

天主教輔仁大學英國語文學系學士班畢業成果
ENGLISH DEPARTMENT, FU JEN CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY
GRADUATION PROJECT 2020

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**Reflection on Participating in
the 2019 Annual Play: *Vinegar Tom***

SANCTITAS BONITAS

PULCHRITUDO

VERITAS

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LOD 2019 AP Reflection

How I Performed in Vinegar Tom

I've always wanted to be a part of a play, especially standing on stage and acting out a life of another person. It seemed to me that the stage is a good place for me to “not being myself”, but still performing fully at the same time. Nevertheless, this is not the story of this year's annual play: *Vinegar Tom*. I did not participate in the acting part; instead, I joined the translation team, and performed the play in another way that I have never imagined. By translating the script, I have the opportunity to explore the cultural background of the story; also, with the back-and-forth discussions with my team members about the small parts in the script, I can have a deeper understanding about the play. So, here's a quick recap of my translating journey in *Vinegar Tom*, and what I have learned from this journey.

At first, I thought translating the script would be easy since all I have to do was to translate conversations; however, I was totally wrong. *Vinegar Tom* is a play based on the historical facts in the witch craft hunt in England in the 17th century. The play not only rewind the incident for the audience, but also challenged the audience on issues like gender and power, in which although seems irrelevant to us through the plot, but are actually everyday events that happen around our lives. In this way, not only the historical facts need certain technical terms to be translated (for example,

bewitched, cunning woman, imp, bootikens), but we also need to figure how to translate the disturbing contents. We soon figured out that the hardest parts were not the technical terms, but how we can translate the tragic plot without making the average audience too uncomfortable, but still disturbed at the same time. The play included the torturing and humiliating of women in a direct manner (for example, one of the lines included “let me see your secret parts” said by a man), and we were worried that audiences might not be able to accept this kind of directness, especially in Taiwan. In the end, we decided to translate the words directly because the team all agreed that it is not our place to change the script in this play.



(One of the abuse scenes in *Vinegar Tom*)

The script was divided into four parts for us to translate. We spent the first few weeks typing and translating our own part of the script, and this was the easiest.

The most difficult part, or say, the most time-consuming part of translating the script was after we finished translating our own part, we proofread the other three parts translated by the other team members. We proofread one part at a time, and then we

will discuss which version of the translation that we came up with are the most suitable. Each week we sit in our “Translation Team Corner” with our laptop and discuss the script translation; we also had meeting outside of the classroom because we did not have enough time in class. Although we sometimes grumbled about how the script is difficult to translate because of the long sentences, and complained about the air conditioner inside the theater (it was very cold), we still had a lot of fun. During the discussion process, I learned translation skill from my team members, including where and how I can quickly find the sources I need for my translation. I also got the chance to observe different translation styles from my team members, and learned how to communicate when we had different stands on which translation is the best. Sometimes giving up on my own version of translation is like taking a step backward and two steps forward, for I can learn to appreciate other people’s work.



(Here’s a picture of our working corner; we barely had any lights because the actors were rehearsing)

After all parts of the script translation were discussed, we then make PowerPoint slides of the lines, and practice changing the slides while the actors were rehearsing. I

thought this part was just to let us get used to the speed of changing the slides; however, I was wrong. During this process, we constantly adjusted out translation according to the actors' tone and speaking speed. There are times when we imagined the way the actors would act on a line, but then discovered they acted in another way, which requires another version of the translation. We also needed to be very cautious when watching the actors rehearse; we needed to see where we should put black slides when no one is talking on stage, or the translation would be dangling awkwardly on the stage during the formal performance.

I appreciate the experience in translation *Vinegar Tom*. Translating the script is not just about letting the audience understand the play better because they can be aided by subtitles; instead, it was also about understanding. When I translate the script, I not only understand the meaning of each line, but also understand the reasons why my team members translate it in different ways. Moreover, I had a chance to understand the script writer, and understand the historical background of the play. As I have mentioned earlier, *Vinegar Tom* is not a play about love and happily ever after. It is also not a play about success. Instead, it is a play about gender inequality, sexual abuse, discrimination, and poverty. It is about fear, about power, and about manipulation. By translating this play, I had the opportunity to do some researches on the historical background of witches in England, and see how men manipulated

women by accusing them as witches. In the beginning, I only thought about how women were put into a unequal position in the society. Nevertheless, as my translating journey went on, I began to realize the disturbing fact: this is not only a play about the past; it is also a play about the present, where people are still abused for being different, or just for being who they are. Caryl Churchill not only wrote a play about past history, but also wrote a play by mirroring the modern society. Upon realization, I appreciate more of the play, and the opportunity to be a part of the whole theatre production.

To conclude, although the semester has long ended, and we have bowed on the stage for the last performance of *Vinegar Tom*, my journey with this play is still ongoing. I enjoyed translating for the play, and I hope I can use this interest to arouse more social awareness on the modern version of *Vinegar Tom*.