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"East West, Home's Best": Feminist Politics of Sue Townsend in *Bazaar and Rummage*

Özlem Özmen-Akdoğan*

Abstract

This paper discusses the social reasons for agoraphobia as a psychological disorder as observed in the women characters of British playwright Sue Townsend's issue-based play Bazaar and Rummage (1982). The depiction of three agoraphobic women in a context characterised by patriarchal dominion constitutes the core of Townsend's play. Although their problematic condition is presented rather comically, from their accounts, it seems apt to argue that societal oppression is the reason for their long-lasting seclusion and constant fear of the outside world. The play offers a rummage sale as an opportunity for women to step outside and conquer their fear. Accordingly, in terms of presenting the psychological condition of women characters and associating the possible solution to their problem with a market occasion, Townsend's play illustrates an example of feminist criticism. In this study, the play's analysis is based on the 1980s context dominated by Thatcher politics, and Townsend's portrayal of agoraphobia is discussed as a criticism of her society in which patriarchal hegemony plays a central role in women's forced confinement.

***Keywords**: Sue Townsend, Bazaar and Rummage, issue-based play, agoraphobia, patriarchal oppression, feminist criticism, Thatcher.*

"Ne Doğu Ne Batı Evimin Yeri Ayrı": Bazaar and Rummage [Çarşı Pazar] Oyununda Sue Townsend'in Feminist Politikası

Öz

Bu makale, Sue Townsend'in problem odaklı oyunlarından Bazaar and Rummage (1982) (Çarşı Pazar)'daki kadın karakterlerde gözlemlenen agorafobinin sosyal sebeplerini tartışmaktadır. Townsend'in oyunu, erkek egemenliğin hüküm sürdüğü bir sosyal çerçevede üç agorafobik kadını ele alır. Kadınların bu sorunu mizahi bir yolla resmedilse de hikayelerinden anlaşıldığı üzere onların süregelen inzivası ve dış dünyadan çekinmelerinin sebebinin toplumsal baskı olduğunu söylemek mümkündür. Oyunda, bu karakterlerin dışarı çıkması ve korkularını yenmesi için bir fırsat olarak ikinci el satış pazarı düzenlenir. Bu doğrultuda, Townsend'in oyunu, kadınların psikolojik sorunlarını ele alması ve onların problemlerine muhtemel bir çözüm olarak bir satış ortamı sunması bakımından feminist eleştiriye bir örnektir. Bu çalışmada, kadınların yaşadıkları sorun, Thatcher siyasetinin görüldüğü 1980 yıllarına dayandırılmaktadır ve Townsend'in agorafobiyi ele alışı, erkek hegemonyasının kadınların eve kapanmasında önemli bir rol oynadığını göstermek üzere tartışılmaktadır.

***Anahtar Kelimeler**: Sue Townsend, Çarşı Pazar, problem odaklı oyun, agorafobi, erkek baskısı, feminist eleştiri, Thatcher.*

* Assit.Prof.Dr. Özlem Özmen-Akdoğan, Muğla Sıtkı Koçman University, Faculty of Letters, Department of Translation and Interpreting in English, Muğla-Turkey. E-mail:ozlemozmen@mu.edu.tr. ORCID No: 0000-0003-3432-8621.

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Introduction

Agoraphobia, as a psychological disorder, is defined in the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* as;

> [a]nxiety about being in places or situations from which escape might be difficult (or embarrassing) or in which help may not be available in the event of having an unexpected or situationally predisposed Panic Attack or panic-like symptoms. Agoraphobic fears typically involve characteristic clusters of situations that include being outside the home alone; being in a crowd or standing in a line; being on a bridge; and travelling in a bus, train, or automobile. (DSM-IV, 1994:22)

As illustrated in this statement, agoraphobia mainly results from a lack of trust in people or places that trigger feelings of panic and anxiety for unexpected and unavoidable danger. Much as it might be a personal psychological problem that stems from one's individual traumatic experiences, it also has other etiological reasons. Among these, society itself plays an important role with all sorts of atrocious events taking place regularly that induce panic and lead people to avoid exposure to any kind of irregularity and unforeseen menace. Sue Townsend's play, *Bazaar and Rummage* (1982) uses this disorder as its subject matter and portrays the pathetic condition of three agoraphobic women humorously, to satirise the societal ills and corruption that force women to isolate themselves from public to the domestic sphere.

Agoraphobia and Women

Elaine Showalter draws attention to the dominant assumptions concerning the relationship between women and mental disorders: "There have always been those who argued that women's high rate of mental disorder is a product of their social situation, both their confining roles as daughters, wives, and mothers and their mistreatment by a male-dominated and possibly misogynistic psychiatric profession" (1985:3). As is the case in some psychological disorders, agoraphobia has often been regarded mainly as a disorder peculiar to women rather than men. As Marrie Bekker states in her analysis of agoraphobia concerning gender, "[a]goraphobia is approximately four times more likely to be diagnosed in women than in men in clinical or community samples" (1996:129). This statement suggests the idea that women are much more likely to be influenced by social control, and they are more likely to confine themselves for protection. The problematic discussion that society is specifically hostile to women has been adapted by feminist critics and social theorists such as Joyce Davidson and Linda McDowell whose ideas will be elaborated here to support this argument. To give an example, Joyce Davidson considers one of the reasons for "feminine sensitivity to her surroundings" to be the "recognition of an environment that treats her as consumer and/or seeks to consume her" (2012:226).

Davidson agrees that agoraphobia is particularly a woman's illness, or rather, a "feminine 'weakness" although she contradicts Kierkegaard's assertion that "anxiety *per se* is gender specific" (2012:213). Concerning the impact of gender on psychological and behavioural development, different social and sexual roles imposed since childhood determine the way people develop behaviours and habits, and patriarchal societies cause the emergence of heavily dependent and insecure women. For instance, one reason for the evolution of much more "dependent, emotional, passive, fearful, homebased" (Moi qtd. in Davidson, 2003:26) women is thought to be the conventionally more restrictive upbringing beginning at an early age. Hoffman mentions the impact of social upbringing on the possibility of experiencing agoraphobia later in life: "[G]irls get less encouragement for independence than boys" (qtd. in Gournay, 1989:210). Gournay further elaborates on this idea by arguing that "[girls] are more protected than boys and less independent in exploring their environment. Consequently, they develop fever skills and less confidence and continue to be more dependent on others" (1989:210). Accordingly, the traditional upbringing of daughters as different from boys with a higher emphasis on their protection affects women's agency later in life. The observable relation between this disorder and women has led agoraphobia to be associated with "sex role socialization, rather than an illness" (Fodor qtd. in Gournay, 1989:213). Thus, the existence of vulnerable or phobic women is considered to be a result of social practices that teach them to be submissive and self-protective. Sex-role stereotyping in early ages is effective in the long-term causing some gender-based behaviours in individuals, thereby making women more susceptible to agoraphobia.

The proposition that agoraphobia is predominantly a women's disease is challenged by some theorists on grounds that it is essentialist and partial (Gournay, 1989:209). However, while this contrary view suggests that psychological disorders should not be pinpointed to specific genders, some findings in academia still refer to the higher rates of agoraphobia observed in women than in men turning it into a "women's syndrome" (Foa et al., 1984:445). Feminist theorists and writers are largely interested in the gendered aspects of agoraphobia like other psychological disorders believing that "a society which does not teach women to be instrumental, competent, and assertive rather than nurturant and expressive, breeds phobic women" (Chambless & Mason, 1986:233).

Sue Townsend is among British women dramatists who observe a correlation between social practices and female submission. In her play *Bazaar and Rummage* (1982), she epitomises the effects of social oppression on women's diffidence with a portrayal of three women suffering from communal phobia. Drawing on the definition of agoraphobia as "a condition that disables those who wish to leave home, to travel, and to enter public places" (Mathews et al., 1981:3), the phobic women in Townsend's play cannot go outside alone, they cannot travel with ease, and they need a company to be in the public space. Townsend's portrayal of this

psychological disorder as a consequence of social oppression makes it possible to discuss the play as a criticism of the Conservative society tethered to its traditions and patriarchal practices. Additionally, the idea of a rummage sale, which is considered as a possible remedy for these women's condition, can be seen as Townsend's critique of women's exclusion from professional life. With the presentation of a rummage sale, Townsend gives the idea that women can recover from their condition if they are provided with the opportunity to go outside, and especially be active in the public space. As a woman dramatist who has also suffered from agoraphobia herself, Townsend's choice of this topic as a way of social criticism begs attention. The discussion of this topic by a writer who has experienced the difficulty of being an agoraphobic woman in a predominantly patriarchal society makes it possible to relate the play's representation of women's place in society to the actual context of 1980s Britain.

Main Body

The evasion of the outside world arises from the inability of a person to control happenings on the outside and the fear of being exposed to unwanted external incidents. The uncertainty of what might be encountered on the outside inevitably leads to a feeling of unsafety, and the urge to avoid places that signal any kind of threat to personal security. It is not surprising, therefore, to observe that women and men might respond differently to experiences in public places as public reception and treatment of different genders is not the same. As Linda McDowell comments on the different senses of place one acquires depending on their identity: "For young women and men, or older women and men, for straight or gay people, different spaces have particular significances and different relations of power that vary over time . . . The urban street and park, which for some are spaces for liberation and exploratory behaviours, are for others inaccessible, or places of fear and danger" (1999:31). What McDowell emphasises is that the same places might conjure different responses in different people based on their perceived identity by the rest of the society. Hence, traditional divisions of public and private spaces according to genders is an outcome of the discrepancy between the experiences of different genders on the outside. To provide an example for the conventional dichotomy of inside/outside as belonging to women/men respectively, McDowell's words are remarkable:

> A range of individuals and particular social groups are excluded from the widest spectrum of access to public spaces and arenas, on the grounds either of their transgressive behaviour and their refusal to recognize the common rights of all or, alternatively, on the grounds of their need for protection from the hurly-burly of the public arena. It is on this latter set of grounds that women have been, and continue to be, excluded from equal access to the public arena. (1999:148)

Additionally, the security of one's surroundings is also a determining factor in developing agoraphobia. This idea is further elaborated by Hudson: "Many anecdotal accounts link agoraphobia with aspects of the person's living

situation: housing, crime rates (real or imagined), and transport difficulties" (Hudson, 1989:64). Apparently, the relationship between social circumstances and the development of certain individual attitudes towards one's environment is a close one. Correspondingly, in Townsend's play *Bazaar and Rummage*, it is depicted that three women cannot go out for many years as they believe that they could easily be victimised in an unscrupulous environment, and they decide to stay at home to be safe from the dangers of the world. While the attitudes of these women are portrayed humorously, the play questions a serious issue by discussing social and patriarchal oppression. Social and patriarchal oppression force female characters in the play to limit themselves only to the domestic sphere depriving them of free will to take decisions on their own behalf. For this reason, Coveney interprets the play as a "chauvinist blast of a male dominated society" (1982:239). The criticism of the play reaches out to the established patriarchal order in a society that excludes women from the public gradually leading them to isolate themselves in their private world. Although the reason for their confinement to their world is agoraphobia, the past experiences of the characters illustrate that the triggering force behind this disorder is social and political rather than personal.

What brings the agoraphobic women together in Townsend's play is their vulnerability against the ills of society and the occasioned oblivion. Obviously, all agoraphobic characters of the play have had unpleasant incidents that led them to live as a recluse for several years. For instance, it has been four years since Katrina last went out of her house because of a public assault. She was a 'songstress,' as she calls herself, in the past. She was an extrovert and a confident person who was able to perform in front of many people. However, she developed agoraphobia after she was pelted with plastic pineapples during her finale, and she was hit in the eye (1984a:59). After this public assault, she locked herself in her house reassuring herself that there is nothing to miss on the streets. Another character, Margaret has been agoraphobic since the time she was raped when she was eighteen. It is reported that she became pregnant and needed to lead a life out of her own choice and control. Apparently, this incident is the cause of her ensuing fear of sexual violence, and her seclusion for the last fifteen years. For another agoraphobic character, Isabel, going outside means going to the dustbin and then immediately returning home. Ironically enough, as it turns out, even the woman police officer, who joins the play in the end, is also afraid of the streets and community policing. Social criticism of this play is enriched with the introduction of the police officer as she adds up to the irony and satire of the play with her remarks about brutality and chaos on the streets. When other women complain about the problems in their community that prevent them from socialising, she agrees with them by saying "the public are bastards, lying, thieving, undisciplined bastards" (1984a:59). Considering the reasons for these characters' development of agoraphobia, including criminal offences such as public assault and rape, it is evident that they have been victimised by certain incidents that particularly targeted them as they were women. It is noted by almost all characters that

streets are full of violence and all sorts of peril that are especially hostile to women. Even Gwenda, who tries to help women conquer their agoraphobia as the organiser of the rummage sale, believes that "streets aren't safe for women" (1984a:41), and that they are living in "[a] country where no decent God-fearing woman can walk the streets without being molested" (1984a:43). Gwenda's remark reinforces other women's reservations, and also supports Townsend's critical exploration of the 1980s' British society.

Seclusion does not seem to serve as a remedy for these women as they keep hearing about the feared events on the outside and consequently their anxiety is triggered. Even though they confine themselves to home to seek protection from the horrible events happening on the streets, their fear is renewed every day as they are still kept informed about criminal incidents by people around them. One of the characters, Katrina, for instance, keeps learning the news from her husband, Maurice:

> Maurice tells me all the news; all about the riots and the muggings and the rapes and the old people being murdered… and the blacks kidnapping white women and all the little kiddies that's molested by perverts and the animals that's tortured by teenagers and the multiple crashes on the motorways and how people have been trapped inside their cars and been burnt alive. (1984a:40)

Katrina's account provides essential social critique as all she hears about the outside world consists of chaos, murder, harassment, and violence of all kinds. As a result of the atrocious side of the community in which she lives, she keeps closing herself indoors to protect herself from all these societal ills thinking "[n]othing can happen to you if you're inside" (1984a:41). Due to her previous bad experiences, Katrina sees no reason to go outside to encounter evil in this abominable world. She is so obsessed with a concern of protection that she does not even let other women leave the door open believing that they are "letting the smell of the streets in" (1984a: 32). Regarding this example, Katrina's situation constitutes an expressive instance that shows women's confinement is determined by the horrific atmosphere of everyday life on the outside both on a social and personal level.

Bazaar and Rummage derives the main source of its comic events from the irrational behaviours and habits of the agoraphobic women in the play. Townsend knows how an agoraphobic person acts when s/he is under stress from her own experience. She considers the things she did when she suffered from agoraphobia unreasonable and talks about one of the habits she developed then: "Agoraphobia forces you to act in the most ridiculous fashion. I once suffered from it for three weeks and during that time I would hang my washing out in the garden at midnight" (1984b:i). Like Townsend's own way of protecting herself, the agoraphobic women in the play behave rather weirdly when they are about to step outside. As much as the agoraphobic characters of the play are afraid to go outside, they are also cautious enough not to let any danger from the outside enter inside. As it is stated in the stage directions, the "[m]issing panes of glass have been replaced by pieces of coloured cellophane" (1984a:3). The women use

coloured cellophane to cover the lacking parts of the door glass, and this initial introduction to the play is symbolic of their obsession to overprotect themselves from any unknown external danger. Additionally, when the women stay silent for some time, siren sounds are heard from the outside signalling the chaotic and insecure atmosphere outside calling for urgent action. The agoraphobic characters of the play have been obsessive about the outside terror to such an extent that they even mistake the noise of laughter coming from the outside as the voice of female screams. The scenery of the play reveals that the pathetic condition of these women has also affected their imagination no longer enabling them to think of even a single happy moment on the outside.

As a result of the inexplicable fear of the outer world and the strangers on the streets, even the thought of stepping outside for the jumble sale causes women to feel under pressure, and they cannot act normal. For instance, Katrina, as a dependent woman on her partner, Maurice, makes it clear that she could never get out of the house if it were not for him. She even needs his help to walk through the path from her car to the house, and she keeps him waiting for her until she feels it is the right time to go back to the car. She is only out on condition that he drives her from one place to another, and she refrains from looking at the streets even while passing by in the car. In this regard, Maurice is the epitome of the "safe person" in agoraphobic relationships Barlow defines as follows:

> A safe person is commonly a significant other whose company enables the patient to feel more comfortable going places than he or she can be either alone or with other people. Usually, this person is considered "safe" because he or she knows about the panic attacks. (2002:343)

Considering Maurice's part in Katrina's situation, the couple represents a prototypical marriage that includes a "help-seeking, agoraphobic woman and her protecting, latently anxious husband" (Bekker, 1996:133). Katrina is overprotecting herself, and Maurice becomes a part of this anomaly by making her sit at the back of the car in case they have an accident (1984a:22). Although there is not an overt criticism about Maurice's protective behaviour in the play, it seems that he lacks some of the characteristics that a partner of an agoraphobic person needs to embody. As an ideal way of behaviour is proposed for the spouses of agoraphobic people, it is necessary to "plan a series of exposure tasks, prompt and reinforce each step, and provide a reassuring presence during exposure" (Hudson, 1989:69). Maurice, on the contrary, is an overprotective partner who tries to meet all of Katrina's necessities and demands, and this causes her situation to get worse. Considering that Maurice fails to do any of the suggested things for Katrina, his lack of support to help her get over agoraphobia is implicitly criticised in the play.

Rummage Sale

As the play opens, an ex-agoraphobic, now a neurotic woman, Gwenda and her social worker friend, Fliss organise a rummage sale to provide an opportunity

for their friends who still suffer from agoraphobia and give them a reason to go out after long years of confinement. As expected, this occasion is a radical experience for all women as it displays their tragicomic fear of the outer world revealing each of their causes for developing this disorder and the increasing difficulty of overcoming it. Since these women have not left their homes for many years, the rummage sale is a crucial experience for them even though it lasts for only a few hours. When Margaret first arrives at the venue, she is so overwhelmed by being out that she cannot feel her legs, and she cannot get out of the car (1984a: 21). Katrina's restlessness about being outside is reported by Fliss who says she is "working up to an anxiety attack" (1984a: 7) while waiting inside her car to be taken home. It is understood that these women are at a later stage of this disorder as it is suggested in a medical article discussing multiple phases of agoraphobia:

> It may be impossible for the person so affected to cross the street. He seems to lose all sense of space . . . He cannot stir without assistance of some other person, and during an attack he may have to lean against a wall . . . There is pallor, acceleration of the pulse and respiration, the face and extremities are covered with cold sweat . . . ("Agoraphobia," 1900: 98)

Apparently, Margaret and Katrina's reactions illustrate that they are almost left motionless on the outside even when they are in a car. Although the illogical actions of these women are seen as a source of comedy in the play, it needs to be noted that the symptoms of agoraphobia are as serious as they are listed in the above article.

Since these women's condition is hopeless and they would never step outside without someone's help, the rummage sale provides an opportunity for them to help them see their potential and realise their aspiration to go outside. They may be living as a recluse for many years; however, the reason for this is more related to feeling vulnerable against dangers than despising the outside world. This is seen in the cases of Margaret and Isabel who would like to go out; however, eventually, they fail as they are not courageous enough to step outside without company. Even the thought of stepping out is so extraordinary for these women that when Margaret comes to Gwenda's place and realises that she at least ventured to go out, she appreciates her effort by saying "[w]ell, I did it! . . . I ain't been further than putting the milk bottles out for bleedin' years. Now here I am, half a mile away . . ." (1984a:23). Although she could not go to the rummage sale alone, she is still happy to be half a mile away from her home at last. Her desire to be outside again is also revealed by her ironic remark as she fancies going around the world if she were a millionairess (1984a:45).

Similarly, it is radical for Katrina to be out for a few minutes even when she is with Maurice. The rummage sale is the first time she is taken out after four and a half years, and she cannot believe she has made her way there at last. Although she makes herself believe for years that the streets are full of evil, she inevitably feels accomplished when she realises that she is somewhere other than her home. Among the agoraphobic women, Isabel is the one who likes to

be out the most. She is the first one to accept the peculiarity of her condition. When Gwenda offers a religious remedy to her, Isabel rejects her help and stands out: "I want to get out and stay out" (1984a:20). Although their condition may not be cured with the jumble sale, this event at least offers these women an opportunity to notice and voice their desire to be out again. In the sense that it helps them realise their potential and wish to be out again, the rummage sale is a radical experience for them. As Nicholls remarkably notes, "[i]t transpires that the sale has not been a huge financial success. They have taken a total of nine pounds, thirty-seven and a half pence. The hall rental was £10 and therefore they made a loss. However, it was a day-out!!!" (2014:301). This rummage sale gathering is no miracle to solve the problem of these women; but at least, it enables them to see their oppressed longing to go out, which they would not be able to realise otherwise.

Seeing their repressed desire to be out again, and realising their potential, the women begin encouraging each other even for the slightest step outside with cheerful songs. However, when it comes to going outside for the sale, they are terrified of this possibility, and together they all start shouting in a panic: "Door! Oh! No! Help!" (1984a:31). Once the door is open, they yell out for help as if all the danger of the outside world would rush into the house. As it is observed in Margaret and Isabel's case, they cannot go out on their own although they are the ones that want it the most. Both of them have to subdue their dream of going out to their panic. If it were Margaret's choice, for instance, she would easily step out when Fliss encourages her to take only two steps outside. However, she is so scared to experience it that she wants to keep Fliss waiting at the door until she finishes those two steps. Although their wish to go out is quite strong as they keep encouraging each other, eventually their motivation turns out to be not as powerful as their fear. Margaret encourages Isabel with the words: "Bell, you're wasting yourself staying in. You're a good woman, you should share yourself out" (1984a:54). However, she overlooks the fact that she is no different, and she cannot help herself, either. It is suggested that "[t]he essence of agoraphobia is that anxiety is greater on public than on private property, and anxiety usually increases as the distance from the individual's private property increases" ("Agoraphobia," 1974:177). Appropriately, Margaret's anxiety rises as she thinks that she is moving away from the house with every step she takes. In this instance, the repressive fear is seen to be more powerful than her motivation and eagerness to conquer her social phobia. Even Isabel, who is different from the other women in the sense that she longs to be out for longer periods, cannot come through her fear any better than the others when it comes to really going out. As the case is medically commented upon, "[i]n pure cases of agoraphobia she [the patient] is perfectly happy at home, but an invisible barrier stretches across her door or her garden gate beyond which lies a limitless expanse of terror and misery" ("Agoraphobia," 1974:177). It is obvious from an observation of the agoraphobic characters that no matter how much they want to be out, they have irrepressible restraint and control over their desire to be outside again. Whenever they think of going

outside, the panic of what danger will come from the outside conquers their motivation and will to be there, and this repression primarily derives from external factors which overcome their determination.

The idea of sorority, peculiar to women's drama as is observed in the works of seminal women dramatists like Caryl Churchill and Timberlake Wertenbaker, plays an important role in Townsend's play as these women know that their fear is also shared by others. For instance, despite their continuous attempts to go out, it is only when Fliss incites the others that it is time to go out that they venture to set their foot on the other side of the door for the sale. Fliss tells that despite all the corruption on the streets, they are also human beings, and there are other people like themselves, and asks "[w]hy should we be forced to stay at bloody home? Come on we're going out" (1984a:59). Although they are not ready yet, and they will never be if they are not forced to be out anymore, they hold on to each other, and with a final note of solidarity, together they take a step outside. As the stage directions inform, "[t]hey take a deep breath. They are still terrified of the outside world. They are not cured of their agoraphobia. They are leaving because they have no other choice" (1984a: 60). It transpires that these women could only venture to go out since they are together, and they have a shared experience. Joyce Davidson also underlines the importance of communal therapy in cases of agoraphobia based on the observations of attendance at a self-help group and claims that "attendance at the self-help group can be so very constructive – the sufferer learns that they are not alone in the world" (2012:224). In a similar manner, the women characters of Townsend's play acquire power by confronting their fear in a union that might not be possible if they tried on their own.

It is thanks to this shared sorority that female agency is established at the end of the play even though fleetingly. Şimşek's observation of the ending of the play is also suggestive of the fact that these women come nearer to obtain agency through the idea of solidarity: "Even if they are not cured of their agoraphobia, they all go out together like a team, which is a kind of hope for them to take over their own life rather than depend on their husbands, children or social workers to run their lives" (2015:158). Apparently, the initial step they take as a group marks the beginning of their self-dependency, hence the importance of solidarity should not be overlooked in the process towards healing. This moment in the play is even more meaningful in terms of being an important step towards self-agency considering Davidson's remark on how agoraphobia might be cured with exposure:

> To open oneself up to excitement, to learn to endure and even enjoy the *potentiality* of panic without giving oneself over to it completely, is the phenomenal freedom to which the agoraphobic aspires . . . It is usually only achievable via a process of *acclimatization* to threatening space, and the patience to persevere through almost imperceptible improvements. Very gradually, her feelings of isolation and abandonment may become transformed and even re-placed by a sense of freedom and independence. (2012:227)

Accordingly, the play's characters slowly expose themselves to the outside with the opportunity of the rummage sale, which is the most promising moment in the play concerning their increasing agency and self-dependency.

Thatcherism and Women

Sue Townsend was an anti-Thatcherite writer, which is much more evident in her *Adrian Mole* series full of direct criticism against Margaret Thatcher (Mingo Izquierdo, 2015: 109). In her dramatic career, specifically speaking about *Bazaar and Rummage*, her anti-Thatcherite criticism is not so direct, however, the play still needs to be considered as embodying implicit political criticism with respect to the depiction of weakened women characters at the time when the country was ruled by the first woman prime minister. Clearly, Townsend's play, with its portrayal of women who are afraid of the dangerous streets, offers a critique of the Thatcherite period which fails to sustain a peaceful atmosphere for women. Whether Margaret Thatcher has been a role model for the women in the country or she prevented their progress by giving emphasis on individual prosperity is an ongoing controversial question. Mostly, Thatcher has been criticized by women dramatists such as Caryl Churchill, journalists, and scholars for not offering adequate support for women who needed it. Specifically referring to Thatcher's lack of support for working-class women, Beatrix Campbell states that "[s]he did not create a new womanly public. She did not engage women as her peers, and she did not noticeably intervene on behalf of women" (2015: 41). Thatcherism has mostly been criticized for its emphasis on privatisation in economic terms, and its lack of concern regarding gender equality. To criticise the latter, many women dramatists including Sarah Daniels, Timberlake Wertenbaker, Pam Gems, and Sue Townsend voiced women's problems on the stage. Contrary to common belief prior to her election, Thatcher did not provide support for women of other classes or ethnic backgrounds. As Campbell aptly observes, "Thatcher addressed women as subordinates. She reserved power and greatness for herself" (2015: 41). Even though it was expected of her to be supportive of women in the country, she did not have such an agenda as she openly mentioned the lack of relation between her gender and her profession/status: "I have always thought of myself as a politician who happens to be a woman" (Thatcher, 1980: 2). The lack of concern for women in Thatcher's period has still been considered among the most problematic politics of the Conservative government from 1979 to 1990.

In Townsend's play, criticism of the establishment's view of women is observed with a portrayal of women who have lost their self-confidence due to agoraphobia. They have been forced to stay at home as a result of recurrent atrocities outside, and it is quite suggestive to consider this along the lines that the Thatcher government domesticated women rather than encouraging their existence in the professional world. As it is informed, "at a time when a majority of women were in the labour market, Thatcher hailed them only as wives and mothers" (Campbell, 2015: 45). In an

interview, Thatcher's words indicate the dominant idea supported during her government that women's place is in the home:

> I think what some of us are very concerned about, and we come across with some women or young wives almost feeling guilty if they don't have a job as well as running the home. That must never be. One of the most important jobs in life, if you have a family and you know you're responsible for bringing them in the world, they depend upon you, is bringing them up to the best possible start in life, and I would say to any woman, if she wants to stay at home, and put absolutely top bringing up her children, and after all I didn't come into Parliament until my children were six, right, that is a very important job you can do, please don't be deflected. (1981: 7-8)

This demonstrates that she preferred to address women's domestic identities and undermined their significant presence and participation in the workforce. As McDowell also comments on the unequal economic family structure in Thatcher's period: "The 'family' evoked in Conservative social policy is based on a strict sexual division of labour where the paterfamilias is the main economic provider and the women is primarily a homemaker and mother" (1989: 179). This, obviously, discouraged women from working, and forced them to remain indoors and become dependent women, an example of which could be seen as an evident outcome in Townsend's play.

The condition of women in Thatcher's Britain is characterised by an increase in the number of unemployed women that relied heavily on men for economic survival. Similarly, Social Security Acts passed under the Thatcher government did not consider women as equal to men in terms of welfare benefits such as child-care provision and unemployment wages. Considering Thatcherite politics' lack of support of women, and its "moral reassertion of the sanctity of the nuclear family" (McDowell, 1989: 173), Townsend's play is evocative of British society in terms of displaying gender inequality. The women in the play are now unemployed while some of them had experience in the professional world in the past. They are economically and psychologically dependent on others, and they cannot even go out without the help of someone. Their weakness and inability to get over a difficult situation illustrate the larger panorama of the British society in which women no longer felt safe, which is also evinced in a speech by Thatcher herself: ". . . a lot of things we used to take for granted seem to be in danger of disappearing. Money that keeps its value. Real jobs that last. Paying our way in the world. Feeling safe in our streets—especially if you're a woman" (1979: 1). The partial treatment of women and men in the years of Thatcher's government and the lack of safety on the streets specifically for women support the idea that the play is a product of its context.

Conclusion

Bazaar and Rummage, which had its premiere at the Royal Court Theatre in 1982, made it possible for women audiences to go out and see a performance in which they found characters close to themselves. Regarding the effect of

the play on its audience, it should be noted that women who had been previously housebound for many years made an attempt to go to the theatre, and they were pleased to see women like themselves represented on the stage as Susan Carlson relays "[s]eeing their lives not only sympathetically portrayed but also celebrated in *Bazaar and Rummage*, many of the agoraphobiacs [sic.] who bravely ventured out to see the play . . . earned self-esteem" (1991: 334). Evidently, besides reflecting fictional women agoraphobics on the stage, Townsend's play has also been successful in influencing many agoraphobic women in real life as it encouraged them to go out by providing an opportunity for them to step outside.

This play was written and performed in a theatrical climate rather hostile to women's drama. Peacock underlines that theatre establishment in the 1980s was dominantly male as both producers, actors, and audiences largely consisted of male members:

> Theatres may have felt discouraged from producing plays focusing on women and women's issues by the consideration that, although 52 percent of the population is female and more women than men are theatre-goers, the majority of critics are white, middle-aged, middle-class men. The cultural climate is, then, primarily determined by male perception. (1999:148)

Enoch Brater's statement concerning the hardships women endure in the theatre industry is also remarkable: "The theatre is the sphere most removed from the confines of domesticity, thus the woman who ventures to be heard in this space takes a greater risk than the women poet or novelist" (1989:2). Correspondingly, the composition and production of Townsend's play are subversive of the dominant understanding of theatre as the play was written by a woman dramatist, the actors were women, and the play appealed to women audiences more than men. In this respect, Townsend's play also tries to broaden public awareness concerning women's issues on a larger scale.

According to Townsend, comedy "is a fundamental human response to a changing, stressful environment" (Carlson, 1991:7-8). Comedy is one of the ways in which she expresses the wishes and dismay of real women through her fictional characters, and this play is a satiric response to the repressive atmosphere women have had to live in, or rather abstained from, for many years. Andrew Wyllie suggests that among the subjects that were primarily focused on in the plays of women dramatists in the 80s were ". . . the challenge mounted in women's writing to the role of psychiatry as a tool of patriarchal oppression; the exploration of the potential for women to become the dominant occupants of spaces both public and private . . ." (2009:22). The argument that women's lives are affected by patriarchal oppression, and that male members of society determine which spaces women could be accepted into is relevant to the psychological peril of the women in Townsend's play. Sue Townsend presents an example of fictional work that introduces agoraphobia as "one phenomenon that demonstrates the continuing oppression of women by men and by modern western institutions" (Hudson, 1989:65). Accordingly, *Bazaar and Rummage* holds

Thatcherite politics that further broadened the gender gap responsible for the discrimination of women from the public sphere while touching on a crucial psychological problem reflective of a male-dominated society.

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