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Pastiche as A Postmodern Technique in Caryl Churchill's *Vinegar Tom* (1976)

Assist. Instructor : Mohammed Najim Abdullah
Al Yarmouk University College
Dept of English Language
mohammednajim@al-yarmok.edu.iq

 "Some of the dominant features of their postmodernist fiction include: temporal disorder; the erosion of the sense of time; a pervasive and pointless use of pastiche; a foregrounding of words as fragmenting material signs; the loose association of ideas; paranoia; and vicious circles, or a loss of distinction between logically separate levels of discourse".

(Lewis, 2011, p,123)

Abstract

This paper examines pastiche as a postmodern technique that is well-applied in Caryl Churchill's *Vinegar Tom* (1976). It is crucial when dealing with aesthetic of postmodernism aesthetic for both pastiche and superficiality. Pastiche permits for reproducing in a space in which stylistic novelty is no longer possible. It means that all is left for imitating old-fashioned styles, to speak their voices with the styles in the imaginary manner. However, Churchill wrote other plays such as *Traps* (1978), *Cloud Nine* (1979), *Top Girls* (1982) and *A Mouthful of Birds* (1986). Most of Churchill's plays tackled theme of violence against women for her being a feminist playwright and her own interest in destabilizing dominant ideologies. This play is analyzed from postmodern perspective in general and in how postmodern techniques such as irony, parody, fragmentation, self-consciousness, minimalism, maximalism and the like were applied to show the skillfully Caryl Churchill and her contemporaries have employed such techniques in their plays. This study adopted a poststructuralist

critical method to analyse the play in the light of Derrida's elements of destruction as for signifier and signified in *Vinegar Tom.* It was indicated that the playwright made use of pastiche in the play as it was found in *The Crucible* by Arthur Miller.

1. Introduction

Pastiche is a "blank parody or empty copy" (Storry, 2001:158), In postmodernism, most of the written plays were set to challenge the patriarchal system and notion of gender representation the society has imposed. As a totally rejected idea by Churchill is of gender representation within the society. Definitely, Churchill employment of postmodern techniques such as black humor, pastiche, parody, irony, minimalism, maximalism and temporal distortion to undermine dominant ideologies. However, Churchill looks cautious for reestablishing the same ideologies for her different feminist political ideology. Moreover, plays presented by Churchill to destabilize the Western binaries such as maleness/femaleness, heterosexuality/homosexuality, whiteness/blackness, etc. Therefore, the final stage in postmodernism is to represent the work of thinker such as Salman Rushdie, John Barth, and so on. The continuous work of postmodernism has contributed to experiment literary technique, yet at the meantime rejects to adopt the superior position of the modernists. It is obvious that dealing with common cultural references and employing pastiche are really influential in works of postmodernists.

The late of the 1970s as well as the early 1980s witnessed the emergence of terms such as *postmodernism* and *postmodernity*. Such two terms culturally spread through Europe and North America, at the time that there were many of the literary movements labelled as postmodern. The period of these three decades saw the news media in which the terms had exceptionally been applied in many academic centers.

In general, the term postmodernism is defined as "broad aesthetic and intellectual projects in our society, on the plane of theory" (Woods, 1999, p.10). For instance, any work of literature with language game that enjoys for its own sake rather than realistic purpose can be a good model, while postmodernity describes "our socio-economic, political and cultural condition" (Ibid:10). As argued by Tim Woods (1999) that:

> "In the west we live in increasingly postindustrial, 'service oriented' economies, while our dealings with mundane task like, for instance, shopping, are ever more mediated through the computer interface, as we communicate with each other by email, voice-mail, fax, tele-conference on video link, accessing the wider world via the net, and choosing for entertainment the high-speed image bombardment of the pop video or the tongue-in-chic thriller anti narratives of the X files." (p,10).

Nevertheless, no matter how the term was applied by the critics, there exist one thing in common, which is that our involvement with the term and the term's being shaped according to our cultural circle. Yet, an overall agree ment is difficult to be created among the lot of critics concerning what postmodernism or postmodernity might be. Here, Simon Malpas (2005) points out:

> "The postmodern has been defined in a huge variety of different ways: as a new aesthetic formation (Hassan,1982,1987), a condition (Lyotard,1984;Harvey,1990), a culture (Conner, 1997), a cultural dominant (Jameson, 1991), a set of artistic movements employing a parodic mode of self-conscious representation (Hutcheon,1988,2002), an ethical or political imperative (Bauman,1993,1995), a period in which we have reached the 'end of history' (Baudrillard,1994; Fukuyama,1992;Vatimmo,1988), a 'new horizon of our cultural, philosophical and political experience'(Laclau,1988), an 'illusion' (Eagleton,1996), a reactionary political formation (Callinicos,1989), or even just a rather unfortunate mistake (Norris,1990,1993)" (p,6-7)

Malpas (2005) stated that as a term, the emphasis of postmodernism is on "a question of style and artistic representation, and postmodernity has been employed to designate a specific cultural context or historical epoch" (p.9). He further argues that postmodernism can be well-exemplified in literature by Salman Rushdie's novel *Midnight's Children*. This piece of literature exposes its narrative structure of fragmentation as well as its style of playfulness. It also

involves a reference of mystery. *The Inhuman* (1991) written by him Jean-François Lyotard, which can be set as a contributive work to postmodernity. Thus, a description of a 'style or a genre' is attributed to postmodernism, while that of an 'epoch or a period' is attributed to postmodernity. It is believed according to a group of critics that it is impossible to set a separation between a style and context due to the work of art if it is postmodern or not, and it comes out from the world in which it occurs.

2. Pastiche as a Postmodern Technique

The way of imitating or mimicking other styles of literature is the way that Fredric Jameson (1991) sees pastiche and parody. However, both techniques are differed from each other. On one hand, and in this regard, Jameson's explanation is that 'parody mocks others' styles in how they write and speak. On the other hand, Jameson's description for pastiche as "Pastiche is, like parody, the imitation of a peculiar or unique style, the wearing of stylistic mask, speech in a dead language: but it is a neutral practice of such mimicry, without parody's ulterior motive, without the satirical impulse, without laughter". "Pastiche is thus blank parody, a statue with blind eyeballs ... the practice of a kind of blank irony, is to what Wayne Booth calls the "stable ironies" of the eighteen century". (p,17)

Therefore, pastiche is used as a way to play with images of past, though not past as a real, which takes us to a falsified and despoiled historicity. It has been argued that postmodernism is in favour of bricolage (i.e. to construct something out of multiple range of other things) or pastiche to originally produced things, which means to mix both of styles and genres together, and then to juxtapose low with high culture.

Form another side, and in terms of aesthetics, it means a pastiched is more preferred parody, though both techniques mimic a 'peculiar or unique style'. But since parody involves 'ulterior motives', (i.e. a motivation to criticism, or satire)

which is a commitment to make a reader/an audience laugh and remember 'conviction that alongside the abnormal tongue you have momentarily borrowed, some healthy linguistic normality still exists', pastiche does not.

Pierre Menard's viewpoint had been provided by another theorist of contemporary literature prior a few years before the appearance of Barth's essay on Borges. Alain Robbe-Grillet in his '*For a New Novel*' (1965) is of the argument that it would be inaccurate to take the scenario set out in ton account as paradoxical. Alain Robbe-Grille (1989) explains:

> "To praise a young writer in 1965 because he 'writes like Stendhal' is doubly disingenuous. On the one hand there would be nothing admirable about such a feat . . .; on the other, the thing itself is quite impossible: in the first place, to write like Stendhal one would first of all have to be writing in 1830. A writer who produces a pastiche skillful enough to contain pages Stendhal might have signed at the time would in no way have the value he would still possess today had he written those the same pages under Charles X. It is no paradox that Borges elaborates in *Ficciones*: the twentieth-century novelist who reproduces *Don Quixote* word for word writes a totally different work from that of Cervantes". (Robbe-Grillet, 1989a, 10)

It is shown through the observations set by Robbe-Grillet the existence of an actual and a strong point of agreement between Fredric Jameson's arguments against pastiche and the arguments of postmodern writers, such as John Barth and Robbe-Grillet, regarding their contemporaries' determined view by which the previously set literary conventions are maintained. Instances of such conventions are the realist novel, as an inappropriate perverse kind of pastiche, which their own work must fight against.

3. Theoretical and Practical Elements of Postmodernism

Ihab Hassan (1980, p.125) stated that postmodernist theatre employs "disjunctive, displaced, or indeterminate forms, a discourse of fragments, an ideology of fracture, a will to unmaking, an invocation of silence - [it] veers toward all these and yet implies their very opposites, their antithetical realities". Thus, the use of the playful potential of signs and performance, it is possible to transgress rather than offend, and to confront without didactic. Consequently, conventions that are governed by assumptions, can – by postmodernism – be

exposed and dislocated for that the traditional ways of reading are removed. This means that, the challenge of conventions can only be effective whether the change on the method in the work occurs in a radical way.

The main principle of postmodernism is to reject the inherited authority of patriarchy. Yet, the collapse of the grand narratives, capitalism is abandoned bare of any ideological sparring partner. It is a suggestion of Hal Foster (1985) that postmodern culture sees the collapse of economic and cultural realms as the "breakdown in the old structural opposition of the cultural and economic in the simultaneous commodification of the former and symbolization of the latter". (p,145). So, to reflect and respond to the climate of the era, there exist an association between postmodernism and nihilistic tendencies for the emergence of some works from postmodern theatre, which are often have the feature to deconstruct the apoliticality. (Pavis, 1986).

The progress in any authorial controlling perspective is frequently disrupted by a postmodern work so that collective and contradictory views are to be embraced. Such a progress accounts for postmodern theatre's disparate, fragmented and open-ended nature and the aim of some deconstructed, self-reflexive and self-conscious works is to deconstruct and destabilize the structure of authority upside down. In its turn, the deconstruction and destabilization are intended to switch between the roles of both the creator and the audience in terms of producing the meaning. For instance, the aim of self-reflexivity is to ironize a work by implicating its own construction. However, if self-consciousness recurs throughout a work, it can ironically result in didacrism or presence (Lee, 1997).

4. Characteristics of Postmodern Literature

Both the nature of existence and concepts of reality are under the microscope of postmodernism. Fictionality and textuality of those realities are also adopted by postmodernism. Literary postmodernism has subsequently been adeptly

summarized by Waugh as "a quest for fictionality" (Waugh, 2006: 10), one that is oriented toward a paradoxical premise: belief in nothing but uncertainty.

Jacques Derrida's theory of deconstruction means the re-reading or breaking down of a text to its basics to show the multiplicity of its meanings at work, which tries to undermine the logic of binary oppositions within language. In this regard, Butler asserts (2002) asserts that:

> "The central argument for deconstruction depends on relativism, by which I mean the view that truth itself is always relative to the differing standpoints and predisposing intellectual frameworks of the judging subject. It is difficult to say, then, that deconstructors are committed to anything as definite as a philosophical thesis. Indeed, to attempt to define deconstruction is to defy another of its main principles – which is to deny that final or true definitions are possible, because even the most plausible candidates will always invite a further defining move, or 'play', with language. For the deconstructor, the relationship of language to reality is not given, or even reliable, since all language systems are inherently unreliable cultural constructs". (2002:16)

Consequently, the postmodernist approach to literary creation invents in a successful way in producing of what could be known as a series of 'meta-realities'. The aim of this series is to lead the reader to the over-all conclusion that the trio of truth, reality and experience are essentially and purely achieved in a subjective and personal manner. The way to achieve this essence occurs via the use of language, as it draws attention to itself as a means of creative expression. That is why, the majority of postmodernist writers consider that, "language constitutes reality; it does not describe the world but constructs it". (Childs and Fowler, 2006: 52)

5. Linda Hutcheon's Contribution to Postmodernism

As for postmodernism, it has varied constructions, yet none of which has more value than the other. For Linda Hutcheon in her book '*A Poetics of Postmodernism*' (1988) says that postmodernism is:

> "a contradictory phenomenon, one that uses and abuses, installs and then subverts, the very concept it challenges - be it in architecture, literature,

painting, sculpture, film, video, dance, TV, music, philosophy, aesthetic theory, psychoanalysis, linguistics, or historiography" (p.3).

In addition to that, she in hers '*A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction*' (1988) set a definition for postmodernism "fundamentally contradictory, resolutely historical, and inescapably political" *(*p.4). In this definition, she explains that "its contradictions may be due to late capitalist society or some other reasons, but what is important in these contradictions is the postmodern concept of "the presence of the past" *(*p.4). This debate begins with the meaning of the term itself, the meaning of the prefix "post" which – as previously mentioned – rejects and separates postmodernism from modernism. However, as for the term itself, as Hutcheon points out, is also a "contradictory dependence on and independence from that which temporally preceded it and which literally made it possible ... It marks neither a simple and radical break from it nor a straightforward continuity with it: it is both and neither" (p.18). She is of the belief that postmodernism is not an utter rejection of modernism, it "critically reviews modernism for its glories and errors" (Hutcheon, 1988, p.30). furthermore, modernist and postmodernist text is distinguished by according to Brian McHale (2003) based on whether the both raise questions either ontologically or epistemologically. Again, Linda Hutcheon (2002) in her book '*The Politics of Postmodernism*' elaborates that postmodernism "inscribes and subverts the conventions and ideologies of the dominant cultural and social forces of twentieth century western world" (p.11).

6. Postmodern Studies

Among the postmodernist studies that informs the techniques of postmodernism is a study carried out by Ivanickova *Chaos of Postmodern Changes*, by which expressions of transformation in Slavic literature after 1989 were investigated when over 300 million Slavs were 'locked' in a cultural paradigm that was opposite to communism. This study was analysed from both postmodern culture and the philosophical ideas of scholars such as Lyotard, Foucault, and Derrida to legitimize the theory of pluralism "in the understanding of the multifaceted

nature of truth, the polyphony of cultures, and the significance of all minorities in the spiritual development of humankind" (Culler, 1998, p.9).

Moreover, Krijanskaia's *A Non-Aristotelian Model: Time as Space and Landscape in Postmodern Theatre* (2008) is a study conducted to analyze Aristotle's *Poetics*, by which specific ideas on how drama is structured, which asserts that both dramatic literature and theatre practices had dominated for centuries. Hence, the study shows the way, causality, narrativity, and temporal linearity function to be primary factors in the organization of dramatic and stage texts.

7. Caryl Churchill as a Feminist Postmodernist Playwright

As a playwright, Caryl Churchill started her career in 1958 with Downstairs and is regarded as the pioneer of English feminist theatre (Keyssar, 1984). However, Churchill was also a postmodernist and as such, techniques of postmodernism were prevailing in her literary writings (i.e. plays). It is very important to consider the fact that techniques of postmodern theatre have often been ignored by scholars. For example, Bigsby & Bigsby (2000) maintains that "theatre has commanded very little interest from the major theorists or those who have taken up their theories" (p. 9). Henceforth, within the literary spheres worldwide, selected playwrights such as Beckett, Ionesco, and Pinter are treated as considered as postmodernists.

8. Methodology

In this article, the methodology that is followed can be shed light on as follows: to present an introduction of postmodernism, origins, features, relationships with modernism and so on. Then, to show the difference between postmodernism and modernism from one side and that same difference between postmodernism and postmodernity. The techniques used within the postmodern literature found its place within the whole work, as well as characteristics in addition to some insights of issue of representation. To be mentioned as well, the playwright who

introduced this piece of art (i.e. *Vinegar Tom*) and the way postmodern techniques are used to show its influence on language. A review of recent studies in the field of postmodern literature/drama, followed by a brief about Caryl Churchill's style of writing as well as the theory that was applied to analyze the play itself. This article as a whole, is an utter declaration of the postmodernism's rejection of the inherited authority of patriarchal system.

9. Caryl Churchill's *Vinegar Tom* (1976)

Churchill in *Vinegar Tom* uses the technique of pastiche as an imitation in *The Crucible (1953)* by Arthur Miller, that circles around 'witch trials'. Characters' names such as Betty and John of *The Crucible* are imitated in *Vinegar Tom (1976)*, while several others such as Reverend Samuel Parris, John Proctor, and Susanna Walcott in *The Crucible* resemble Jack, Alice, and Bellringer in *Vinegar Tom*. *Vinegar Tom* (1976) centers on the theme of 'witch trials' and it was regarded as a marginalization of women's status within their society after accusing them of being witches.

It is Susan's relation to Alice, which represents the utter example of faithfulness in *Vinegar Tom*. After being tortured by stabbing her body to find the spot of devil, which cause no pain, and Packer and Goody felt tiredness to find nothing with which to accuse Alice of. Therefore, they made their minds to seek evidence of her witchcraft from others. It is for their surprise that it is her friend, Susan, who speaks out against her:

> *"SUSAN: I know something of her."*
> *"PACKER: Don't be shy then girl, speak out."*
> *"ALICE: Susan, what are you doing? Don't speak against me."*
> *"SUSAN: Don't let her at me."*
> *"ALICE: You'll have me hanged."*

> *"[SUSAN starts to shriek hysterically]"* (p, 175)

Alice is taken out and Susan, calm again, initiates her evidence:

> *SUSAN: She met with the devil, she told me, like a man in black she met him in the night and did uncleanness with him, and ever after she was not herself to want to be with the devil again.* (p, 175)
>
> *"ALICE: There. It's back."*
>
> *"JACK: It is. It's back. Thank you Alice I wasn't sure you were a witch till*   *then."*
> *"[JACK goes.]"*
>
> *"SUSAN: what are you doing Alice? Alice? Alice?"*
>
> *"[ALICE turns to her.]"*
>
> *"ALICE turns to her"*
>
> *"ALICE: It's nothing. He's mad. Oh my neck, Susan. Oh, I'd laugh if it didn't hurt."*
>
> *"SUSAN: Don't touch me. I'll not be touched by a witch"* (p, 173).

Having turned to Alice pleasantly, Susan says that she could laugh at this time, Susan however, has a totally different view. She has confirmed Alice's being a witch. Definitely, the entire scene can be dismissed on account of Susan's being more than innocent; yet as is evinced by other speeches within the play, that Alice is not strongly charming over Jack. Though she is designated as a prostitute and Margery, Jack's wife, is woman of vigorous reputation, yet it is Alice who has a spell over Jack. It is also fascinating that though she is a poor woman, and her unstable reputation for being accused as a prostitute, Jack's financial offer is rejected by Alice:

> *"JACK: Alice, I'd be good to you. I'm not a poor man. I could give you things for your boy…."*
>
> *"ALICE: Go away to hell"* (p,156)

Therefore, in this ambiguous atmosphere, Susan is confused that Alice may not have a certain influence over Jack, and she does tend towards a mysterious touch of "witchcraft,". From a viewpoint of male authority, Jack provides Alice with

the power of the phallus to repossess his organ, however then, as a newly authorized and empowered, he must pacify her by "seeing" her as, labeling her a witch" (Diamond, 1988, p. 194). This point can be directed to that "[i]f Jack hardly seems in a phallic position of knowledge and authority, Susan as spectator believes that he is" (p. 194). Jack's phallic authority is a possible way that Susan also sees in Alice as independently powerful, which not only put Jack in fear, but also adds to Susan's awe or even to have her feel closer to despair.

Prior to being provided with Jack's phallic authority, it was Alice who seized that power with a feminine vitality independent of the patriarchal society which empowers Jack with "a phallic position of knowledge and authority." Therefore, not only "a phallic economy based on castration fear" (p. 194) that must see Alice as being witch, yet also to have the awe of the initially provided power of being castrated, that is not essentially originated in the male mentality.

10. Conclusion

The techniques that have been used by Caryl Churchill aimed to break into the realistic restrictions that occurred via the use of corresponding discourse in *Vinegar Tom* (1976) that is appeared in the playwright's use of pastiche. Moreover, the way postmodern techniques are used Churchill is to undermine prevailing discourse within postmodern drama. It also added to the prevailing structure of how women are treated in terms of gender representation. Churchill's *Vinegar Tom* (1976) seems to be concerned with in how it deals with ideas such as troubling and problematizing the system of patriarchy for criticizing the fundamental notion of gender, which the society has imposed. By writing this play, Churchill intended to undertake postmodern technique (i.e. pastiche) respectively to support the fact that her writings have postmodern touches. The way this play was analyzed, depended on poststructuralist critical approach according to the destructive elements set by Derrida's and among them notions of signifier and signified in *Vinegar Tom* as well as the notion of binary

opposition. The study has indicated – via the analysis – that Churchill's use of pastiche in *Vinegar Tom* (1976) is an of the subject of *The Crucible* by Arthur Miller. Finally, it is recommended that a similar article is to be conducted in the field of postmodern novel to examine the aforementioned techniques used in the English novel.

أسلوب ما بعد الحداثة والذي تم تطبيقه في مسرحية الكاتبة الانجليزية كاريل تشرتشل في فينجر توم ١٩٧٦

الكلمات المفتاحية: ما بعد الحداثة ، كاريل تشرشل Pastiche.

م.م. محمد نجم عبد الله

كلية اليرموك الجامعة

الملخص

تبحث هذه الورقة في تقنية pastiche باعتبارها تقنية ما بعد الحداثة التي يتم تطبيقها بشكل جيد في (1976) Caryl Churchill's Vinegar Tom. إنه أمر حاسم عند التعامل مع جمالية ما بعد الحداثة الجمالية لكل من pastiche والسطحية. باستيش

تصاريح التكاثر في مساحة لم تعد فيها الحداثة الأسلوبية ممكنة. هذا يعني أن كل شيء متروك لتقليد الأساليب القديمة ، والتحدث بأصواتهم بالأساليب بطريقة خيالية. ومع ذلك ، كتب تشرشل مسرحيات أخرى مثل (1978) Traps ، (1979) Cloud Nine، Top Girls (1982) و A Mouthful of Birds (1986). تناولت معظم مسرحيات تشرشل موضوع العنف ضد المرأة لكونها كاتبة مسرحية نسوية واهتمامها بزعزعة استقرار الأيديولوجيات المهيمنة. يتم تحليل هذه المسرحية من منظور ما بعد الحداثة بشكل عام وكيف تم تطبيق تقنيات ما بعد الحداثة مثل السخرية والمحاكاة الساخرة والتجزئة والوعي الذاتي والبساطة والحد الأقصى وما شابه ذلك لإظهار بمهارة كاريل تشرشل ومعاصريها وقد استخدموا هذه التقنيات في مسرحياتهم . اعتمدت هذه الدراسة طريقة نقدية ما بعد البنيوية لتحليل المسرحية في ضوء عناصر تدمير دريدا كما هو الحال بالنسبة للدال والمشار إليه في خل توم. تمت الإشارة إلى أن الكاتب المسرحي استخدم pastiche في المسرحية كما تم العثور عليها في The Crucible بواسطة Arthur Miller.

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