



**School: Music and Performing Arts**

**Researcher: Silva Semerciyan**

**Project Title: Witches Can't Be Burned**

**UOA: 33 - Music, Drama, Dance, Performing Arts, Film and Screen Studies**

## 300-Word Statement

*Witches Can't Be Burned* is a practice-based research project initiated by Silva Semerciyan, Drama Lecturer at Bath Spa University, wherein the creation of a playscript became both an instrument and a process for challenging institutional sexism. It was commissioned by the National Theatre as part of their Connections Festival 2020 in which 19 youth theatre companies across the UK would perform the play.

The play engaged with research, crucially Schissel's *ReDiscovering Witches in Arthur Miller's the Crucible: A Feminist Reading*, which analyses Miller's problematic depiction of girls and women. This inspired the creation of a diverse narrative which sought to initiate dialogue within theatre education about the broader representation of girls and women in so-called 'masterpieces'. By writing a play which would offer more rounded and positive depictions of womanhood and female friendships through naturalistic language, Semerciyan sought to contribute new ways of writing the female and rewriting aspects of the literary record. In addition, by allowing the play's content to parallel its context of realisation, Semerciyan was able to offer education groups a chance to reflect on their own gender politics and experience of institutional sexism. Application of such devices as the play within a play and intertextuality worked to position the youth actors of *Witches Can't Be Burned* as resisting readers and offered them tools with which to become resisting theatre practitioners of the future.

The research culminated in multiple performances across the UK in Feb 2020 and the script being published by the Methuen Drama imprint of Bloomsbury as part of the *National Theatre Connections Anthology*. The play's performance has been available to view on YouTube throughout summer 2020 offering an educational resource that challenges representations of girls and women.