A Postfeminist Criticism of Caryl Churchill's *Nm Vinegar Tom* and *Fen*

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Abstract

This study is chiefly a postfeminist criticism of two of Caryl Churchill's plays, *Vinegar Tom* (1976) and *Fen* (1982). In its introduction part, the topic, playwright and background information of the era are identified, and postfeminism as the theory of the paper is introduced in order to discover and analyze postfeminist issues in the texts of the plays and respond to the basic research questions as follows: what are the postfeminist elements that can be found in both texts? How do women represent the postfeminist new possibilities of individuality and sexuality? What are the implications of femininity and its perception in postfeminism? Do women celebrate the opportunity of career and financial independence or they retreat to domesticity? How do women embody postfeminist issues of marriage, family and children, and what is the position of men in that embodiment? Then, both plays are analyzed respectively in their chronological order through the use of postfeminist theory. The study is significant as it assists the readers to gain a better understanding of postfeminism, identify its elements in both texts, and analyze gender relations in the texts and in the contemporary life which helps both genders, specifically women, to comprehend equality, gender roles, domestic life, individual independence, comparison between women's circumstances in the past and in the contemporary life, their

DOI: https://doi.org/10.26750/vol(6).no(1).paper10 http://journal.uor.edu.krd/index.php/JUR Vol. 6, No.1, June. 2019

various voices, the nature of new life, their relationship and cooperation with men, and the choice between their individual promotion and their familial duties or their coexistence.

Keywords: postfeminism, feminism, gender relations, female identity, individuality.

1. Introduction

1.1. Historical Background

Vinegar Tom and *Fen* are two plays written by the British playwright Caryl Churchill and staged in 1976 and 1982 respectively when Margaret Thatcher had just become the Prime Minister. A profound shift in the consciousness of women as a group was witnessed in Britain in 1970s including changes in law, in publishing and the media, in the arts, in employment, in the attitudes to public morality and in social habits combined in a relatively short period of time to alter radically the base from which women viewed their lives. This new climate came about as a result of what feminism had worked for, and it produced the new woman who expected to do everything that men could do and do it better. These social and economic shifts placed more women in need for economic independence and available for work.

Several acts of parliament had a sudden and major influence on women's modified sense of personal independence and their correspondence to employment. In 1967, the Abortion Act made abortion far easier to obtain; in 1969, the Divorce Reform Act broadened grounds for divorce; in 1970, the Equal Pay Act stipulated that equal pay for men and women doing the same job was to become law; in 1974, contraceptives were made freely available on the National Health Service; and in 1975, the Sex Discrimination Act outlawed sex discrimination in employment, education and advertising and set up the Equal Opportunities Commission to discover that the new act was observed (Nasmith and Worrall, 2013, pp.43–44). The Employment Protection Act also guaranteed pregnant women their jobs after maternity leave. The Women's Liberation Movement was formally active in Britain throughout the 1970s and did much to focus attention on women's issues and to raise women's consciousness of themselves as a group with identifiable demands and needs (*ibid.*).

In the postfeminist age presented by popular culture, as a result, the image of women has taken an interesting turn. Women have entered business and unexpected

DOI: https://doi.org/10.26750/vol(6).no(1).paper10 http://journal.uor.edu.krd/index.php/JUR Vol. 6, No.1, June. 2019

realms only imagined by the earlier feminists. Tasker and Negra (2007, p.107) contend that postfeminism positions female success at entering traditionally male dominated fields such as business, law and politics. This progress in the life of postfeminist women can be depicted as the power of female sexuality and a response to the victim identity which are the common themes running through the works of Wolf, Roiphe and Paglia who are viewed as postfeminist writers by feminists (Denison, 2007).

However, from the very beginning of Thatcher's first term, one of her objectives was to terminate the 'Welfare State' in favor of the 'Enterprise Economy' in its way towards a radical capitalism. In her opinion, the source of all the extreme economic situations was the individual (Blay, 2016, p.6). This conception is reinforced by one of her most repeated announcement: "There is no such thing as society. There are individual men and women and there are families" (*ibid.*). The privatizations and the consequences of her economic measures, as Blay states, were the increase of unemployment, inflation, deindustrialization and economic recession.

1.2. Author Biography

Churchill was born in London on 3 September 1938 and is widely considered to be one of the most innovative playwrights to have emerged in post-war British theatre whose work garnered acclaim from both British and international audience. She has written more than forty-five plays and has received twelve awards in her career (Gomez, 2016, p.7). Her formally innovative plays combine an analysis of gender and economic oppression, both in contemporary Britain and in other historical ages. Churchill confessed in 1982 that she prefers quite well a kind of society which is decentralized, non-authoritarian, communist, non-sexist– a society in which people can be in touch with their feelings and in control of their lives, but it always sounds both ridiculous and unattainable when you put it into words (Aston and Diamond 2009, p.3).

Some writers and groups in the 1980s had noticed that the world was changing. For this reason, Churchill endeavored to scrutinize the construction of gender and social identity in a characteristically fragmented postmodern style. Later, she pronounced her personal struggle to balance the process of writing and her personal career with being actively involved with her children, which envisions some of her plays. Although she could hire a nanny for her kids, she was dissatisfied to pay someone else to take care of her own children, for she supposed that she could do it better (Tycer, 2008, p.12). Churchill undermines capitalist ideology in her works through the use of double characters, gender-blind casting, or anti-linear, metatheatrical narratives. She invites her audience to explore their own social and gender codes and assumptions. What is most interesting here now is

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that she is still writing in the so-called 'postfeminist', 'postsocialist' nineties, and their postfeminist roots can be identified in *Vinegar Tom* and *Fen* in the sections to follow.

1.3 Postfeminist Theory

Postfeminism is a concept fraught with contradictions. Detested by some and celebrated by others, it emerged in the late twentieth century in a number of cultural, academic and political contexts, from popular journalism and media to feminist analyses, postmodern theories and neo-liberal rhetoric. Critics have claimed and appropriated the term for a variety of defi nitions, ranging from a conservative backlash, Girl Power, third wave feminism and postmodern/ poststructuralist feminism (Genz and Brabon, 2009, p.1). Tasker and Negra (2007, p.19) define postfeminism as "the middle of the road, middle-class" and it is particularly treacherous in its "pervasive insistence on the bleakness and redundancy of feminism." It is used to describe reactions against contradictions and absences in feminism and its ideology is often recognized by its contrast with the prevailing or preceding waves of feminism. Thus, postfeminism strives towards the next stage in gender-related societal progress, and as such is often conceived as in favor of a society that is no longer defined by gender binary and gender roles. The early part of the 1980s was when the media began labeling teenage women and women in their twenties the postfeminist generation.

Moreover, the *Concise Oxford Dictionary* defines postfeminism as "of or relating to the ideas, attitudes, etc., which ignore or reject feminist attitudes of the 1960s and subsequent decades" (Gamble, 2000). Denison (2007, p.61) believes that it should be interpreted as meaning a "process of ongoing transformation and change." It can also mean a "continuation of the originating term's aims and ideologies albeit on a different level" (Gamble, p.45). The strategy, according to Denison (2007), is to discredit feminism as irrelevant and even undesirable because it made millions of women unhappy, unfeminine, childless, lonely, and bitter. Postfeminism in all of these portrayals is individualistic, consumerist, and elitist because it determines that any remaining inequity is due to women's failed choices to make it otherwise (*ibid.).*

The term now is still used to refer to young women who are thought to benefit from the women's movement through expanded access to employment and education and new family arrangements, but at the same time do not push for further political change. Research conducted at Kent State University summarizes postfeminism to four main claims: support for feminism declined; women began hating feminism and feminists; society have already attained social equality, thus making feminism outdated; and the label 'feminist' is disliked due to negative stigma. It suggests that women are human beings before considering them as female. Unlike feminists, this view attempts to unite the sexes

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rather than separating them. Postfeminism is, as Ann Brooks (1997, p.4) suggests, framed within the feminist academic community, particularly those drawing on postmodernism, post-structuralism and post-colonialism to inform their understanding of feminism in the 1990s. She perceives postfeminism from this perspective as the conceptual shift within feminism from debates around equality to a focus on debates around difference. In addition, postfeminism is an essential study to the area of political thought, for it is basically a continuation of the study of women. Issues such as marriage and family, parenting, generations and collaboration, femininity and masculinity, victimhood, work and domesticity, individuality, and sexuality all take prominent positions in the realm of postfeminism and are to be examined here as the main concentrations of the study.

2. *Vinegar Tom* (1976)

Set in England during the Puritan witch hunts of the 17th century, the women of the play are on the edge of the social and economic order, individuals who cannot conform to any accepted role. The play is about witches or poor women who are hanged for being witches. The principal action of the play concerns Joan and her daughter, Alice, who gradually are accepted by their neighbors, Jack and Margery, as the reason for their misfortunes. Whenever Joan or her cat, Vinegar Tom, is around, Margery realizes that her "butter won't come" (4, p.141), she feels "ill" (7, p.152) and "calves stink, shake and die" (7. p.151). Jack realizes that he cannot make love to his wife, Margery, whenever Alice is around, which is in reality because of his sexual desire to Alice. However, as Alice constantly rejects Jack, he attempts to take revenge by accusing her publicly of bewitching his sexual organ (Dincel, 1998, p.61). Things get even worse when Alice's married friend, Susan, furthers the accusation about Alice. Susan becomes certain that Alice is a witch when she witnesses the climactic moment when Alice gives back Jack's sexual organ (13, p.164). Moreover, by declaring the fact that it was Alice alone to suggest Susan to go to Ellen, the midwife, to have an abortion, Susan undoubtedly causes Alice's downfall, as well as Ellen's and her own (Dincel, 1998, p.62). Eventually, Alice, Joan, Susan, Ellen are sentenced to witchcraft and prepared to be hanged.

Gill (2007, p.258) suggests that in media culture since the late 1980s, there has been a shift in the way women and women's bodies are represented, a move away from the passivity and submission once associated with female bodies on display for a masculinized gaze, toward the presentation of desiring sexual subjects who choose to present themselves in a seemingly objectified manner because it suits their liberated interests to do so. *Vinegar Tom* basically opens with a scene following the sexual encounter of Alice and the Man, which portrays justifiable indications of female sexuality, female sexual pleasure and promotions about the sexual relationship between both

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genders in the grounds of postfeminism. The first of the play's deviant, unconventional women character is Alice. Directly after their erotic encounter in the first scene of the play, the Man asks her "so you think that was no sin we did?" (1, p.135) to which she answers "if it was I don't care" (1, p.136). Traditionally, the man has been taught that he is the doer and subject of the sex that can individually and solely taste the pleasure of a woman without regarding it as a sin, but the woman would only be the object of that pleasure with no taste and she would be the one who is sinful and has to be distorted. However, Alice's response can be recognized as Dobson's new regime of sexual meanings based on "female consent, equality, participation, and pleasure, free of politics" (2015, p.31).

Such images in a context of self-representation may be a way for young women to show an interest in sex, and experiment with their sexual identities. According to Modarres Zadeh (2013, p.2), Alice does not only care about sinning, she would actually be happy about it if others would leave her alone: "Any time I'm happy someone says it's a sin" (1, p.136). Although it demonstrates society's rejection of female sexuality, she is doing what makes her happy and, thus, for her it cannot be a sin (*ibid.*). In the postfeminist era, women basically are represented as subjects with powerful and active sexual drives and desires, and also as sexual objects that make choices about their own sexual status. Furthermore, the location of where Alice and the Man live in which happiness is a crime is contradicted with London, in which that same feeling possibly is not regarded as an offence, thus, it is not surprising that she wishes to escape such restrictions with the Man and elope to London where she can practice and enjoy her sexuality freely:

ALICE: Any time I'm happy someone says it's a sin.
MAN: There's some in London say there's no sin.
ALICE: Would you take me to London
MAN: Will you do everything I say?
ALICE: I'll do what gives us pleasure (1, p.136).

Traditionally, it is believed that men are fundamentally and physically more powerful than women. However, Paglia (1992, p.52) introduces an opposite view and asserts that men are less authoritative because of their uncontrollable desire for the female body, and women are the more powerful gender because of their sexuality and its impact over men. Denison (2007, p.93) also agrees with her that woman's appearance is the only source of the female strength which is the feminine ambition to be beautiful and appealing. In this point, woman is the dominant sex since men have to do all sorts of stuff to prove that they are worthy of a woman's attention (Paglia, 1992, p.62). As it can be observed from the text,

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the Man is in need of Alice's body and attempts to attract her attention. In this way, Alice's body and sexuality overpowers the Man:

> MAN: If you come with me and give me body and soul, you'll never want in this world (1, p.135).

This aspect of women's authority over men or at least men's inability to control women is apparently represented through Jack's relation with Alice as well. Although he is married, he attempts to deceive Alice and to sleep with her. Alice is a poor and ordinary woman, but her power is in her body and sexuality that attracts Jack's attention and drives him crazy whenever they meet. Jack, as Dincel (1998, p.64) argues, considers women as objects for his sexual pleasure and does not want to limit it in his wife. He regards it his right to look for the satisfaction of this natural instinct outside of his family. Nevertheless, there begins a problem for Jack when he thinks he has found the right woman in Alice to provide him with extramarital sexual taste. For his most surprise, she refuses to make love with him. In addition, the conversation between the two at this moment of refusal proves that Jack is no longer the domineering one as it has always been so in his relation with his wife (*ibid*.) when he begs Alice to: "have some pity" (5, p.148).

In this way, women can engage in the textual strategy of refusal (Mascia-Lees and Sharpe, 2000, p.138), which Wolf (2002, p.3) distinguishes it as a sign of an evolution and progress in consciousness, in which the time was right as girls and women were ready to say no to something they found oppressive. Paglia (1992, p.59) celebrates this conception that women have the right to freely choose and to say yes or no. Thus, a woman's right to express her disapproval is another pivotal progress related to sexual freedom, in which a woman is free to reject or accept a man's proposition for sex. Even Jack proposes and pressures on Alice for exercising choice, but she refuses to obey, for Alice is a woman who has realized her dominance as the female sexuality and that woman's sexual power is enormous (Paglia, 1992, p.66). Alice, according to Dincel (1998, p.64), is in possession of his sexual organ which is the symbol of the phallic power, but useless without Alice's consent. Jack is put in a situation in which his sexual potency is dependent upon the mercy of a woman (*ibid*.). Interestingly, Alice enjoys sex with the Man and is proud of it because that is what she wants, but she rejects Jack because she does not want it. Thus, she is the dominant female character and keeps a balance of what she wants and what she does not.

> Jack: [..] Am I not handsome enough, is that it?
> Alice: If I say you're not handsome enough will you go away?

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Jack: Alice, have some pity…(5, p.148).

Joan is another character whose age affects her representation of sexuality, but attempts to prove the opposite. Firstly, she does not hide it that if she and her daughter, Alice, each would have got a man, they "would be better off" (3, p.141). She approves that they each need a man with whom to be happy. Then, in a speech, she portrays the effect of age on sexuality and her ongoing sexual needs despite her old age, for she, as Modarres Zadeh (2013, p.3) indicates, thinks that a woman does not stop wanting sex just because she is not young, of whom the chorus sings

I met an old woman
Who made my blood run cold.
You don't stop wanting sex, she said,
Just because you're old (3, p.142).

The textual language of the play is also sexual and there are many connotative and denotative erotic words as in the last song, 'Evil Woman', at the end of the play. The song invites the readers to perceive that man is in need of sex with woman, man has to give pleasure to the woman he has sex with. It makes it possible for a woman to propose sex and to be the subject of that encounter not always the object, and lastly it is woman's performance and reaction that arouse male's sexuality. Thus, in all these implications, man and woman complete each other and they are in a harmonious correspondence. Hence, sexuality takes up a more human level of satisfaction between both man and woman to enjoy themselves rather than objectifying one for the sake of the other. It provides humanity a definitely free will to choose what they desire, not to be obliged by any outer force apart from their own feelings. Here, women are stepping forward into the next ladder in their journey of achieving equality which is the sense of individuality and autonomy as another pivotal postfeminist feature:

If you like sex sinful, what you want is us.
You can be sucked off by a succubus
Do you ever get afraid
You don't do it right?
Does your lady demand it
Three times a night
If we don't say you're big
Do you start to shrink? (21, p.178).

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Wolf (2002, pp.137-8) places a central emphasis on the significance of the individual's story in defining womanhood, femininity and what it means to become a woman. This understanding is definitely applied to Alice's personality, actions and views, because she is the one who follows her passion and does what she chooses. Scholars of girlhood and culture have theorized the kind of youthful new femininities that have come to prevail as centered on energy, vitality, capacity, and entrepreneurial spirit, along with public visibility and self-exposure (Dobson, 2015, p.32). For instance, Ellen does not oblige Alice, Suzan, Betty or anyone else to obey her in taking herbs and healing. However, it is the individual's selection to decide what to do, and she will be responsible to accept the outcome; to stay as it is, or step towards change.

ELLEN: There's no hurry. I don't want you unless it's what you want (13, p.156).

This sense of individuality basically provides a better ground for autonomy in the next stage of individual's promotion. As it has been pinpointed earlier, the emphasis of postfeminist culture is on educational and professional opportunities for women and girls so that economic freedom for women and freedom of choice with respect to work, domesticity, and parenting would be available (Tasker and Negra, 2007, p.1). These features may all assist a woman in developing herself as an individual to have her own economic, individual, gender and social independence. These issues are clearly reflected in the play through various characters including Alice, Ellen, Susan, Betty, and Goody, but their depiction of autonomy varies. If taking Ellen into consideration, one can perceive that she offers herbal treatment to women and she possesses her own work. Modarres Zadeh (2013, p.4) maintains that medical treatment is solely a male prerogative, but Ellen is trespassing into dangerous male territory, and she achieves economic independence. Therefore, she is regarded by Modarres Zadeh as a woman who earns her own living outside of the monetary system and works outside the sanctioned man's medical establishment. Because of her financial independence, no male character can possess or manipulate her.

Another figure of independence and autonomy can be contemplated in Alice's character. Men might have always attempted to control women financially as to offer some money and in return to own women's bodies. Many women possibly have been deceived and nowadays are raped, of course, by the force of money just to continue living, but despite her poverty and her infamous reputation in the village as a prostitute, Alice rejects Jack's offer of financial support in return for his favors (*ibid.*). Here, it can easily be seen that Alice rejects all patriarchal power forces that attempt to objectify her body and

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manipulate her for the sake of men's sexual pleasure. Neither money nor power nor physical attraction can enslave Alice in having sex with Jack. Instead, her body and soul is for the Man whom she chooses and loves regardless of his power and wealth.

> 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 (5, pp.141–4).

Female agency and choice overcome that of men who attempt to control women. The new woman, according to Dobson (2015, p.178), is resilient as she chooses the situations into which she goes, and by asserting an autonomy that draws upon and does not deny her desire. That is, of course, the progress of women's aspirations to autonomy. For instance, Betty's rejection to marry someone she does not love functions as her autonomy against the traditional and conventional arranged marriage. She wants to be alone than to be the wife of a man for whom she has no feeling. Ellen also utters an unforgettable expression that supports the above idea and identifies everybody as responsible to act and change their own life:

> ELLEN: If you won't do anything to help yourself you must stay as you are (13, p.155).

Denison (2007, p.65) theorizes that the concept of sisterhood or female bonding is almost completely absent from postfeminist programming. This reinforces the postfeminist idea that the individual woman has to face her own problems and women who encounter challenges and difficulties have to overcome them based on competence and self-assurance rather than any sort of group effort. For instance, Susan speaks out against Alice and declares that she is a witch and provides a justifiable evidence to help witch finders to officially announce her witchcraft. And feminist solidarity is lost in Goody, as she considers it "an honor to work with a great professional" (15, p.168) against other women to discover witches. In addition, Margery is portrayed as a sign of autonomy and lack of female bonding as she rejects to offer anything to Joan that is her own property not of Joan's and says: "Now get out, I'm making my butter" (4, p.144). She even gives the evidence and convinces Jack that what is happening is not his fault and because of his sins, but they have been bewitched by Joan as she cursed the butter to hell and wished devil to take Margery's man, their cows and butter (7, p.153).

> MARGERY: It is, isn't it, Jack? Mother Noakes, isn't it?
> JACK: It was Mother Noakes in that glass (10, p.158).

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Another postfeminist feature is the celebration of masculine and feminine differences between men and women. In the play, there are many apparent implications of such variations that are meant to be demonstrated and appreciated by both genders and society as well. For instance, in the first act in the conversation between Alice and the Man, there are some words which are connected to the masculine nature of the Man such as: 'devil', 'uncleanness', 'rough and hairy', 'so heavy', 'enormous size', 'terrify' and 'hurt', but there are some opposite expressions by Alice that function as feminine qualities like: 'smooth', 'sweet', 'bright enough eyes'. These words deliberately disclose the harsh language and nature of men in contrast to women's friendly nature. What is important here is that these innate qualities and other masculine and feminine features are celebrated by both genders as a part of their behavior. Consequently, the Man wants to exhibit his strength and hairy features of his body and questions Alice if his masculine body does not hurt her, indicating his dominant nature over women, but it seems that in the postfeminit era women admire a man with masculine qualities, and they do not want a feminine man. Thus, Alice's reply is that she does not adore a man too smooth because it is a feature of women and Alice wants a man not a woman because woman is in need of a man and vice versa.

Man: is my body not rough and hairy?
Alice: I don't like a man too smooth (1, p.135).

Furthermore, marriage, men and family seem to matter to women and are important focuses of postfeminism. A great deal of postfeminist discussions naturally center on the relationship between the genders, but unlike feminism, it regularly tends to praise the harmony between these groups rather than the discord. Postfeminism, in essence, appears to signify "a cease-fire in yesteryear's battle between the sexes" (Press, 1991, p.45). Margery is the most hardworking female character in the play who has dedicated her whole life to her husband and to preserve her family. Her attempt is always to keep her husband and she is ready to break the female bonding with Joan as she regards her as beggar, stealer and witch, and with Alice as well to depart her from her husband. She comprehends that marriage is an undeniable need for a woman and not having a husband such as Alice and her mother may result in suffering and isolation. It forces her to pray to God so that He saves them and provides them love and property while Joan and Ellen are supposed to be hanged. Margery also attempts to persuade Betty to get married because

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she instructs Betty that she will be happy, and she does not hide it that marriage and wedding is everybody's wish. Additionally, Joan basically reassures that she and her daughter, Alice, both would be happier and better if they each have a man in their life as a husband when she says to Alice "If we'd each got a man we'd be better off" (3, p.141). Thus, postfeminism appears to be more heterosexist and has an interest in carving a role for men as lovers, husbands and fathers as well as friends (Gamble, 2000, p.43).

3. *Fen* (1982)

Fen was performed in 1982 and it revolves around a community of potato pickers and their economic dependency on the low-paid labor. The general idea of *Fen* can be observed in its concentration on a field in which there are many female characters who are working. Most of the characters are female in the play and in the field such as Mrs. Hassett, Val, Nell, Shirley, Angela, Becky…etc. The manifestation of female characters in the labor market resembles a new era in which women are independent individuals who have their own work and money separated from that of men (Mascia-Lees and Sharpe, 2000, p.135). In this way, any remaining inequity according to the individualistic feature of postfeminism is due to women's failed choices to make it otherwise (Denison, 2007).

Thatcher's policies intensifi ed acquisition and enlarged its scale after she opened the English economy to foreign investment as in the play workers are picking potatoes for faraway owners or grading onions for faraway supermarkets (Gobert, 2014, pp.138-9). Nevertheless, the hardships of the duty in the fields are apparent in the production that causes men and women to agonize and there are considerable portrayals of the dreadful working conditions throughout the play. In the first page even before the production note by Churchill, the Retired School Teacher demonstrates how work occupies all the lives of fen workers as he notes: "it was work, work, work, it was all their lives", and the Union Branch Secretary remarks: "What's the point of working till you drop" (Churchill, 1996, p.121). Apart from that, in Scene Ten, women are packing onions including Shirley, Nell, Angela, Alice and a Baptist. They keep working hard throughout the scene (10, p.137). In addition, Ivy, Val's grandmother who is ninety, narrates her unbearable working environment when she was a child and worked without having any food or tea, and studied in school as well:

> IVY. I come home late from school on purpose so I wouldn't have to help mum with the beet. So I had to go without my tea and straight out to the field. 'You

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can have tea in the dark,' mum said, 'but you can't pick beet in the dark' (16, p.146).

After Cade's deal with Tewson, an enraged Ghost, whose child died out of hunger, appears to Tewson and ensures the ongoing suffering of the workers which was initiated at the beginning of the fen up to now. The Ghost and Tewson reassure that even if the field is sold, no difference will happen and the misery will go on as it is:

TEWSON. Are you angry because I'm selling the farm?
GHOST. What difference will it make?
TEWSON. None, none, everything will go on the same.
GHOST. That's why I'm angry. My baby died starving (9, p.136).

In this way, people are suffering in the fields whether because of the distress of the job or the unrespectable treatment of the owners or unsatisfactory payment. As a result, women like Nell and Val may fantasize to withdraw from the hardships and revolt against their agony. For instance, Val attempts to abandon the work and her family as she proposes to elope with Frank to London, but Frank convinces her to stay there not to move to somewhere that they cannot expect what they will confront with. Farm labor is also tied to domestic duty, as when the always hoeing Nell works in her garden or when Shirley, immediately after packing onions in the fi elds, is seen ironing, mending, babysitting (Gobert, 2104, p.145). In Scene Eleven, Shirley is "working in the house. She goes from one job to another, ironing, mending, preparing dinner, minding a baby", she never stops throughout the scene (11, p.139). This duality of career and domesticity is also apparent in several characters as in Val who toils outside in the fields and does her households. For instance, she informs the audience that she makes a cake for her children as she says: "I made a cake Deb always likes" (11, p.139).

Women's financial crisis and their quest for economic autonomy might have put pressure on them to work. However, the hardships of the career that many women encounter in the play and in the real life may assist women to retreat from occupation to home, as Wolf (2002, p.218) argues that hunger makes women's bodies hurt them, and causes women hurt their bodies. In Scene Nine, the Ghost demonstrates how people are suffering because of their poverty and hunger that may lead to a revolution against capitalist authorities who cannot survive if it was not for the poor. Thus, postfeminist culture simply emphasizes educational and professional opportunities for women and girls;

DOI: https://doi.org/10.26750/vol(6).no(1).paper10 http://journal.uor.edu.krd/index.php/JUR Vol. 6, No.1, June. 2019

economic freedom for women and freedom of choice with respect to work. Assuming full economic freedom for women, postfeminist ideology also enacts the possibility that women might choose to retreat from the public world of work to domestic sphere (Tasker and Negra, 2007, p.1). In this stage, many women quit their occupations to take care of their family and children. To prove such a withdrawal of women from career to household, Val can be taken in the second scene when she rejects to suffer any more in the field. Instead, she abandons the work and returns to her home and kids:

> Val. I've got to leave now. Just back home (2, p.125).

Consequently, according to Delaney's survey, one in four working mothers are not satisfied with the balance they have stuck between work and home, while almost half of them claimed that they demand more lifetime to devote to their children (Delaney, 2006, p.84). Additionally, fifty percent also believed that the flexible work arrangements offered by their organizations did not adversely affect their career movement, but twenty-six percent of the mothers interviewed argued that the correspondence with their offspring were negatively influenced by their occupations (*ibid.*). Studies indicate, however, that many women who work do it necessarily or obligatory only and have lower satisfaction levels than women who are homemakers or work part-time (Denison, 2007, p.87). This contribution is related to the postfeminist moment of the 1990s in which many women have found themselves returning to the domestic sphere, but on new terms, as Mascia-Lees and Sharpe (2000, pp.80-81) claim. They assert that feminist ideology situated many women in a conflicted position in that they may wish to be home with their children rather than following the politically correct pressure to continue a full-time job. For instance, Shirley reinforces this conception that if she does not need the money to spend on her daily life to survive, she will not accept the hardships of the fields which occupy all the workers' lives:

> SHIRLEY. Can't think when you're working in the field, can you? It's work, work, work, then you think, 'I wonder what the time is,' and it's dinnertime. Then you work again and you think, 'I wonder if it's time to go home,' and it is. Mind you, if I didn't need the money I wouldn't do any bugger out of a job (11, p.140).

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In addition, the domestic realm and parenting, including motherhood and fatherhood, are very crucial for postfeminism (Denison, 2007, p.106). This cloudless celebration of motherhood and the inseparable bond between mothers and children that was pessimistically affected by feminism once again are undoubtedly depicted through Val as she is evidently unable to leave her children, and when she meets her daughter, Shona, she does not hide her pleasure to meet her as she remarks: "Shona. I hoped I'd see you" (20, p.151). The source of the complication between Val and her family is demonstrably the feeling that she has for Frank. She loves him sincerely that she wishes to elope with him to have a deserved future life, but she cannot choose him over her children and she is stuck undecidedly between the two. After some quarrel with Val, her mother, May, reconfirms her devotion and support for Val and wants to take care of Val's children if she is willing to live with Frank. The strongest bond can be observed in mother–child attraction when May is ready to go through fire for the sake of her daughter:

> MAY. Get one thing straight. It's no trouble having them. They've always a place here. I'll stand by you. I stand by my children. I'd never have left you, Val. I'd go through fire. What's stronger than that (8, p.134).

However, in Scene Twelve, the readers are instructed that Val has returned to her children since she could not resist their departure. Her determination to reunite with her children is definitely understandable and appreciated as well in the postfeminist values because of the biological and spiritual bond that is apparent between a mother and her children, which can be possibly noticed in Shirley's judgment who acknowledges it and regards it as the best alternative to go back to her children:

> SHIRLEY. Still you're back with the kids, best thing. Just get on with it (12, p.143).

Apart from the significance of the presence of motherhood, there are some consequences of the absence of motherhood in the play that have to be examined here. The typical implication of this concentration can be observed in Becky's kinship with her stepmother, Angela. Becky is suppressed throughout the play by Angela as a consequence of the absence of her biological mother. In Scene Six, the unfriendly relationship between them is cloudless when Becky is not permitted even to sit

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comfortably and has to stand on one leg because she refuses to call Angela mother. As a result, Angela illuminates her anger to Becky as she tells Becky: “a filthy little cow”, and reassures that even her father wished she was dead with her mother.

> BECKY. Can I sit down now, Angela?
> ANGELA. No, because you asked. Drink it standing up. And you didn’t call me mum.
> BECKY. You’re not, that’s why.
> ANGELA. Wouldn’t want to be the mother of a filthy little cow like you. Pity you didn’t die with her. Your dad wished you’d died with her. Now drink it quick (6, p.128).

After Becky drops the cup and breaks it, Angela terrifies Becky that she is going to punish her and again horrifies her that she is going to tell her father about it. This obliges Becky to announce that she is going to report it to somebody so that Angela will be imprisoned and burnt to which Angela scares her, hurts her physically and emotionally and promises to kill her eventually. Notwithstanding, Becky has written a poem for her mother as the only trustworthy addressee, in which she recalls her dead mother; interrogates where is she, reports her dreadful circumstance to her mother, notifies her that if she is aware of how Becky is suppressed by her stepmother and her father, she would come back to her and rescue her, and eventually she restates her true love for her mother (19, p.150).

> ANGELA. I’ll have to punish you for breaking a cup. Why do you push me? I’ll tell your dad what a bad girl you are if he phones up tonight and then he won’t love you (6, pp.128–9).
> BECKY. I’ll tell someone. You’ll be put in prison, you’ll be burnt.
> ANGELA. You can’t tell because I’d kill you. Angela strokes Becky’s hair then yanks it (6, p.129).

Moreover, postfeminism, as it has been explained before, appears to be more heterosexist and has an interest in carving a role for men as lovers, husbands and fathers as well as friends (Gamble, 2000, p.43). Marriage, men and family are important focuses of

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postfeminism as they still seem to matter to women and a considerable deal of postfeminist discussions naturally tend to provoke the harmony between the genders. This development in the correspondence between men and women can be noticed by the readers in numerous scenes and actions of the play. For instance, Shirley demonstrates her friendly fraternity with her husband in their devotion to each other and their children as well when she explains to Val. Shirley acknowledges that she and her husband, Geoffrey, took care of their child, Susan, and never went out till she became fifteen; Geoffrey even did not go to the pub without Shirley because he took the responsibility to look after their child the way Shirley did as he thought that Susan was his child as much as Shirley's. This possibly indicates how the participation of postfeminist men has increased in the domestic realm with their female counterparts and it suggests and promotes a more friendly relationship and companionship between mothers and fathers to have a healthy family and a wholesome future generation:

> SHIRLEY. You expect too much Val. Till Susan was fifteen I never went out. Geoffrey wouldn't either, he wouldn't go to the pub without me. 'she's mine as much as yours', he says, Geoffrey (11, p.141).

This modern celebration of the family unit is depicted in several characters and scenes in the play, in which men, women and children ritualize family values and keep its principles and members as it can be noticed in Val's family and her attachment to her children and her mother, Shirley's family and her devotion to her husband, children and grandchildren. For instance, Deb, Val's elder daughter, is supposed to support and rescue her sister, Shona, when Nell is outraged and attempts to hit her:

> NELL. You watch out, Shona, or you'll have a smack.
> DEB. You hit my sister and I'll kill you (7, p.131).

Mascia-Lees and Sharpe (2000, p.131) agree that individuality, as a postfeminist tendency, acts as a form of power which separates the individual woman from others and forces her back on herself and ties her to her own identity in a constraining way. There are several characters and portrayals of individuality in the play, in which women endeavor to break all social, economic and religious barriers that made obstacles upon their autonomy in the previous era of feminism. Among them, Nell and Val are two typical implications of

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female individuality who dedicate all their lives to struggle for their own autonomy, and other characters are also of great assistance. As an example, when Val is stuck between two options, whether to choose between her kids or her boyfriend, Shirley ensures her that if it is her wish to leave her family and go with Frank, then she can do it because Frank also left his family and all of them accepted it. Shirley's approval of Val's elopement with Frank can be deliberately regarded as her appreciation of individuality over any other ideology of collectivity or community:

> SHIRLEY. If it's what you want, get on with it. Frank left his wife two years ago and everyone's got used to that (11, p.140).

Nell, in the last scene, also exemplifies an individual woman who decides not to turn back for anything or anyone. However, she selects to walk out on the fields as a symbol of a postfeminist woman who rejects oppression and manipulation by any outer force that undermines her individual autonomy. Instead, she looks for her individuality and her own freedom of choice. That is what Brooks (2006, p.178) regards it as the sense of autonomy that can be seen in choosing the situations by resilient individuals into which they go, and draws upon their personal ambitions:

> NELL. I was walking out on the fen. The sun spoke to me. It said, 'Turn back, turn back.' I said, 'I won't turn back for you or anyone' (21, p.154).

Regarding individuality and her personal responsibility to shape her narrative version, Tewson's interesting recounting tale can be taken as a typical strategy that pushes the individual to have her own life, her own decision and responsibility. It narrates Tewson's friend who reveals that he will die after six months, but he is not going to let anybody know that, and he kills himself before he starts to suffer. The essence of the story is in his courage that he takes all the responsibility of his life alone, and never engages his family in his own misery or his own suffering:

> TEWSON. That was a friend of mine you were speaking of. He found out he had six months to live. So he sold his orchards without telling anyone. Then before he started to suffer he took his life. Never said a word to his family. Carried it out alone, very bravely. I think that's a tragedy (12, p.143).

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What is important here to note about Val's choice of death over misery is that Val is basically satisfied because that is what she wants and requires as she confesses later. Thus, it is Val's decision and her personal autonomy that chooses death over misery and this is appreciated in postfeminism as she, according to Gobert (2014, p.147), appears as a spirit that instantiates a new theater space, in which she can speak from beyond the grave to reassure the lover who killed her: "It's what I wanted" (21, p.154). Furthermore, in Scene Eighteen, Nell criticizes Frank that he is Tewson's right-hand man, and she is honored that she is an autonomous lady who is nobody's assistant, cannot think like other people and is proud of it. This can be considered as Nell's recognition of the sense of individuality and autonomy:

> NELL. I'm nobody's right hand. And proud of it. I just can't think like they do. I don't know why. I was brought up here like everyone else. My family thinks like everyone else. Why can't I? (18, p.148)

Another feature that is related to individuality is the sense of privacy and ownership, in which the properties or any possessions that a woman owns, she refuses to share with other characters or community. In Scene Nineteen, Angela seizes an exercise book of Becky's and attempts to read it, but Becky does not let her read her private notebook. In the new possibilities of postfeminism, Becky understands and wants others to comprehend that the notebook is her own privacy and no one is allowed to read it to disclose what has been encapsulated in it. It encircles every woman's personal freedom that she does not have to exploit others' borders and has to prevent others from distorting her own:

> BECKY. It's private (19, p.149).

In addition, the deliberate lack of female bonding discussed in the previous section can also be noticed here from Angela's hostility towards Becky throughout the play, especially in the last scene when Val sees Becky crying and having a nightmare, she is running downstairs away from Angela, but she cannot run fast enough since Angela is following her. Then, Becky reaches the school, but the teacher is Angela (21, p.154). In the whole play, the sense of companionship between Angela and Becky is absent and they are always in struggle. Becky usually encounters and challenges Angela's physical and emotional abusive endeavors and behaviors as in the real life, nowadays, many women

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are suppressed and abused by other women whether mentally, physically, socially or economically:

> BECKY. I want to wake up. Angela beats me. She shuts me in the dark. She put a cigarette on my arm.
> ANGELA. I can hurt you, can't I? You feel it, don't you? Let me burn you. I have to hurt you worse (21, p.154).

Another postfeminist issue is the new possibilities and expectations of hope for a better future, which are deliberately depicted in the play and they have to be discussed here. Before the play starts, the atmosphere is darkness, then it becomes lighter which resembles a brighter future after darkness, "It gets dark. It gets lighter, but still some mist. It is the present" (p.124). Then, the readers are presented with several female characters in the first scene who work in the fields. This indicates the new possibilities of work and business that women achieved in the postfeminist era and assisted them to have their career choice and financial independence. Furthermore, some women such as Val and Nell even are not satisfied to remain in their restricted potentiality and they are attempting to step towards a deserved new life in London:

> VAL. I'm leaving him. I'm going to London on the train, I'm taking the girls, I've left him a note and that's it. You follow us soon as you can. It's the only thing. New life (3, p.127).

The countryside, as the traditional and outdated location in which women live, is contradicted to London and the imaginative possibilities relevant there. Val also endeavors to persuade Shirley that her daughter, Sukey, and all the people there in the village are suffering and have limited choices compared to London which is used as the destination of change and hope. The young girls such as Becky, Deb and Shona inspire their future careers that they wish for in their song. Professional potentials for these characters vary; whether to be a nurse, to get married, to have children, to be a hairdresser, to be a teacher, to be a cook, or a housewife. They are all the expectations that the young generation recommend to be in the play and in postfeminist culture in general. Singing as a profession or to express feelings or a symbol of transformation is also one of the expected efforts. Deb seeks May to sing the way her mother sings for them and they

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agree that Val's voice is pleasant. Besides, May is thirst to sing from the beginning of the play, but she does not grasp the opportunity until the end of the play. The last sentence of the play is her song which indicates the probability of modification the readers can notice and every character longs for in the play. Other characters such as May and Shona are also depicted to illustrate their confidence in the power of hope to promote their life as well. May reassures the current generation like Shona and Deb that a light comes as a symbol of hope from behind clouds to rise up dead people as brightness into the heaven. The light is supposed to come to diminish sorrow and the grim atmosphere to help the new generation change their circumstance and make their future pleasurable:

> MAY. When the light comes down from behind the clouds it comes down like a ladder into the graveyards. And the dead people go up the light into heaven (8, p.132).

Another potentiality for women in the postfeminist negotiations is to participate in some public places that they were denied from before. For instance, restaurants, public houses, inns and pubs are traditionally considered as places dedicated to men, but here in the play, there are women going to a pub, enjoying their time playing and speaking. In Scene Eighteen, women are playing darts in the pub including Shirley, Alice, Angela and Nell (18, p.147). Their attendance in the pub can be regarded as a new possibility available for postfeminist women to deny any conventional gender distinction that prevented women to go to public places. The conception of hope and new ambitions is also deliberate in the last scene when Val identifies the time to awaken spring. In a literary sense, spring is used as a symbol of new life, reborn and hope of a better future. In Scene Twenty-one, spring is attached to other overconfident symbols that suggest change and hope such as "door, dawn, green mist, grow again, getting whiter, make her strong, cowslips, gate, next day, and awake". All these words in the last scene can provide another implication to the play and assist the readers to perceive an optimistic conclusion that the playwright endeavors to demonstrate, as Gobert (2014, p.147) contends, that Val can notice the entire unhappy history which haunts the fens but which may not doom the future.

Furthermore, many implications of the conception of love, sexuality and heterosexual relationships, as pivotal postfeminist elements, can be noticed here in the play as they have been mentioned in *Vinegar Tom* as well. In Scene Eighteen, Nell and Angela attempt to attract Frank and they converse with him separately. Nell initiates her conversation with him by asking about his master, Mr. Tewson, as she regards Frank as

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his right–hand man (18, p.147). Then, Angela reminds Frank that he is after married women, she basically endeavors to draw his attention and proposes for him that although she is married, they can possibly enjoy their encounter the way Frank and Val seem to do as she remarks: "Never thought you were the type, after the married women" (18, p.148). Angela probably is jealous of Val and wants to deceive Frank to leave her. The progression in the life of women in the postfeminist customs encourages women to illuminate their sexual attraction in men and fascinates men to engage in romantic scenes. This competition between women, as Wolf (2002, p.14) argues, has been made part of the postfeminist values so that women will be distributed from one another, in which youth and virginity have been considered as admirable and attractive in women since they stand for experiential and erotic ignorance. Thus, beauty, facial features and body are fundamentally a woman's fortune and weapon that she utilizes to attack men.

> ANGELA. Real country is romantic. Away from it all. Makes you feel better. You wouldn't consider running away with me? (18, p.148)

Women's endeavor to appear sexual to men can be regarded as the shift from sexual objectification of women to sexual subjectification, which, according to Dobson (2015, p.23), is a central shift in representations of women in visual culture, in which new modes of youthful femininity have been identified along with more active and desiring constructions of sexuality. In Scene Nineteen, Becky's poem deliberately represents all such erotic images that a postfeminist girl enthusiastically expresses. In the poem, she obviously depicts scenes of passion, sexualized body, pleasure in sex and love between a woman and her beloved all in a sexual intercourse. Besides, the poem even evidently portrays all such embodiments in a highly sexualized terminology as she immodestly indicates sensual feminine and masculine expressions and erotic organs such as breast, cunt and cock:

> He pressed me with a passionate embrace
> Tears ran down all over her face.
> He put his hand upon her breast
> Which gave her a sweet rest.
> He put his hand upon her cunt
> And put his cock up her
> He made love to her all night long
> They listened to the birdsong (19, p.150).

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In the postfeminist mores, female sexuality is attached to women's emancipation because autonomy can be experienced as a result of a positive definition of female sexuality (Wolf, 2002, p.154). This advancement in the life of postfeminist women can be indicated as the power of female sexuality and a response against victim identity. In this new possibility, pleasure and desire are not considered merely as secondary potentials, but they are vital components of postfeminism and its observance of sexuality (*ibid*.). As evidence, Angela begs Becky to pen a poem about Frank dying, but Becky illustrates that she does not adore him and tells Angela that she has affection for Frank and she can compose a verse. Then, Angela writes down some lines and reassures her attraction to Frank as she says: "I stay alive so Frank may as well" (19, p.151). Additionally, Angela inscribes in a more erotic language about Frank and even his sexual organ:

> Those pills must have made him feel sick
> And wish he'd never followed his prick (19, p.151).

Conclusion

It can be concluded that there are several postfeminist tendencies that can be found in both texts. The historical play, *Vinegar Tom*, is set in England during the Puritan witch hunts of the 17th century, but the essence of the play is its contemporaneity that invites the readers to compare women's contemporary lifestyle and their promoted circumstance to their horrible past and their suffering. It is evidenced from Khozaei's (p.574) words that Churchill wanted:

> To illustrate that modern women− women who curse, women who enjoy sex and feel no need for relationships, women brave enough to make their own choices regarding pregnancies, women who are old and alone− would have been hanged, burned or tortured as witches a few centuries ago.

Khozaei suggests that women's issues and their life witnessed a considerable shift as they can curse, they can fulfill their sexual instincts, they can have a relation with a man and they can refuse it, they have achieved the freedom to do what they desire and they can be independent individuals no matter whether they are old, young, or alone, and they are able to be pregnant and have children or they can delay it. All these achievements

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have been obtained through hard work, and many women have been victimized a few centuries ago who were hanged, tortured or burned as witches or just because they were women.

In *Fen*, as well as in *Vinegar Tom*, there are postfeminist new possibilities of women's individuality and autonomy, freedom of choice regarding their potential in career or domestic values, the significance of motherhood and family, their desire to appear sexual and to fulfill their drives and feelings, and numerous indications of hope and a better future. These postfeminist features can be observed in both plays. Hence, the plays invite the contemporary women to realize that woman's life was dreadful and unsatisfactory in the past and women have to celebrate the current developed conditions, in which they can follow their desires, act as sexual beings, autonomous individuals, and above all as human beings in a harmonious correspondence with the male counterpart.

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پوختە

ئەم توێژینەوەیە بە شێوەیەکی سەرەکی لێکدانەوەیەکی ڕەخنەیی ڕێبازی ڕەخنەی نەدەبی پۆست فێمینیزمە لە دوو شانۆنامەی کارل چێرچیڵ: قینیگە تۆم (١٩٧٦) و فێن (١٩٨٢). لە سەرەتادا، بابەتەکە و شانۆنوسەکە و سەردەمی نوسینی شانۆنامەکان دەناسێنرێن، وە هەروەها قۆناغی پۆست فێمینیزم وەکو تیۆریی توێژینەوەکە دەخرێتە بەر باس بۆ دەستنیشانکردن و لێکدانەوەی خاسیەتەکانی ئەم قۆناغە لە هەردوو تێکستی شانۆنامەکان، وە وڵامدانەوەی پرسیارەکانی توێژینەوەکە کە بریتین لە:ڕەنگدانەوەی تایبەتمەندیەکانی قۆناغەکە چین لە شانۆنامەکان؟ چۆن ئافرەت بەرجەستەی تایبەتمەندی کەسێتی سەربەخۆ و لایەنی سێکسی خۆی دەکات؟ لایەنی ڕەگەزی و مێینەیی ئافرەت چۆن بەرجەستە کراوە؟ ئایا ئافرەت کام بژاردە هەلدەبژێرێت لە نێوان کارکردن لە دەرەوە بۆ دەستخستنی ئابووری سەربەخۆ یان گرنگیدان بە منداڵ و خێزان لەماڵەوە؟ ئافرەت چۆن دەڕوانێتە پرۆسەی هاوسەرگیری و خێزان و منداڵ، وە ئەرک و جێگای پیاو چییە لەم پرۆسەیەدا؟پاشان، هەردوو شانۆنامەکان شیدەکرێنەوە بە بەکارهێنانی تیۆری پۆست فێمینیزم. گرنگی توێژینەوەکە لە وەدایە کە یارمەتی خوێنەر دەدات لە ناساندنی چەمکی ڕێبازی ڕەخنەی نەدەبی پۆست فێمینیزم و دۆزینەوە و لێکدانەوەی تایبەتمەندیەکانی ڕێبازەکە لە ناو هەردوو تێکستی شانۆنامەکان و وە ئاشنابوونی خوێنەر، بە تایبەتی ئافرەت، بە پەیوەندی هەردوو ڕگەز و ئەرک و مافەکانیان و یەکسانی لە نێوانیاندا، ژیانی ناو ماڵ، سەربەخۆیی کەسیی، وە بەراورد لە نێوان گوزەرانی ئافرەت لە کۆندا و لە ئێستادا لە بارەی دەنگی ئافرەت و پەیوەندی و گیانی هاریکاری لەگەڵ پیاو، وە هەڵبژاردن لە نێوان بەرەوپێشچوونی کەسیتی تاک و ئەرکەکانی لە ناو ماڵ و خێزاندا یان ڕاگرتنی باڵانس لە نێو هەردووکیاندا.

DOI: https://doi.org/10.26750/vol(6).no(1).paper10 http://journal.uor.edu.krd/index.php/JUR Vol. 6, No.1, June. 2019