typed roles by showing that the only way of being successful in business as a woman is to adopt male manners. This attitude does not weaken the social limitations of women in society but strengthens them, since the women characters in the play do fallacious sacrifices in order to have limited power in society. Rebecca Cameron reports upon this idea:

By emphasizing the disturbing, disempowering consequences of assuming a masculine role, *Top Girls* shows how such achievements can serve to reinforce gender restrictions rather than to disrupt them. Churchill's use of fictional and apocryphal figures from art and historical works created by men acts as a further reminder that their power remains circumscribed within a patriarchal framework. (Cameron 159)

Churchill aims at displaying a woman's achievement in business life but also how her personal life becomes a failure. In order to gain a status in society, she gives up her motherhood and sisterhood. She looks like a feminist character because she earns her own livelihood and is not dependent on a husband. Churchill criticizes the main feminist idea by putting characteristic male features onto a woman to discuss that it might be possible for a woman to be successful in business while losing/giving up her gender. The point is not to have a career by imitating a male, but to achieve it by herself.

Churchill's aim of using fictional and historical female characters from different nations and classes together is to show the commonality of women's restrictions in different societies, and how they support each other with a sisterhood connection. As Cameron explains, "By bringing together women from different time periods and

geographic locations, [this] production presents [its] audience with a spectacle of female solidarity extending across national, cultural, and class boundaries” (Cameron 143). Every character in the play has different degrees of self-awareness, but the main character is the only one who has total freedom. Marlene, the contemporary character, is the symbol of female individualism. She is the picture of a woman’s success, but they are the frame that holds the puzzle together. Each character symbolizes a part of this character’s life. All of them make significant changes in their lives, such as travelling and getting through various difficulties. Yet, they are all socially restricted, not only by men but by their own patriarchal biased thinking about a woman’s proper role.

In the name of freedom and success, every character but one has a child and gives up them later. Dulle Gret had ten children, Patient Griselda gave birth to a son and a daughter, who were removed from her by the Marquis; Lady Nijo had several children from the Emperor and her lovers, Akebono and Ariake; and Pope Joan had a daughter who was killed by the Roman cardinals after birth. Isabella Bird did not have a child. She had a different approach to life and she had a big compassion towards her sister and a fondness to horses. Marlene does not mention about her daughter at the dinner, and the audience is not aware of the truth till the last act. Hence, Marlene is seen at first as being a success but later the audience figures out that she has sacrificed her daughter (traditional womanhood) to achieve her success.

The first arrivals of Marlene’s guests to the dinner are Isabella Bird and Lady Nijo. These two women have the same strong feeling of guilt for wanting go beyond. They both suffer from patriarchy in their societies, especially Nijo. Nijo’s story is an affecting sob story of prostitution, renunciation and rape. She mentions about how

she was forced to give up her children since a concubine of the Emperor is not allowed to keep her children. The best part of her story involves beating the Emperor with a stick under the organization of Nijo. In her period and society, “they make a special rice gruel and stir it with their stick, and then they bear their women across the loins so they’ll have sons and not daughters” (*ibid*: 80). She is in fact accepts the idea that she is belonged to the “Emperor” and her duty is to satisfy her man. However, she decides to take revenge from the Emperor for he told his attendants they could beat Nijo and the other concubines. Also, the idea of beating a wife or concubine to have sons not daughters is clearly sex discrimination in Nijo’s society. Women are abused physically, emotionally and they also suffer from leaving their children, especially daughters, after giving birth to them because it is allowed neither having daughters nor keeping them.

Lady Nijo describes her life in two halves: The first one is spent on tempting men such as Ariake, and the second one lasts by repenting for what she did in the first half. “The first half of my life was sin and the second all repentance” (*ibid*: 59). She blames herself that Ariake, the priest and her lover, is condemned to the hell forever because of her. “I wasn’t a nun, I was still at court, but he was a priest, and when he came to me he dedicated his whole life to hell.” (*ibid*: 64) Besides Ariake, Nijo feels guilty about her father’s dooms as well. She says,

My father was saying his prayers and he dozed off in the sun. So I touched his knee to rouse him. ‘I wonder what will happen’, he said, and then he was dead before he finished the sentence. / If he’d died saying his prayers he would have gone straight to heaven. (*ibid*: 58)

She blames herself for being the reason of their abject.

Nijo's failure in society does not stem from her inconvenient actions in compliance with her gender. She fails for being "too much woman" which is again a social role for a female. If she uses her womanhood as she likes, it is a reason to be punished. She should be belonged to only one man assigned by society, and even though she is taught to be a prostitute, she still does her duty according to what is told to her by patriarchy. She is bound to her master -man- so much that she endures her master's choices among women but she is never pleased with that "... No, of course not, Marlene, I belonged to him, it was what I was brought up for from a baby. I soon found I was sad if he stayed away. It was depressing day after day not knowing when he would come. I never enjoyed taking other women to him" (*ibid*: 57). As it is seen in Nijo's words that it was considerably indigenous thing to have more than one woman for a man and this was taken for granted by the other women.

In the first half of her life, Nijo chooses what she is obligated to do. She accepts the roles of a woman that she is taught by her society. A girl should be brought up carefully then she can become one of the concubines of the Emperor. That is the reason why she visits her illegitimate daughter as a guest not as her mother;

I saw my daughter once. She was three years old. She wore a plum-red / small-sleeved gown. Akebono's wife had taken the child because her own died. Everyone thought was just a visitor. She was being brought up carefully so she could be sent to the palace like I was. (*ibid*: 72)

If she declares her three-year-old daughter as her child out of wedlock, that little girl will probably lose the chance of being a "concubine" in the palace.

Churchill emphasizes Lady Nijo's words during the dinner to show the reader that Lady Nijo wears the clothes that her society obligates to. She dresses nicely

because dresses and clothes are the sign of one's status besides the Emperor. Man identifies his woman with several layered gowns, which is an insulting position for a woman. Additionally, when Nijo is offered a drink she says: "It was always the men who used to get so drunk. I'd be one of the maidens, passing the sake" (*ibid*: 56). Here is what she actually means that there are things men do and there are things that women do not do. Drinking and getting drunk are behaviours that belong to males according to Nijo and her society. Women wear silk layers under their clothes and men drink and enjoy their women.

Being a concubine to a Master is regarded as good by Nijo, but "falling out of favour" of him is the worst thing that can ever happen to a woman like her. She names this situation as nothingness. If she does not have a lover in her life anymore, she has nothing after all: "How else could I have left the court if I wasn't a nun? When my father died I had only his Majesty. So when I fell out of favour I had nothing. Religion is a kind of nothing / and I dedicated what was left of me to nothing" (*ibid*: 61). She unconsciously accepts that without the norms of patriarchy, she is useless and she has no other choice but being a nun to continue her life.

Dulle Gret is a fictional character drawn by Pieter Breughel and she wears warrior clothes –an apron, helmet and a sword-. She behaves like a man and speaks so less. When she speaks, she says impolite words. Her aggressive behaviours and impolite speaking style creates confusion about her femininity and masculinity. She is an important female figure in the play because she fights back to the enemies who occupy her village like a man, with armour on her head and an apron in her hand. Even though she is not drawn as a passive figure, she does not have much to say

during the dinner. Maybe her becoming masculine character revokes her to participate in the female conversation.

Pope Joan is a woman who became a Pope. She tells her story how she is able to become a Pope. After all, she is a woman and a woman's becoming a pope is not possible on earth since "women, children and lunatics can't be Pope" (*ibid*: 69). For these reasons, she does not have the right to be a Pope. While she was growing she decided to stay as a man and she began dressing as a boy at the age of twelve. That is how she continued to study. However, at the same time she never sacrifices her womanhood and she continues to have male lovers. She was very clever and elected as a Pope. But, her body *disappointed* her because she got pregnant by her chamberlain lover and delivered her baby during a papal procession. Because of this, Joan was stoned to death.

Pope Joan's situation is a show to announce what will happen to women if they try to break the lines of already constructed gender identity. As a woman she was at first not permitted to have education or be Pope like men. Yet she broke the rules of her patriarchal society and got punished severely in response to her outrageous action. Cameron interprets this case as,

Pope Joan's masculine attire, for example, comes to signify her society's revulsion with the female body. While at first her robes and her language might suggest enlarged possibilities for women, her story soon becomes a cautionary tale against transgressing gender boundaries. (Cameron 159)

Even though Pope Joan is an example of female victory throughout history, being executed by a patriarchal society punishes her. It is not a likely perception to put a woman on a Pope's chair, which only belongs to men.

Patient Griselda is a muted, passive and docile female character, which is famous with her extraordinary marriage. Marlene introduces her to others as in Boccaccio and Petrarch and Chaucer's tales a perfect female figure. This suggests that Griselda's marriage is approved by patriarchy. She is shown as a good example of an obedient wife who fulfils her duties toward her husband. That is why; patriarchal people applaud her at the end of her story. Despite the remorseless manners of her husband, Griselda sticks up to her gender duties and never outrages her husband even when he separates their newborn children from her. Griselda obeys whatever she is told to do since she sees her husband in a higher status than her in their society.

Marlene is a character with conflict. Sometimes, she looks like a man, behaves like a man, owns a man's job, but on the other hand; she does have feminine characteristics as well. She gave birth to a daughter, Angie, and she has male lovers. For all that, she is a complex character who is in between being neither a man nor woman. The audience cannot condemn her for what she has done to be successful, nor praise her for the status in business she gained. She does not speak a word about her life during the dinner since the other characters such as Isabelle Bird, Patient Griselda and Lady Nijo are all reflections of Marlene. They all leave or lose their children in favour of being free or acceptance by the male dominated society with their successes like Marlene. Thus, while Dulle Gret and Pope Joan are a part of Marlene's masculine side, Nijo and Griselda are her feminine side. Isabella Bird signifies Marlene as a sister.

Marlene left her family and illegitimate child behind in order to found herself a successful life. She achieved being very successful businesswoman and she owned

an agency and became the managing director, which was seen as a male job according to patriarchal society. Because of being successful like a man and owning the status of a manager, a patriarchal woman named Mrs Kidd blames Marlene for being unnatural. Her husband, Howard, does not want to work for a woman. He thinks a man should be the manager instead of Marlene. A managing director should be a man and because of that Marlene is not natural in the eyes of Mrs Kidd and her husband Howard.

Unlike the patriarchal woman Mrs Kidd, Win and Nell, the employees of the Employment Agency, prefer a woman rather than a man as the manager. Win says, “we’d rather it was you than Howard. We’re glad for you, aren’t we Nell” and Nell confirms “Oh yes. Aces” (*ibid*: 104). They support Marlene since they think she represents all women in business field. However, Marlene only acts for herself and never takes action in the name of other women. Her achievement is good only for her, not for the others. In this percept, Marlene is resembled to the first woman president Margaret Thatcher. Ahmet Gökhan Biçer and Erdinç Parlak explain this situation as that “As a politician Ros Brunt points out, ‘Thatcher never made any claim to represent women or speak in any way on their behalf. Nor indeed has she ever done anything for women, apart from making the majority much harder up’” (Biçer and Parlak 121-22). Marlene wears male shoes as a woman to have a career. Without those shoes, it is questionable if she would have the same victory. Biçer and Parlak say that:

Individual struggles of these women will never come to any success because the system is too well rooted to overcome. This poor result of the play shows us the dialectics of sex and also the way to beat the current

situation: Women should reorganize and redesign their way of struggling against the patriarchal system. Eliminating the well-established patriarchal system needs more than copying male's roles and recalling women's own nature and identity. (Biçer and Erdiñ 126)

If a woman takes action in the name of breaking gendered roles, then the position she gains in her society will be meaningful. Acting like a man or embracing a patriarchal view does not help women improve their status in a patriarchal society.

4.3. Modern Patriarchal Women in *Top Girls*

Other remarkable points in *Top Girls* are the interviews with other women where Marlene works. Each interview explores how and why the workingwomen are becoming mannish in their search for success. They think the way a man does during their interviews and lead their clients from the aspect of a man. As a result, while these women character unconsciously behave like a man and reject female gender roles, they adopt the biased stance towards women.

One scene explores Marlene's attitude towards a woman who is in a lower status than her. Jeanine, a girl at the age of twenty, wants a change in her job to earn money for marriage. Saving money to get married is not a problem, however, Marlene advises Jeanine not to mention marriage to the prospective employers. Marlene tells Jeanine about a job but she warns: "I've sent him a girl before you and she was happy, left to have a baby, you won't want to mention marriage there" (*ibid*: 86). Having children is a reason for not being employed. Yet, a man who fathers a child does not face limitations in his career. He gets married, has children and continues her career without interruption unlike woman. If Jeanine wants to be in the

same position with Marlene, she needs to do some sacrifices such as giving up marriage or not having a baby for a while.

Ageing, like in *Vinegar Tom*, is seen as a problem in *Top Girls* as well. In this case, it is an obstacle for a woman to get a job rather than to get a husband. Yet the result is the same. A second interview takes place between Win and Louise, an older woman. Win tells her: "It's not necessarily a handicap, well it is of course we have to face that, but it's not necessarily a disabling handicap, experience does count for something" (*ibid*: 105). Louise explains why she wants a change in her job:

There you are, I've lived for that company I've given my life really you could say because I haven't had a great deal of social life, (...) I had management status from the age of twenty seven and you'll appreciate what that extremely well, and I feel I'm stuck there. I've spent twenty years in middle management. I've seen young men who I trained on in my own company or elsewhere, to higher thing. Nobody notices me, I don't expect it, I don't attract attention by making mistakes. (*ibid*:105)

A woman who is experienced is raised to the same positions as less experienced younger men. Because she does not "neutralize" her as a male, she is not promoted. Win offers her to get a job which is "easier for a woman" for instance "there is a cosmetic company here where your [her] experience might be relevant" (*ibid*: 106-117). Additionally, Win tries to silence her by saying that it is not good talking too much in an interview. Win, as a masculine woman, stuffs Louise and convinces her to be passive as usual if she does not have the courage to adopt male manners like Marlene.

Even though Marlene has achieved something usually associated with men in society, some women fear being successful. Matina Horner explains the idea of woman's having a fear of achievement because of the disharmony between success and a sense of femininity;

A bright woman is caught in a double bind. In testing and other achievement-oriented situations she worries not only about failure, but also about success. If she fails, she is not living up to her own standards of performance; if she succeeds, she is not living up to societal expectations about the female role. For women, then, the desire to achieve is often contaminated by what I call the motive to avoid success. (qtd in Riger 108)

So, unless Marlene gives up her successful performance in the male world, she will not fit into the female picture that society draws for her. Her success is counted as a failure in a patriarchal society. However, by attributing herself a male role, she becomes an image of success among individualistic feminism.

Mrs. Kidd is a patriarchal woman who is afraid of her husband. If he finds out that she visited Marlene to convince her giving up the management position, he will be very angry with her because he is *very proud* as a man. Mrs. Kidd tells Marlene that if it were a man instead of woman, Howard would "get over it as something normal" (*ibid*: 112). Marlene says "I'll consult him on any decisions affecting his department. But that's no different, Mrs. Kidd, from any other colleagues" (*ibid*: 112). Mrs. Kidd's answer is quite patriarchal that she thinks because he is a man, he has the right to have being manager and not being directed by a woman. A managing woman is an insulting for a man who works under her. As it is all the mentioned that Marlene is not a common patriarchal woman figure in the play. She prefers being in

a position of a patriarchal man. That is why; she is accused of being ball breaker and unnatural. From the perspective of a patriarchal woman, Mrs. Kidd says: “It’s not easy, a man of Howard’s age. You don’t care. I thought he was going too far but he’s right: You’re one of these ball breakers/ that’s what you are. You’ll end up miserable and lonely. You’re not natural” (*ibid*: 113).

A person is not directed by any kind of groups, ethnicity or culture according to Stephanie Riger, based on Francis Galton’s experiment. What she or he has done comes inside of her or him. Marlene here does not reflect only on her culture but also her individual choice. The manner she has is the real identity she wants to be. Unlike Riger’s claim, the reason of Marlene’s adopting masculine behavior lies in her subconscious. Thus, it is likely to say that individualist actions are affected by the person’s culture because people are born without biases. After a person’s sex is decided by nature, ethnics and religions are stated. However, Riger claims,

The self is contained in the individual body. The origins of our actions (and responsibility for those actions (lies within the individual, rather than in some social group larger than the individual, such as the family or one’s racial or ethnic group, or other extra—individual factors. (Riger 43)

What she means is the difference does not come from the sex but from the individual itself.

Being female is not a good thing from a perspective of a patriarchal man or woman. Even when a female is economically more powerful than a man, she is seen as acting out of nature and wears a male mask by patriarchy. Without freedom, no one can make choices. Riger points out that: “Equality of opportunity does not require that women and men be identical (...)” (Riger 46). In order to break the

biases, women should not be seen as a second sex and should be given the same opportunities that men have in a patriarchal society.

CONCLUSION

Throughout history, a woman has been the “other” to man. Due to the physical and psychological distinctions between the two sexes, gender studies have taken up the use of binary oppositions: masculine / feminine, good / bad, or right / wrong. Being on the left side has generally been a privilege and associated with superiority to the other. These perceptions are socially constructed like gender roles. Masculinity and femininity are the attitudes attributed to the two sexes in a patriarchal society without question. As we grow up, we acknowledge the ground duties derived from gender roles in a male-dominated society.

Most male-centred societies still have stereotypes about the roles of women and men despite the advancement of feminist movements through decades. Neither men are superior to women nor are women inferior to men. It is reasonably possible that the two sexes can be different but at the same time equal. They are equally born but are charged with different duties in some societies. Their functions in the world are equally important. This is the perspective that every person should have. However, most women suffer from social restrictions and stereotypes, and some societies degrade women’s position to a lower level than men. While a man is mostly seen as dominant in the family, a woman or girl is frequently counted as the servant of men. It can be argued that the problem is the result of the attributed gender roles of many patriarchal societies.

One’s body is labelled according to cultural and historical differences. The sanctions and the taboos of the society construct identities for humans, such as a woman being mother to her children, being a loyal wife to her husband and being a

docile daughter to her father. Feminist theatre plays an important role in illuminating women's place in society. Caryl Churchill is an important playwright, one who criticizes the socially limited status of women. She tells different stories of different women from various nations. Her two plays, *Vinegar Tom* and *Top Girls* are heading examples to this. What restricted women are, in fact, the already constructed gender roles for her, before she is born as a female.

The characters of these two plays have different lives but deal with the same problems. They all live from a perspective that they have been taught. For instance, a character like Marlene in *Top Girls* might have escaped from male domination, but she sacrificed her motherhood for her own autonomy. Alice, in *Vinegar Tom*, is a woman who sacrifices her purity in the name of autonomy, but she ends up being executed for it.

In *Vinegar Tom*, the characters Alice and Ellen in *Top Girls*, the fictional female figures are seen as monstrous by the patriarchal society, and because of their gender/sex whatever they achieve in life does not matter. Marlene in *Top Girls* is the heroine who leaves motherhood and family behind her for the sake of success. No matter how she turns into a male character, she is a woman, and therefore strange to the ones who are not used to seeing a female in control of men. In *Vinegar Tom*, this idea is tried to be demolished by the character Alice; however she couldn't escape of being the object of male desire and eliminated by the patriarchal society by being accused of witch. In addition to this, Betty of *Vinegar Tom* is as a muted character, stuck under the big stones of patriarchy and couldn't voice herself on behalf of freedom. Susan is a passive figure who once attempts to do a favour for her own body but fails since she is used to be passive.

Some women of the two plays are in fear of both being failed and successful. Marlene in *Top Girls* does not want to accept her failure in motherhood and sisterhood. In *Vinegar Tom*, this fear is quite obvious in Susan. She is encouraged to be in control of her body; however, she is very timid. She unconsciously has accepted the patriarchy very much that she confesses what she has done in fear of achieving something for her and gaining self-autonomy.

Caryl Churchill shows in *Vinegar Tom* and *Top Girls* how women have struggled and suffered in the past to obtain the same social/economic position as men, and the same problems and limitations exist in today's world for women. In order to gain equality, Churchill shows that a woman should at first accept herself as a female and continue her career and domestic life on her own. If not, it does not matter to womankind whether she becomes successful, and it is a hollow personal victory, because one's identity has been sacrificed.

APPENDIX

Joan: Damnation only means ignorance of the truth. I was always attracted by the teachings of John the Scot, though he was inclined to confuse / God and the world.

Isabella: Grief always overwhelmed me at the time.

Marlene: What I fancy is a rare steak. Gret?

Isabella: I am of course a member of the / Church of England.*

Gret: Potatoes.

Marlene: * I haven't been to church for years. / I like Christmas carols.

Isabella: Good works matter more than church attendance.

Marlene: Make that two steaks and a lot of potatoes. Rare. But I don't do good works either.

Joan: Cannelloni, please, / and a salad.

Isabella: Well, I tried, but oh dear. Hennie did good works.

Nijo: The first half of my life was all sin and the second / all repentance.*

Marlene: Oh what about starters?

Gret: Soup.

Joan: * And which did you like best? (*Top Girls* 58-59)

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