



## [Witches in Manhattan: Vinegar Tom](#)

Filed under: [WebLog](#) — Peter Ferko

Write a love story, and few people are going to start comparing you to this and that, but pick a less common topic, and the comparisons just come naturally. Such is the case with “Vinegar Tom,” a play written in 1976 by Caryl Churchill, that appeared this weekend and last in the unusual venue of the 190th Street subway plaza, more commonly used for ping pong and watching the leaves fall.

A story of witch hunting and the unjust treatment of women inevitably draws comparisons with the oeuvre that peaks with the “Crucible” and runs the gamut from *Witches of Eastwick* to, well, this play. “Vinegar Tom” brings new material into the topic through its frank discussion of sex. With warnings on the flyers about town of “mature content”, this production by Patchwork Theatre Initiative takes on women’s interest in sex, their value other than as sexual objects or mothers (see [Penny Arcade’s](#) comments

concerning “mating machines”), and the revenge men take against their power.

None of the women fare well in this play. The mature find their wisdom misunderstood or their prior attractiveness lost; the young find their desires misconstrued and their refusals countered with vengeance or overwhelming force; even the respectable are lost to their confusion between God and Man, turning over neighbors and friends to live up to the patriarchal “good”, while their husbands look upon them as means of production and cheat on them to boot. Salvation comes only for the assistant to the witch hunter, who transforms to man’s image; Goody, played by Emily Campbell, who also directed, tells us it’s better than anything else she could do as a widow.

The production was engaging and clever, and the performances effective if uneven — I wasn’t sure if we were going for Medieval Festival style or TV. **Highlights were Maayan Schneider’s presence and honesty in the role of the lusty daughter with a penchant for magic** and David Pringle’s Man/Devil who opens the play. Music by Michael Rosen was superb. Everyone (including the cast line, in an unusual directorial choice) enjoyed the epilogue, a soft shoe number by Steph B. Taylor and Shannon Lower, in which their satirical recitations of the *Malleus Mallifacarum*, the 1494 textbook on witches, serves to highlight our continued tendencies toward prejudice — if even or only at the subconscious level. - **October 14, 2007**  
Image: [Maayan Schneider and David Pringle](#) (photo by Peter Ferko)