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**PHILOMELA AND HER SISTERS:
EXPLORATIONS OF SEXUAL VIOLENCE IN PLAYS
BY BRITISH CONTEMPORARY WOMEN DRAMATISTS**

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for My Parents

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SUMMARY

The theme of this thesis is women and violence explored in eleven plays by British contemporary women playwrights in the 1980s and 1990s. In order to explore these plays, I have made investigations into a basic knowledge of violence against women in the Introduction. Violence against women is also called sexual violence or gender-related violence. The knowledge I have gained includes how sexual violence is defined; why sexual violence occurs; what kinds of sexual violence there are; how people perceive sexual violence. My definition is that any act which limits the autonomy of women constitutes sexual violence. Based on a variety of definitions by feminist scholars, there are many forms of sexual violence in women's history around the world. As a result, I have found out the continuity, diversity, and universality of women's pain. The nature of sexual violence has been mistaken by many people from the perspective of prevailing myths about women's sexuality. Because of them, many women and female children become double victims. Having understood the true nature of sexual violence, I have selected eleven plays which explore women and violence: *The Love of the Nightingale* (1988) by Timberlake Wertenbaker; *Crux* (1991) by April de Angelis; *The Taking of Liberty* (1992) by Cheryl Robson; *Augustine (Big Hysteria)* (1991) by Anna Furse; *The Gut Girls* (1988) by Sarah Daniels; *Ficky Stingers* (1986) by Eve Lewis; *Beside Herself* (1990) by Sarah Daniels; *Thatcher's Women* (1987) by Kay Adshead; *Money to Live* (1984) by Jacqueline Rudet; *Low Level Panic* (1988) by Clare McIntyre; *Masterpieces* (1984) by Sarah Daniels. The thesis is divided into two parts depending on whether the plays are set in the past or present in order to identify the continuity of sexual violence. They depict the exercise of men's power through sexual violence. In the plays women experience

violence committed by men and then they are silenced. However, the women demonstrate their fighting spirit and regain their voice or find ways to express themselves. Women's hope for change is expressed through theatre.

INTRODUCTION

Since the Women's Liberation Movement started in the United States in the late 1960s, women's status has improved greatly in many parts of the world. Over the last quarter of a century women have had increasing opportunities for education, employment, and other activities for a better quality of life. However, women still do not enjoy equal opportunities with men. Male supremacy has been institutionalised, simply on the basis of gender, in every aspect of our lives. Economic and political power controlled by men is so dominant over women in most societies that women in the majority of countries still have had less access to power and privilege than men, even though the degree of power allowed to men varies from society to society. For example, in many third-world countries over 90% of the women are illiterate. Women represent 70% of 1.3 billion people world-wide who live in poverty. Although they do 66% of the world's work, women earn 10% of the world's income and own 1% of the world's property. In 1994 only 8 countries were close to having 30% of their government representatives as women.¹ '[I]n the UK, only one in ten MP's are women...; only one in ten judges are women. Britain, unlike Germany, France and Italy does not have a policy of paid paternity leave.'² As the above statistics show, except for highly advanced societies with well-developed welfare provision (some Scandinavian countries, for example), women in most patriarchal societies are inferior to men in their homes, their jobs, and in other spheres of societies. Women are oppressed economically in employment and in marriage. As wives and mothers, still many women are excluded from job opportunities, especially because of child-rearing and housework. Even when women are employed, most of them are in low-paid insecure job. In the same status of work women are frequently less paid than men.

They are also expected to carry out unpaid housework. Some women have made their way into senior positions, but they are still a minority in positions of power and influence. They have fewer prospects for promotion and are often less paid than men in the same position. Overall, the situations of employment are not favourable to women. Today, women still have to suffer this discrimination to earn their living.

Women are also oppressed sexually. They are still vulnerable to physical and sexual violence. It is estimated that a quarter of women world-wide are physically battered. For example, in Pakistan, over 80% of women in custody are subjected to some form of sexual assault. East Timorese women are forcibly being sterilised in an attempt by the Indonesian government to annihilate their race. One million young girls in Asia are prostitutes. In China abortion is compulsory for unmarried mothers. The punishment for being a lesbian in Iran is for the guilty women to be cleaved in half. In Algeria women are gunned down by terrorist groups for not wearing head scarves. Approximately 100 million women and girls throughout the world have undergone genital mutilation. In the USA a woman is raped every six minutes. In the UK around a thousand cases of domestic violence are reported to the police every week. Also in Britain girls have disappeared close to their homes and have later been found raped and killed, or, worse still, have never been heard of again. Women have to avoid certain places and certain times for their own safety. Their freedom of movement in public places, at least, at night time, is restricted. Even in the daytime women are not necessarily safe. They may be sexually harassed in the streets and in their workplace. Women are thought to be safe at home, where they are presumed to be protected by their fathers, husbands, or male relatives such as brothers, uncles, or grandfathers, but the truth is that they are not safe at home, either. Women and female children are sexually and/or physically abused by men in their homes. Thus

irrespective of differences arising from age, class, colour, religion or culture, and of the type of political and legal systems under which they live, world-wide women's freedom is limited while are beaten, abused, raped, sexually harassed, killed and psychologically tormented in the home, workplace, and society. They are verbally and visually humiliated and objectified as sexual beings in the mass media. Violence sometimes threatens or devastates women's lives. Yet the prevalence and the problem of violence against women have not been widely acknowledged. It was only in the early 1970s that feminist campaigns and actions in many societies made sexual violence, which is sometimes of a private nature, a public issue. It was not until recently that sexual violence was recognised as a crime and a major obstacle to sexual equality and women's welfare in society. A woman's right to be free from danger and fear for her personal safety within the home, the workplace, and society should be secured sooner or later for the good of half of the population of mankind - women and female children.

Since the women's movement, feminists have paid special attention to violence against women and children, which has become one of the main issues in feminism. Feminists have conducted numerous researches and published a considerable body of writing on it. Their publishing has drawn interest from other women and from men, raising awareness of male violence against women among the public. In addition to how to define sexual violence and how to deal, and cope, with it, the reason why men perpetrate violence against women has been widely studied. When we know why men commit violence against women, chances to prevent it will be higher and thus a great number of women can be saved from violence being perpetrated against them. The socio-political system in most countries, however, has not been structured favourably for the well-being of women and children.

The resulting ideas and theories from numerous researches into sexual violence need to be understood in order to make a valid critique of the plays that have been selected for this thesis. The Introduction therefore concentrates on a fuller examination of male violence against women than has been stated above. Section One discusses definitions of male violence against women drawn by feminist theorists and researchers. Women's autonomy is emphasised in determining whether an act against women constitutes violence. Section Two investigates why men commit violence against women. The reason stems largely from the disparity of power between men and women. In Section Three, in addition to some examples of sexual violence I have given briefly above, I will examine the types of sexual violence in detail and at length in order to emphasise how pervasive and prevalent sexual violence is in women's lives and in societies. The occurrence of sexual violence is far more frequent than is generally understood. Section Four focuses on how general perceptions of this violence differ from the reality and how these stereotypes regarding sexual violence lead men to commit sexual violence, and oppress and silence their victims.

1. Definitions of Sexual Violence

In feminist writing and campaigning there are a number of definitions and forms of male violence against women which can also be termed as 'sexual violence', for most violence that men commit against women is sexual, i.e. rape, child sexual abuse, and sexual harassment. Until the late 1970s, however, sexual violence was primarily associated with rape or the discourse of sexual violence used rape as a paradigmatic example in connection with men's exercise of power over women. Since rape including child sexual abuse and sexual harassment are sometimes accompanied by other forms of physical violence such as beating, knifing, killing and/or mutilation, these forms are also considered to be sexual violence. Thus sexual violence is

associated with sexual and physical abuse of women in the first place. In *Women's Madness* Jane Ussher defines sexual violence in this sense as she comments, 'sexual violence [is] exemplified by rape, sexual murder, prostitution and the glorification of sadomasochism,'³ leaving out pornography, Chinese footbinding, Indian suttee, genital mutilation which other feminists see as forms of sexual violence. In addition to this sexual and physical nature, other feminists include, in their definitions, language, gestures and visual images which degrade women. Kathleen Barry's definition is wider, as she contends: 'Crimes against women are defined as those acts which are directed at women because of their female sexual definition.'⁴ She regards sexual violence as crimes committed against women, using women's sexuality as a means.

Some feminists have adopted terms such as 'terrorism' or 'slavery' for sexual violence. Like 'crimes', one of Barry's terms for sexual violence, her other term, 'sexual slavery', can be another way to name sexual violence, for her analysis of sexual slavery in prostitution is also relevant to certain natures of sexual violence. This is discussed in her book, *Female Sexual Slavery*, which mainly explores forced prostitution. In this book Barry argues, 'Pimping and procuring are perhaps the most ruthless displays of male power and sexual dominance.'⁵ Other sexual violence also takes place through the exercise of male power. Like prostitutes who are victimised and exploited by pimps in brothels, women, Barry argues, are also victims of men in the homes and she instances wife battery and incest as examples of this. These practices make, as Barry writes, 'the private family instead of the public street or "house" the location of female sexual slavery' (*Ibid.*, p. 163). She parallels sexual slavery in prostitution with sexual violence in the home, which she also calls sexual slavery.

Female sexual slavery is present in all situations where women or girls cannot change the immediate conditions of their existence; where regardless of how

they got into those conditions they cannot get out; and where they are subject to sexual violence and exploitation. (*Ibid.*, p. 139)

Barry uses the term ‘sexual slavery’ to describe a general social circumstance of sexual violence and exploitation to which women are enslaved. Barry argues that female sexuality is controlled by male power in patriarchal societies and this men’s power results in sex colonisation of them.

Female violence, in all its forms, is the mechanism for controlling women through the sex-is-power ethic, either directly through enslavement or indirectly using enslavement as a threat held over all other women. This is the generalized condition of sex colonization. Enslavement or potential slavery is rarely seen as such by either its aggressors/potential aggressors or by its victims/potential victims. That is the subtlety of long term sex colonization. (Barry, p. 165)

The idea of ‘sexual slavery’ and ‘sex colonisation’ means the restriction of women’s autonomy and choices by patriarchal power. Many women remain in a deadlock, as they are still bound by patriarchal control, though its grip in some countries has been much loosened in recent years.

Carole J. Sheffield calls sexual violence ‘sexual terrorism’, arguing that ‘The right of men to control the female body is a cornerstone of patriarchy.⁶ Patriarchy denies women autonomy and the idea that a woman’s body is her own property. According to Sheffield, violence and the threat of violence terrorise women in order to maintain control over women. As Sheffield insists:

The word *terrorism* invokes images of furtive organisations of the far right or left, whose members blow up buildings and cars, hijack airplanes, and murder innocent people in some country other than ours. But there is a different kind of terrorism, one that so pervades our culture that we have learned to live with it as though it were the natural order of things. Its targets are females - of all ages, races, and classes. It is the most common characteristic of rape, wife battery, incest, pornography, harassment, and all forms of sexual violence. I call it *sexual terrorism* because it is a system by which males frighten and, by frightening, control and dominate females. (Original italics, *ibid.*, p. 3)

Sexual violence pervades women’s lives and societies so much that it is regarded as an ordinary occurrence. Thus women live in constant fear and threat, and can hardly

predict when and where they will be victimised, just as it is difficult to predict when and where bombs will go off in terrorist attacks.

Liz Kelly has come to a lengthy definition in an attempt to 'reflect both the extent and range of sexual violence and to include women's perceptions within it'

Sexual violence includes any physical, visual, verbal or sexual act that is experienced by the woman or girl, at the time or later, as a threat, invasion or assault, that has the effect of hurting her or degrading her and/or takes away her ability to control intimate contact. (Original italics, Kelly, p. 41)

The definition of sexual violence has been broadened as time passes by and in the 1990s, for example, S. F. Agudelo, discusses:

[A] definition of violence...includes a notion of power which is defined as the ability to exert physical force on others, and also the ability to appropriate people's *symbols* and *information* as well as their *territory* and *economic resources*. The exercise of any of these types of power may constitute a form of violence. The definition of violence needs to recognize that power might be unevenly distributed at the *interpersonal* and the *collective* level, and that violence might result from both *direct* and *indirect* use of force.⁷ (My italics.)

In the same book, Janette Forman and Jan Macleod argue that the non-physical aftermath of men's violation and/or the fear of as yet uncommitted attack on women can constitute a form of violence.⁸ In a wide sense, sexual violence is defined as the exercise of power by men against women, including institutional, cultural, and socio-structural factors. For example, Naomi Wolf defines cosmetic surgery as a form of sexual violence in her book, *The Beauty Myth*. Una Stannard contends that some fashions women follow for beauty and/or to arouse men have become violent enough to cause death. (Both of these points are discussed further later in this chapter.) To sum up all these definitions, in addition to physical violence, sexual violence also comprises emotional, psychological and/or material damage which is inflicted on women as a result of acts committed by men against women. My definition of sexual violence includes nearly all forms of violence committed by men against women which deny the victim autonomy and free will.

2. Why Men Commit Violence against Women?

Before the advent of modern feminism, in the Victorian Era, John Stuart Mill wrote in his essay, *The Subjection of Women*: ‘Until a late period in European history, the father had the power to dispose of his daughter in marriage at his own will and pleasure, without any regard to hers.’⁹ After marriage, according to Mill, the husband had ‘the power of life and death over his wife’ (*Ibid.*, p. 32). The husband was called ‘the *lord* of the wife’, as the old laws of England decreed, while the wife was an actual servant: she vowed ‘a lifelong obedience to him at the altar’ and the wife could ‘acquire no property but for him; the instant it becomes hers, even if by inheritance, it becomes *ipso facto* his’ (*Ibid.*, p. 32). Women did not have rights to own property. They themselves were the property of their fathers or husbands, which reflects the fact that women were inferior in legal and economic status. Women were at the mercy of fathers and husbands to such an extent that J. S. Mill acknowledged the possibility of rape in marriage and recognised physical abuse of women in the home as commonplace. The inferior status of women made them vulnerable to physical assault and thus helpless victims in the home. In addition, they were vulnerable to men’s violence in the public sphere when they were there without their male protectors or when the protectors ceased to fulfil this function. The brutality in and outside the home still exists at present, though its degree and frequency vary from culture to culture.

The practice of male protection of, and control over, the female is based on traditional assumptions about gender identity which equate the male with masculinity and the female with femininity. Gender, from this perspective, is seen as the result of biology. Many feminists today reject an essentialists view of the relation between biology and gender identity. Others however, while discussing some of the

simplicities of traditional approach, continue to view gender relationships as still characterised by men's determination to dominate women.

In *Fascinating Womanhood*, published in 1975, Helen Andelin described a conventional view of gender attributes. Andelin wrote:

Femininity is a gentle, tender quality found in a woman's appearance, manner and actions. It is a sort of softness, delicateness, submissiveness, and dependency upon men for their masculine care and protection. More than anything else, it is a lack of masculine ability - a lack of male aggressiveness, competency, efficiency, fearlessness, strength, and "the ability to kill your own snake."

The important thing to remember is this: Men enjoy protecting women. Do not think, therefore, that it is an imposition on a man to protect a dependent, feminine woman. One of the most pleasant sensations a real man can experience is his consciousness of the power to give his manly care and protection. Rob him of this sensation, of superior strength and ability, and you rob him of his manliness.¹⁰

This traditional construction of masculinity centred on dominance, sex, and aggression. Masculinity, virility, conquest, power, domination were reflected in gender relations and heterosexual practice. Femininity was practised through compliance, self-denial, suppression of anger, dependence on male approval, and submission to male authority. The fact that sex was a male entitlement was justified by a cultural view of women as devoid of autonomy and dignity. Contrasting features of masculinity and femininity were believed to be innate and allowed men more power. Men could enjoy exercising power over women under the guise of protecting them from forms of sexual violence by other men with the result that women became dependent on their male protectors for security and thus vulnerable to abuse by them. Thus male control over women's sexuality has historically been a key factor in women's oppression.

In the early 1970s the well-known feminist, Kate Millett, in *Sexual Politics*, asserted that patriarchy had been the basis from which men had controlled a social and political system in which they had power over women. She contended

furthermore that patriarchy still persisted in such advanced societies as that of the United States where women had been given equal civil and political rights by law. Thus women's subordination by men continued to exist in a variety of cultures. Societies came and went, but misogyny continued. In her examination of the oppressive nature of patriarchy against women, Millett argued that patriarchy prevailed in nearly every aspect of life: 'ideological, biological, sociological, class, economic, force, anthropological (myth and religion), and psychological.'¹¹ Particularly in 'Chapter 'VI Force'', Millett discussed sexual violence in connection with patriarchal force. She maintained, 'Patriarchal force also relies on a form of violence particularly sexual in character and realized most completely in the act of rape' (Ibid., p. 44). Millett argued furthermore that, 'Historically, most patriarchs have institutionalized force through their legal systems' (Ibid., p. 43), Millett defined force as the overt use of coercive power by the dominant group - a power, legitimised by law. The use of force and the control of women's sexuality were, she contended, essential features of patriarchal societies.

Also writing in the mid-1970s, Kathleen Barry, however, maintained that:

In committing a crime against women, sexual satisfaction, usually in the form of orgasm, is one of the intended outcomes of sexual violence for the aggressor who unites sex and violence to subdue, humiliate, degrade and terrorise his female victim. (Quoted in Kelly, p. 40)

Defining sexual violence mainly as coercive sex - rape, Barry contended that men violate women in order to get sex and achieve sexual satisfaction - orgasm or ejaculation. Susan Griffin, in her article analysing the threat of rape in women's lives entitled, 'Rape: the all American crime', argued that rape was a political act rather than a sexual crime. She defined rape as 'a form of social control' which affects all women.¹² Similarly, Susan Brownmiller maintained that 'rape is the primary mechanism through which men perpetuate their dominance over women through

force.¹³ This theory extended Griffin's analysis of rape as a form of social control. The fact that some men rape was seen as creating the threat of rape and fear among women in general. The threat of rape encouraged women to place themselves under men's protection which in turn exposed them to male sexual abuse.

This view of sexual and gender relation was continued in the early 1980s by Andrea Dworkin and Diana Russell and in the late 1980s, it was further enforced by Wendy Holloway, who argued, male violence against women should be seen 'as a way of asserting 'masculinity' by exercising power over a woman.'¹⁴ Also in the late-1980s Jane Caputi suggested that rape was 'the paradigmatic expression' of patriarchal power and control - 'not, as the common mythology insists, a crime of desire, passion, frustrated attraction, victim provocation or uncontrollable biological urges.'¹⁵ According to Caputi, rape was not perpetrated by a deviant minority, but was 'a social expression of sexual politics, an institutionalized and ritual enactment of male domination, a form of terror which functions to maintain the same [status] quo'

(Ibid., p. 3). Caputi also agreed that male violence against women, mostly referred to as rape here, was a consequence of men's power and dominance over women. Other feminists also explored the basic questions of force and coercion, and power and control, in women's oppression. Liz Kelly, for example, in her book, *Surviving Sexual Violence*, examined the way in which sexual violence was explained and located within feminist theory, paying 'particular attention to the proposition that male violence has a critical role in maintaining women's oppression' (Kelly, p. 21). According to Kelly, feminist research revealed the fact that the level of male dominance correlates with the frequency of male violence.

The theory of the 1980s is still supported in the 1990s, as is argued by Diana Scully in her book, *Understanding Sexual Violence: A Study of Convicted Rapists*,

where she writes that ‘rape has been a force in maintaining the status quo.’¹⁶ As Scully comments:

[A]nthropological research suggests that sexual violence is related to cultural attitudes, the power relationship between women and men, the social and economic status of women relative to the men of their group, and the amount of other forms of violence in the society. (*Ibid.*, p. 48)

In the same vein, as part of her argument that sexual violence results from misogyny and women’s subordination, Jane Ussher insists that ‘[w]here men have power...certain of them have exercised it over women through the use of sexual violence’ (*Women’s Madness*, p. 31). Bradby also points out that the exercise of one’s power over others is a key element in (sexual) violence:

The definition of violence needs to recognize that power might be unevenly distributed at the interpersonal and the collective level, and that violence might result from both direct and indirect use of force. (Bradby, p. 5)

The analyses of the above feminists’ work reveal similar explorations of the cause of sexual violence, even though their specific individual focuses are different. The central focus is a power relationships, patriarchy, rape as social control, male control of female sexuality, and women’s oppression as the reason for sexual violence. Therefore, male violence is seen as directly related to men’s use of power, social control, and control over women’s sexuality, which result in women’s continuing oppression. Among other elements, men’s power over women is the most deciding factor in women’s oppression which is carried out through patriarchal systems. If the power relationship between women and men changes, if the mechanism of patriarchy changes, the social and political system will change and there will be a possibility for change in male violence against women and in women’s oppression.

3. Types of Sexual Violence

There are a number of definitions of sexual violence. There are also many forms of sexual violence according to its varied definitions. Mary Daly, an American feminist, theologian, and philosopher, enumerates different types of sexual atrocities in her book entitled, *Gyn/Ecology*. Her work is categorised as myth criticism by Maggie Humm, who argues that ‘The issue for Daly is that the language, symbols and concepts of Christian myths and other world religions are masculine.’¹⁷ Daly claims the archetypal myths of male superiority involve female destruction and mutilation which thus legitimise ‘sado-rituals’ that have been witnessed around the world: ‘Indian suttee, Chinese footbinding, African genital mutilation, European witchburnings and American gynaecology’ (for example, unnecessary practices of hysterectomy and lumpectomy - removal of breast).¹⁸

Andrea Dworkin cites Mary Daly, who first termed such atrocities as ‘gynocide’ and calls some types of violence against women ‘gynocide.’ As she writes, gynocide is ‘the systematic crippling, raping, and/or killing women by men. Gynocide is the word that designates the relentless violence perpetrated by the gender class men against the gender class women.’¹⁹ According to Dworkin, Chinese footbinding is an example of gynocide. She points out that in China for over one thousand years women were ‘systematically crippled so that they would be passive, erotic objects of men’ (Ibid., p. 17). Its purposes were: to make women entirely dependent on men for food, water, shelter, and clothing; to prevent them running away, let alone walking, or from uniting against the brutalities of their male oppressors. Another form of gynocide Dworkin takes as an example is the mass killing of nine million women who were regarded as witches. These women were hanged or burned alive over the period of three hundred years in England, Wales, Scotland, Ireland, France, Germany, Spain,

Italy, Holland, Switzerland, and America. This slaughter was perpetrated ‘in the name of the God the Father and His only Son, Jesus Christ,’ who represent male, father figures in Christian society (*Ibid.*, p. 19). (See Chapter II Witches: *Crux*.)

In addition to men’s victimisation of women, Dworkin argues that men blame women for oppressing them:

They are often in their individual lives victimised by women - by mothers, wives, and “girlfriends”. They tell that women provoke acts of violence through our carnality, or malice, or avarice, or vanity, or stupidity. They tell us that violence originates in us and that we are responsible for it. They tell us that their lives are full of pain, and that we are its source. They tell us that as mothers we injure them irreparably, as wives we castrate them, as lovers we steal from them their semen, youth, and manhood - and never, never as mothers, wives, or lovers do we ever give them enough. (*Ibid.*, p. 19)

Women are often blamed or they blame themselves for violence done to them as has been evidenced throughout the history of mankind in the cases of the Biblical women (as dramatised in *Beside Herself* in Chapter 7), the execution of witches (see Chapter 2), and the two Rippers below. Dworkin contends that ‘under patriarchy every woman is a victim, past, present, future’ (*Ibid.*, p. 19).

Another example Dworkin presents is the systematic rape of women in Bangladesh. When the former East Pakistan declared independence in March, 1971, troops from West Pakistan were flown to the East to quell the rebellion. The Pakistani soldiers raped a huge number of Bengali women during the nine month conflict. Dworkin maintains that the rape was part of the military strategy of the male invading armies. When the war was over, those women estimated as being between 200,000 and 400,000 were considered unclean by their husbands, brothers, and fathers, and were left to prostitute themselves or starve to dearth. The Bengali gynocide was perpetrated first by men who invaded Bangladesh, and then by the men who live there, the husbands, brothers, and fathers. Dworkin asserts that ‘it was perpetrated by the gender class men against the gender class women’ (*Ibid.*, p. 16).

In a similar way during World War II, when Korea was under Japanese colonial rule, Korean girls in their early- or mid-teens were forcibly taken by the Japanese army to the battlefields all over Asia and the South Pacific. These girls, estimated as being between 80,000 and 200,000, were coerced into prostitution for the Japanese soldiers but they were not paid. In fact, they were constantly raped by the soldiers. Their lives were ruined. They could not go home because of shame and could not marry because they were violated and regarded as unclean. Some of them contracted venereal disease. When they were 'lucky' enough to get married, some of them were victimised by their husbands because of the violation. They were displaced and degraded, but had nobody to turn to. These women's lives were devastated because of the forced prostitution - rape. In recent times in Bosnia between 300,000 and 500,000 women have been raped by the invading Serbian army and some women became pregnant by the rape. However, they do not have access to abortion due to the war.

In addition to outright physical violence committed by force, Naomi Wolf defines cosmetic surgery as a form of violence in her book, *The Beauty Myth*. In the Chapter entitled, 'Violence', she argues, 'From the beginning of their history until just before the 1960s women's gender caused them pain.'²⁰ Women have suffered from childbirth and sometimes illegal abortion with its dangers of haemorrhage and death by blood poisoning. Since contraception and safe abortion became available in the late 1960s in the United States, women have suffered less sexual pain in most western societies. 'In the strange absence of female pain,' Wolf comments, 'the myth put beauty in its place' because 'freedom from sexual pain left a gap in female identity' (*Ibid.*, p. 216). According to Wolf, cosmetic surgery is expanding by manipulating the ideas of health and sickness. She argues that women have been defined as sick as a

means of subjecting them to social control. What the modern surgical age is doing to women, she contends, is an overt treatment of what nineteenth century medicine did to make well women sick and active women passive. In the context of western thought on femininity and masculinity, Deidre English and Barbara Ehrenreich in *Complaints and Disorders* write, ‘man represents wholeness, strength and health. Woman is a misbegotten man, weak and incomplete.’²¹ Women are believed to be born ill-fated and thus to depend on the mercy of men. They must suffer to be desirable to men. Some women, freed from sexual pain, now suffer from many types of cosmetic surgery to look more beautiful.

Una Stannard also examines beauty-orientated violence against women. She insists that women have been indoctrinated to be beautiful since their childhood by people around them, the media, and society. She contends that some fashions women follow for beauty and/or to arouse men have become violent, sometimes violent enough to cause death. Like Dworkin, Stannard cites the example of Chinese footbinding which began at early ages of girls, as it was significant to parents, especially if they wanted their daughters to marry well. However, some Chinese women died from gangrene due to the binding. Another example is narrow-toed shoes which were once fashionable in Europe not long ago. Many women had their little toes amputated so their feet would more comfortably fit the shoes. As Stannard comments, ‘These women were like Cinderella’s sisters, one of whom cut off her big toe and the other the back of her heel in order to fit the glass slipper.’²² These are extremes, but many women today suffer from the discomforts of fashions Stannard lists such as high heels, pierced ears (a kind of mutilation), plastic surgery (having ‘their freckles burnt off, their skin peeled, their face lifted, their nose reshaped and their breasts filled with silicone’), and plucking ‘unfeminine’ hair on their legs and

under their arms (*Ibid.*, p. 190). In this process women spend an enormous amount of time, money, and energy. In the past when women wore corsets, they suffered the tortures of tight lacing, which sometimes dislocated their kidneys, and crushed their livers so that they turned green. Most women do not realise that some beauty methods they are using may cause crippling and sometimes death in the worst case. Stannard argues that in western culture women are regarded as the fair sex, but at the same time ‘their “beauty” needs lifting, shaping, dyeing, painting, curling, padding.’ In this sense women are “monsters in disguise” and ““beauty” is the beast’ (*Ibid.*, p. 192). Most violence resulting from fashion and beauty the two writers discuss is socio-cultural, particularly in western society.

As far as beauty is concerned, in most cases women are more constrained than men to conform to these images constructed by their societies. Because under patriarchy women’s status depends greatly on what males expect of them. Together with women’s physical beauty, fashion is also sometimes violence. Even for women who pursue careers, their appearance sometimes determines men’s reaction to them and influences the assessment of their work and chances for promotion. Some women feel driven to mutilate and injure themselves in order to live up to an ideal - sometimes, the image of a pin-up girl or a fashion model in an advertisement. Such women hate, and are alienated from, their own and other women’s bodies, and see themselves only as sex objects. Self-hatred leads to a sense of women’s degradation and loss of women’s integrity. (All this is well portrayed in Clare McIntyre’s play, *Low Level Panic*, which I discuss in Chapter 9.)

There are other forms of violence relating to beauty in other societies, in addition to Chinese footbinding. Women have their noses pierced in India. They wear as many necklaces (which look more like tight rings) as possible in Papua New Guinea

and also among the Padaung tribespeople, who originally came from Burma in order to escape brutality by the Burmese regime in the early 1980s and took refuge in neighbouring northern Thailand. Since women with longer necks are regarded by these people as beautiful, some women's necks are so long that they look like those of giraffes. To the western eye, they look as if they have been humiliated into the images of monsters or animals. Yet the idea that women should suffer to look desirable to men prevails in many cultures, sometimes irrespective of how women look to people from other cultures. The suffering, especially of the Padaung people does not end here, as they are used as tourist attractions by the Thai Government and they are not allowed to leave their homes which look more like concentration camps. They are coerced by Thai soldiers (who are there to prevent them from escaping) to smile for the camera when they pose for tourists. Thai businessmen and government officials benefit from the organised tourist trips to this tribe. The suffering of these women is commercialised like that of women in pornography.

The fact that some women are seen as monstrous in Western culture is reflected in many types of violence, especially in the brutalities of Jack the Ripper and the Yorkshire Ripper. Jack the Ripper (one man or many) is believed to have killed a number of prostitutes and some 'innocent' women in Whitechapel, London, in 1888. In her book, *City of Dreadful Delight: Narratives of Sexual Danger in Late-Victorian London*, the feminist historian, Judith R. Walkowitz, writes: 'the fact that most of the murders were accompanied by acts of sexual mutilation also contributed to the grisly notoriety of the crimes...'²³ Walkowitz links the image of mutilation with that of the prostitute, who, she notes, was viewed as 'putrid body, as sewer, as syphilitic carrier, as corpse, as link in a chain of resigned female bodies' (*Ibid.*, p. 196). The prostitute was therefore regarded as filthy and dangerous by Victorian society. She was 'the

conduit of infection to respectable society...the primary source of disease and pollution.²⁴ ‘Good’ women, on the other hand, were viewed as uninterested in sex.

As Jeffrey Weeks argues:

In the nineteenth century there was a sustained effort to inform the population that female sexuality amongst respectable women just did not exist...The sexuality of women has at various times been seen as dangerous, as a source of disease...²⁵

This argument reflects the traditional polar images of women held by nineteenth-century Western society, epitomised by the virgin and the whore; Mary and Eve; the wife and the mistress; the innocent and the guilty. While the wife/mother is seen as asexual, with her reproductive role recognised as sacred, the prostitute symbolises sexuality. Those prostitutes who were murdered by Jack the Ripper were believed in some quarters to have partly brought their ‘punishment’ on themselves by their lewd conduct. Their sexuality was feared as something dangerous and a source of contamination that had to be eliminated. Men desired, and at the same time were threatened by, female sexuality. This led to their need to affirm their masculinity by demonstrating power over women through committing violence against them. This is true of the present when serial sexual murders recur in many parts of the world.

Although the Ripper murders have been discussed from the viewpoint of the ‘dangers of unrestrained male sexuality’ (Walkowitz: b, p. 218), according to Walkowitz, there had also been speculation in the context of misogynist fear of female sexuality and female autonomy in the late Victorian Age that the Ripper might have been female. Most of the blame went to prostitutes who were so depraved that they were believed to be capable of the most heinous crimes. Women with medical knowledge were also suspected, as Walkowitz writes:

[S]uspicion also extended to the midwives and medical women inasmuch as the “knowledge of surgery...has now been placed within the female reach.” However different their social class and occupational mobility, prostitutes, midwives, and

medical women shared two common characteristics; they possess dangerous sexual knowledge and they assert themselves in the public male domain. (*Ibid.*, p. 218)

In addition to female sexuality, men have been threatened by female power, i. e. knowledge, since they have wanted to be in control. That is arguably why those women, especially, many midwives, were labelled as witches and executed as scapegoats of social unrest in Medieval and Renaissance times. (See Chapter 2. Witches.)

The Ripper murders cannot be seen as isolated events, but, as ‘a part of constant but ever increasing series of cruelties’ against women. One of the percussions felt around that time was, Elaine Showalter observes, that:

[T]he Ripper murders “eerily evoked” themes of medical violence against women that pervaded *fin-de-siècle* literature - of opening up, dissecting, or mutilating women: indeed, they may well have helped to consolidate and disseminate those themes publicly to a wider readership. (Original italics, *ibid.*, p. 199)

While the image of the prostitute was linked to that of corpse in the Victorian Age, the mutilated women’s bodies were also linked to a pathology laboratory. These debilitated bodies represented women’s passivity, vulnerability, and degradation into pieces of meat. Women became helpless victims in *fin-de-siècle* literature under the control of men who wielded the power of anatomical knowledge and a knife.

The Ripper murders had a late-twentieth century counterpart in Yorkshire in the 1970s and early 1980s. Between October 1975 and January 1981, residents in Leeds and Bradford were terrorised by a mass murderer, named ‘the Yorkshire Ripper’ by the newspapers, who was believed to be responsible for the murder of a number of prostitutes. This series of murders provoked additional misogynist assaults on women. As Walkowitz comments:

As in 1888, women were harassed on the streets by would-be Rippers, at the same time that they were told to look to other men for protection...The murders, the wide spread intimidation of women on the streets and media coverage

terrified women living in Yorkshire just as similar activities had provoked fear in Whitechapel and in the West End one hundred years earlier. (*Ibid.*, p. 230)

Women lived in utter terror for five years. Unlike that of Jack the Ripper, the identity of the Yorkshire Ripper was revealed when Peter Sutcliffe, the killer, was finally caught and punished. At his trial, according to *City of Dreadful Delight*, the prosecution offered the jury two different views on Sutcliffe's motivation with regard to the crime: either he was 'mad' enough to be 'a true religious maniac,' committed to the eradication of social evil - (i.e. prostitutes); or he was 'bad' enough to derive 'sexual satisfaction' from the murders and did not care whether the woman was a prostitute or not. In an attempt to prove that Sutcliffe was 'bad' - a 'sadistic, calculated, cold-blooded murderer who loved his job' (*Ibid.*, p. 231), the prosecution produced grisly evidence of his 'sexually motivated' mutilations. The prosecution also introduced 'the evidence of his generalised hostility towards women': 'I realised Josephine was not a prostitute but at the time I wasn't bothered. I Just wanted to kill a woman' (*Ibid.*, p. 232). Sutcliffe's prime motivation was believed to be his hatred of women. However, it was insinuated by the media that women (his wife and his mother) were possible causes of the murders. His wife, Sonia, was obsessed with cleanliness and frequently had nervous breakdowns. She also 'nagged' him in their turbulent marriage. His mother, Kathleen, had had an affair with a policeman, which outraged 'his youthful sense of propriety' (*Ibid.*, p. 233). As in the case of Jack the Ripper, women were the victims and, at the same time, were suspected of being possibly, though indirectly, responsible for the Yorkshire Ripper's actions.

In her article entitled, 'I Just Wanted to Kill a Woman. Why? The Ripper and Male Sexuality,' Wendy Holloway observes the Yorkshire Ripper case from the viewpoint of the connection between masculinity, power, and male violence:

Sutcliffe's first murder came after a prostitute had accused him of being 'fucking

'useless' when he was slow to get an erection, after which he said he felt a 'seething rage' and attacked and killed her...Sutcliffe hated women for their sexuality, which he split off into prostitutes rather than acknowledge in his wife. Yet he was also obsessed by them. For it is against women's sexuality that we are motivated to measure their masculinity and because they must prove this at each encounter, their masculinity never rests assured. Sutcliffe's desire for sexual murder was not satisfied by one murder. (Holloway, p. 131)

The social construction of masculinity and femininity also works in Sutcliffe's behaviour. Sutcliffe's acts exhibited an aggressive male sexuality, though in an extremely violent way, while subordinating women as its objects. Assaults on prostitutes are not different from violent attacks on other women. Just as the blame is laid on prostitutes, the primary victims, women's sexuality is also seen as provoking violence against women in general. Men are split between desire and hatred of women because of this sexuality, which, in turn, threatens men and consequently, leads them to wish to punish women. Their actions are often rationalised in patriarchal societies, which, as Holloway observes, see 'men's aggressive sexuality as natural' (*Ibid.*, p. 132).

The Jack-the-Ripper killings can be equated with those of the Yorkshire Ripper in a number of ways. Both consisted of a series of murders of mainly prostitutes, involving sexual mutilation, and were motivated by violent misogyny. The Ripper events recur in present times. Depictions of female mutilation, the frequent theme of recent films, intensifies fear of male violence. In particular, hard-core pornography - snuff films - in which women are actually mutilated and killed by men, is comparable with the mutilations by the Jack the Ripper: the deliberate removals of the uterus and other organs and the insides strewn around the murdered women's bodies. The elements of evisceration are very similar to the descriptions of a snuff film one of the characters, Rowena, describes in *Masterpieces* (see p. 231). Joan Smith also describes the Yorkshire Ripper case from the perspective of misogyny in

her book, *Misogynies*. Caputi too discusses a number of cases of sexual murder including the two Ripper cases in her book, *The Age of Sex Crime*. Caputi argues that serial sexual murder ‘enacts a primary principle of male supremacy’ (Caputi, p. 3).

Representations of women as helpless victims or as sex objects to be dominated, seen at their most extreme in the Ripper cases, pervade contemporary western culture, through both verbal and visual images: in sexist jokes, in advertising hoardings, and pornography portraying violence against women. Citing the following slogans from the women’s movement, for example, ‘Pornography is the theory; rape is the practice’; and ‘Pornography is violence against women,’ Rosalind Coward perceives sexual violence depicted in pornography as an instance of the exercise of male power.²⁶

[T]he representations of women circulated in pornography are seen as equivalent instruments in the control of women. The effect of the form taken by male sexuality is a literal, and frequently brutal, control of women, hence the suggestion that the representation of women found in pornography is the theoretical expression of the same physical violence found in rape. (*Ibid.*, p. 308)

While arguments have been put forward by some feminists that pornography is harmless, radical feminists such as Andrea Dworkin and Katherine MacKinnon insist that pornography is the expression of men’s power over women through its victimisation and degradation of women as sex objects. As Jeffrey Weeks argues with regard to the impact of pornography on women:

The hostility of some feminists to pornography and sado-masochistic activities relies on the argument that representations of violence can cause violence, and that sexual behaviour which flirts with power imbalances can sustain existing power relations. (Weeks, p. 117)

Pornography emits misogynist images which undermine women’s confidence and self-respect. Patriarchal society conditions perceptions of male sexuality in ways that strengthen men and make them feel confident and powerful over women. Pornography constitutes an act of violence towards the women participating in it.

Additionally, violence depicted in pornography plays a role in removing inhibition on the part of its readers (or viewers) and the danger is that violence can be re-enacted in real life by its subscribers, most of whom are men. Male dominance and female submission enacted in pornography are propagated into every aspect of our lives. (This is explored in the discussion of *Low Level Panic* in Chapter 9 and *Masterpieces* in Chapter 10.)

In the aftermath of the Yorkshire Ripper, British women concerned with feminist issues held conferences under the title of ‘Women against Violence against Women (WAVAW)’ in 1980, 1981, and 1982. They presented a number of papers under six major categories of men’s violence against women which included pornography, rape, prostitution, marriage, sexual harassment at work, and incest.²⁷ In addition to these, some papers discussed the oppressive nature of gynaecology and obstetrics, clitoridectomy, fashion, and language as violence against women. The conferences concluded as follows:

[M]en’s sexual behaviour has been socially constructed to be aggressive, exploitative, objectifying. It is not nature that has constructed this effective system for the subordination of women. The system is constructed by men, in men’s interest for the benefit of all men. (*Ibid.*, p. 7)

In *The War Against Women*, Marylin French describes men’s discrimination against women as a state of war men wage against women, where violence is brutally inflicted on women. She places male violence against women under four major categories: ‘Systematic Discrimination against Women; Institutional Wars against Women; The Cultural War against Women; Men’s Personal War against Women.’²⁸ French lists extensive examples of sexual violence throughout her book under the four categories. In ‘Systematic Discrimination against Women’ French cites some forms of religion, state, and community as the agents of sexual violence. French maintains that ‘[a]ll major religions are patriarchal’ (*Ibid.*, p. 46). She defines militant Islamic

movements (by Muslim fundamentalists) as explicitly woman-hating. The fundamentalists, who force women back into veils and out of their workplaces, threaten, harass, beat, torture, or even execute women who oppose or violate their principles, which are mainly imposed on women. They spread fear among women everywhere in the Middle East. The Catholic Church denies women control over their own bodies by forbidding contraception and abortion. As a result, many women in Latin America die due to improperly performed illegal abortions or to complications following abortion attempts. Like Daly, Dworkin, and Stannard, French cites Chinese footbinding and women's fashions, which sometimes cause deformed bodies or even death. Genital mutilation is also one form of sexual violence committed by the community. It is estimated that in 1987 over twenty million women underwent genital mutilation, which may result in pain, infection, anaemia, and stillbirth and brain damage of babies. Clitoridectomy is a common practice in Africa and parts of the Near East. Other forms of community violence French cites are the selective abortion of female foetuses and murder or neglect of baby girls in China and dowry death in India. Women die of starvation due to male control of property, or are killed by their husbands, lovers, rapists, or fellow-workers. The total figure of women who die unnecessarily cannot be estimated. French insists that "If this figure referred to a religious, ethnic, or racial group, we would be using the term 'genocide' - comparable to the term used by Mary Daly and Andrea Dworkin: 'gynocide'.

In 'Institutional Wars against Women' French takes various institutions both past and present as examples of the agents of sexual violence: judicial and penal systems, and the medical system. Prior to the late seventeenth century in Europe, childbirth was the province of women. Midwifery could be a dangerous profession as midwife's knowledge of herbal remedies, including abortifacients, could lead to

accusations of witchcraft against them. From the late seventeenth century male doctors increasingly took over control of obstetrics and gynaecology. Men's control of medicine in the twentieth century has led to women being manipulated into having unnecessary operations such as lobotomy (partial removal of the brain), mastectomy (removal of the breast), and hysterectomy. In a contemporary context, French instances sexual harassment in the workplace, women being teased, pinched, or fondled (physical abuse), barraged with comments on their sexuality, appearance, and competence (verbal abuse), and/or forced to look at lewd photographs men hang in the workplace (visual abuse). In 'Cultural War against Women' French suggests that men's hatred of women pervades art and pop culture. Frequently, female bodies are depicted in paintings based on woman hatred (portrayals of women as lascivious and exaggerated or dismembered female body parts). French insists, 'Many women are repelled at seeing their own bodies so appropriated or transformed into commodities in commercial art and fashion' (Ibid., p. 166). Misogyny is also seen in films, which debase ambitious career women by depicting them as selfish, mean, and evil, and in pornography, which degrades women into sexual objects. In 'Men's Personal War Against Women' French lists rape, beatings, harassment, and incest. These are some of the most common types of sexual violence across different cultures and feminists stress the need to exert special effort to alleviate the situations creating them. French's own 'survey of adult women suggests that very few reach the age of twenty-one without suffering some form of male predation - incest, molestation, rape or attempted rape, beatings and sometimes torture or imprisonment' (Ibid., p. 198). French covers nearly all forms of violence against women in detail, but at the same time uncovers many forms of sexual violence which may not be recognised as such because people are so used to them as a matter of course. From her examples, we learn that nearly

everywhere in the world a great number of women suffer from a variety of forms of sexual violence, some of which are beyond our imagination. Near the end of her book, French observes: 'The most important accomplishment of the feminist movement may be exposure of the secret, the hauling it out of the private darkness where it has flourished and hanging it out in the air for all to see' (*Ibid.*, p. 199).

Some of the examples I cite in this section are culturally specific forms of sexual violence. Cross-cultural sexual violence includes: rape, incest, sexual abuse of children, wife battery, sexual harassment, prostitution, and pornography. Koss discusses the prevalence of sexual violence in Western society:

Sexual abuse and assault has been experienced by 30% to 67% of adult women recalling the period before the age of 18, 12% of adolescent girls, 15% of college women, and approximately 20% of adult women.²⁹

Examples of abuse occur frequently, but are under-reported. Girls and women are made vulnerable to sexual violence and suffer trauma in the aftermath because of the concepts of male power and patriarchy which are still prevalent in many societies including those of America and Britain. These forms are thus also the most universal types of violence which have a great impact on women's lives. These types of male violence against women will be used to inform my selection of plays and detailed comments on these types are found in the beginning of each chapter. Witch-hunts, which can be regarded as a past (state as well as religious) violence, will be also discussed in this thesis as a link between the past and present condition of women's lives and oppression in western societies.

4. Sexual Violence: Myths and Reality

Explorations of various forms of sexual violence by many feminists demonstrate the wide difference that exists between what the general public believes

sexual violence to be and what feminist scholars and writers have discovered about what it is actually like. The victims of sexual violence frequently do not receive proper help, partly because of the inadequacies of the social services, and partly because of prevailing ideas concerning sexual violence, ideas which can, alternatively, be termed ‘stereotypes’ or ‘myths’. These myths have been challenged by feminists since the early 1970s, yet they are still widely current. These myths work to silence women and to contribute to women’s oppression.

The myths feminists point to are many and varied, though they are also distressingly similar in content. Liz Kelly’s examination of the myths pertaining to sexual violence is one of the most systematically-organised, and includes the following:

1. They [women] enjoy/want it.
2. They ask for/deserve it.
3. It only happens to certain types of women/in certain kinds of families.
4. They tell lies/exaggerate.
5. If they had resisted they could have prevented it.
6. The men who do it are sick, ill, under stress, out of control. (Kelly, p. 35-6)

These myths apply to such forms of sexual violence as rape, child abuse/incest, and domestic violence, and sexual harassment, thus linking one form to another in many respects. By removing responsibility from men for its perpetration, the myths attribute the cause of sexual violence to women, who are seen as responsible for not preventing or stopping it. Stereotypical notions also deny the prevalence of sexual violence by limiting it to certain types of women, men, and/or social groups. Consequently, the violated are regarded as bad enough to deserve their punishment, which the violators are excused for their acts. The minimisation of the seriousness of sexual violence also means that friends, families or representatives of the legal system frequently fail to recognise the seriousness of victims’ suffering. Perpetrators of violence against women also frequently escape with only light sentences.

The myths regarding sexual violence also affect the victims with regard to the

way in which they see their own experiences. In many cases they blame themselves and hesitate to report to, and seek help from, legal institutions and help services. As various forms of sexual violence are linked, one to one another, they are seen by feminists as constituting a continuum. In contrast, and often in opposition to this continuum of violence, there exist the myths and stereotypes, and also public responses, and social remedies. Sex and aggression are linked for most men. Hostility and dominance are central to the construction of masculine sexuality. Masculinity, virility, conquest, power, domination are reflected in gender relations and heterosexual practice. Until recently girls and young women have been encouraged to be feminine. This means they have had to comply with male views, to suppress their anger with men, to depend on male approval, and submit to male authority. This femininity conditions women to live victimisation rather than being angry with men and fighting back. All the myths are based on men's concepts of their relationship with women. The myths surrounding sexual violence are the outcome of men's abuse of power and position, as much as sexual violence itself. The stereotypes manifest men's attitude to women, the way men treat women and children as property, and relationships being based on power. The myths result from the idea that sex is a male entitlement and the justifications from the cultural view of women as sexual commodities, dehumanised and devoid of their autonomy and dignity. The myths, thus, provide belittling views of women, but have been refuted by many feminist theorists and therapists. Women suffer a great deal because of the myths, which make it hard for the victims to overcome the impact of sexual violence. Myths and stereotypes silence women and make them double victims - first from violence and subsequently from its trauma.

5. The Chapters: Sexual Violence and Women's Theatre

In Britain the ‘first wave’ of women’s theatre in the twentieth century started with suffrage plays staged by the Actresses’ Franchise League early in this century. In the interwar years successful female playwrights included Clemence Dane, Dodie Smith and Jordan Daviot. In the 1950s and 60s these names were supplemented by Jane Arden, Margaretta D’arcy, Shelagh Delaney, Ann Jellicoe, and Doris Lessing. Among others women’s theatre started in earnest in the early 1970s in line with the Women’s Liberation Movement, which involved women in political protests for women’s rights and campaigns to raise awareness of women’s oppression. The ‘second wave’ feminists, as Lizbeth Goodman writes, ‘discovered the effectiveness of public performance as a form of political communication and persuasion.’³⁰ According to Goodman, many feminist issues were staged ‘as theatre performances, on the streets and on (and in) many different stages’ (*Ibid.*, p. 17). As a result, women’s theatre companies were founded in the 1970s with a view to changes in culture, politics, and society. The Women’s Theatre Group, the earliest all-women group, was formed in 1974, around at the same time as such fringe companies as Portable Theatre, the Pip Simmons Group, The Warehouse Company, The Brighton Combination, Welfare State International, Red Ladder (former AgitProp Street Players). Later three major companies were formed in the mid-1970s and continued to produce women’s and gender-based theatre into the 1990s: Monstrous Regiment (formed as a feminist theatre collective in 1975 to make ‘exciting political theatre based on women’s experience’³¹, Gay Sweatshop (a mixed company of lesbians and gays, founded in 1975); Siren (‘incorporates punk music and culture into the fabric of work with an emphasis on strong political narratives’ (*Ibid.*, p. 81), formed in 1979). These groups were devoted to the production of women’s and gender-based plays and

dealt with women's and/or gender issues. With more cultural space available for women's plays, the 'second generation' of women dramatists emerged: Caryl Churchill, Byrony Lavery, Olen Wymark, Pam Gems, and Louise Page.

In the 1980s a variety of women-centred dramas were written by Sarah Daniels, Jackie Kay, Charlotte Keatley, Deborah Levy, Sharman MacDonald, Clare McIntyre, Winsome Pinnock, Heidi Thomas, and Timberlake Wertenbaker. The emphasis shifted from a more global approach to a more personal approach to women's problems in the 1980s. As Goodman writes:

Plays by women which included parts for men began to be replaced with all-women's plays, or with forms of theatre work which focused on women's relationships to each other, rather than to men or family. As the decade wore on, more women's plays reached audiences through two different routes: a few plays by women were produced by most of the 'mainstream theatres' - in seasons of work including mainly the work of male playwrights and the 'classic' - while a great deal of women's work was taken up and produced by women's collectives, female directors, and specifically feminist theatre groups and organisation. (*Feminist Stages*, p. 97)

This decade also witnessed the publication of a range of women's plays, notably the *Plays by Women* series by Methuen (edited by Michelene Wandor and later Mary Remnant), and the text of plays staged by the Royal Court Theatre including plays by Sarah Daniels, Clare McIntyre and Timberlake Wertenbaker. Meanwhile, The Women's Playhouse Trust was established by Jules Wright and The Magdalena Project was founded in Cardiff by Jill Greenhalgh. The Women's Theatre Group organised The Glass Ceiling Events which consisted of annual conferences involving women engaged in theatre. These events brought together playwrights, actors, directors with academics, theorists, journalists and people interested in women's theatre.

In the 1990s the publishing approaches of the 1980 continue, but the *Plays by Women* series, with a new editor, Annie Castledine, has changed its focus and

includes a range of work by European women. Other publishers such as Nick Hern Books and Aurora Metro Press have published collections of plays by women. Academic books such as Gender in Performance series have been published.³² The academic establishment has recognised women's theatre and interdisciplinary art forms as fields of important research. An increasing number of conferences have been held on the subject and many BA and MA courses are available, as Goodman discusses:

[They range] from the representation of women to Gender and Performance, often offered across disciplines: literature, visual arts, history, art history, performing arts, cultural studies, British studies. (*Feminist Stages*, p. 192)

The 1990s saw a move away from text-based to non-text-based drama, and more experimental forms. For example, *Beg* was staged by Peta Lily in a movement/live arts show about the female psyche and sexual imagination; *Twenty Ways to Learn A Language* (1994) by Anna O working on the representation of feminist theory in theatre practice about cultural boundaries and communication; *Shiny Nylon* (1994), a site-specific event, by Deborah Levy with the Women's Playhouse Trust; an experimental interdisciplinary dance piece by Emily Claid and the Hairy Marys about representing the female body in and through performance.

With regard to major themes in the 1960s and 70s, issue-based plays included - Louise Page's *Tissue* (about breast cancer) and WTG/Wandor's *Care and Control* about the rights of lesbian mothers - were reworked in a number of plays in the 1990s. To take a few examples, Sarah Daniels wrote plays of women's madness and incarceration in *Beside Herself*, *Head-Rot Holiday* and *The Madness of Esme and Shaz*. (She also dealt with lesbian motherhood and their rights to child care in *Neaptide* in 1986.) (See the discussion of Sarah Daniels' plays in Chapter 5.) Other related plays are *Mothers* (1990) by Black Mime Theatre Women's Troop about black

mothers and domestic violence and a musical comedy *Who's Breaking?* by Neti-Neti about AIDS-awareness. The Magdalena Project organised by Jill Greenhalgh, Susan Bassnett and Sharon Morgan convened in 1993, was supported by women engaged in theatre work from the UK, Africa, South America, Canada, and Eastern and Western Europe all of whom aimed 'to explore inter-relations in the working practices and images of women developing out of experimental performance work' (*Feminist Stages*, p. 193).

Women's theatre has witnessed changes in focus and in performance practice. Kate Harwood has valuably analysed the proportion of plays by women at the Royal Court under the title, 'Women Writers at the Court 1956 to 1990.'³³ Between 1956 and 1980, she writes, 8% of the plays produced at the Court (i. e., 39 plays) were written or co-written by a woman and a third of these were written by two women, Ann Jellicoe and Caryl Churchill. Between 1980 and 1989, 29% (i. e., 53 plays) were by women. Harwood comments:

So, clearly there is a steadily growing body of women's writing being presented at the Royal Court and elsewhere though it is still to be measured as much in terms of potential as achievement. The bulk of women's writing is still presented as either rehearsed readings or in studio theatres. This means the announcement of a 17 % increase for the Royal Court, which will enable the Theatre Upstairs to reopen, is of major importance to a new generation of female writers.³⁴

In the early days of the English Stage Company at the Royal Court, the following plays by women were performed: *The Sport of My Mad Mother* (1958) and *The Knack* (1962) by Ann Jellicoe, and *The Lion in Love* (1963) by Shelagh Delaney. In 1972 Caryl Churchill's play, *Owners*, was produced at the Royal Court and in the 1980s *Top Girls* (1982) and *Icecream* (1989). Other productions by women at the Court in the 1980s included Sarah Daniels' *Masterpieces* (1983), Timberlake Wertenbaker's *Our Country's Good* (1989), and Charlotte Keatley's *Mother Said I Never Should*

(1989). In the 1990s two plays by Sarah Daniels, *Beside Herself* (1990) and *The Madness of Esme and Shaz* (1994) have been staged at the Royal Court. As the above figures show, women's theatre still occupy a relatively marginal position. According to Goodman women's theatre is "alternative theatre" and is located on the 'fringe' (*To Each Her Own*, p. 18) in opposition to the mainstream of British theatre. Churchill, Daniels, Keatley, and Wertenbaker, among others, have reached the mainstream and have drawn wide audiences.

Among the various issues that contemporary women's theatre has explored, I have chosen to focus on the issue of sexual violence. The thesis analyses representations of violence in plays from the 1980s and 1990s by British women dramatists and is divided into two parts (one dealing with the plays set in the past, the other with plays set in the present) in order to examine a continuity in male violence against women. In the seventeenth century, for example, during the witch-hunts, women who were suspected of witchcraft were subjected to torture, rape, and public humiliation during their trials. Madwomen have experienced similar violence, as J. M. Masson argues: 'Once somebody is declared 'mentally ill' you can do anything you want to them, including torture, as long as you claim that you are doing it for their own good.'³⁵ Ussher also contends the continuity of violence - the confinement of women - from the past to the present in the case of madwomen:

The rusting chastity belt, incarcerating the wife of the absent soldier in the time of crusades, has been seen as a literal representation of the same discourse which incarcerates women today with tranquilizers, definitions of a pathological femininity and diagnoses of madness. (*Women's Madness*, p. 23)

Similarly, women in the late-twentieth century, are still raped and mutilated (for example, in Sarah Daniels' 1983 play, *Masterpieces*). Just as the torture of witches gratified the erotic fantasies of the judges, so women in snuff films fulfil men's sadomasochistic pleasure. In conjunction with the parallel that exists between witches,

madwomen, and women in pornography, Mary Daly writes on the continuity and pervasiveness of male violence against women through changes of times in *Gyn/Ecology*:

When we double-double unthink the psychiatric historians' mazes of reversals in this way, we focus attention upon the agents of the atrocities: the professional hunters and judges of the witches. In its convoluted and deceptive way the psychiatric literature calls attention to the central issue of sado-masochistic erotic fantasies. Hags can see the acting out and voyeurism of the torturers and judges as establishing a christian precedent for the "live porn" which men "enjoy" today. Such entertainment reaches its logical conclusion when the female "performer" is actually murdered - snuffed out...This kind of entertainment is enjoyed by judges, physicians, policemen, and other professionals today, all in line of "duty," when women who have been victimized (rape victims, for example) come under their power. (Daly, pp. 214-5)

Women have suffered from men's violence throughout the history of mankind, under different social circumstances and social movements, at the hands of men who have had power in different social, political, and economic roles which have all allowed them to victimise women.

Like the feminist theorists, and scholars and researchers who have been discussed above, British women playwrights have conducted numerous researches into the circumstances of women's oppression in patriarchal societies of the past and present in order to explore this issue through the medium of theatre. Women's theatre, particularly has strong historical, social, and political implications. Toril Moi argued in *Sexual/Textual Politics* in 1985:

For a generation educated within the ahistorical, aestheticizing discourse of New Criticism, the feminists' insistence on the *political* nature of any crucial discourse, and their will to take historical and sociological factors into account must have seemed both fresh and exciting; to a large extent those are precisely the qualities present-day feminist critics still strive to preserve.³⁶

This is still true, in the 1990s, of women's oppression as is demonstrated in the plays of the 1990s selected for this thesis. Through its ability to provide a platform for the dramatic exploration of crucial contemporary issues relating to women, theatre can

play a valuable role in giving voice to those who have been silenced by sexual violence.

In order to discuss the continuity of women's oppression in Western society, I look at a decade of plays by British women dramatists that explored sexual violence beginning with Sarah Daniels' 1983 play, *Masterpieces*, which gave rise to a considerable controversy over the issue of pornography. Out of contemporary British plays by women from the early 1980s and the early 1990s, I have chosen five plays (of the past) which have been written from a present-day women's perspective. The plays are in their order of appearance: *The Love of the Nightingale* (rape and female silencing, 1988) by Timberlake Wertenbaker; *Crux* (witches, 1991) by April de Angelis; *The Taking of Liberty* (women during the French Revolution, 1992) by Cheryl Robson; *Augustine (Big Hysteria)* (madwomen, 1991) by Anna Furse and *The Gut Girls* (Victorian working women, 1988) by Sarah Daniels. These five plays problematise past interpretations of violence done to women in order to give a new light on its history as well as to trace such thinking in the present. The plays of the present are: *Ficky Stingers* (rape, 1986) by Eve Lewis; *Beside Herself* (madwoman and child sexual abuse, 1990) by Sarah Daniels; *Thatcher's Women* (prostitution, 1987) by Kay Adshead; *Money to Live* (female strippers, 1984) by Jacqueline Rudet; *Low Level Panic* (pornography, 1988) by Clare McIntyre; *Masterpieces* (pornography, 1983) by Sarah Daniels. The plays of the past and present demonstrate that women's oppression is omnipresent, transcending time.

The plays exhibit a number of similarities, one of the most common of which is that women are silenced by men's violence. At the same time, women are angered by their silencing and most of them fight back against the atrocities committed against them.

As R. T. Lakoff argues with regard to the silencing of women:

“Silencing” is a word with some of the most sinister undertones in the language, a word laden with political consequences. Americans think of it as the ultimate weapon of a totalitarian regime, the antithesis of democracy’s “marketplace of ideas.” We think of it, too, as necessarily conscious and deliberate, part of the armamentarium of public discourse, or rather of the chilling of public discourse.³⁷

Women’s silencing, depicted in the plays discussed in this thesis, is similarly political, as women are denied a voice within the public discourse. Lakoff also writes, ‘To be deprived of speech is to be deprived of humanity itself - in one’s own eyes and in the eyes of others’ (*Ibid.*, p. 345). Thus women’s silencing highlights their lack of power in society where, as a result, the imbalance of power is created in favour of men. Consequently, silencing women leads to the perpetuation of men’s political power.

Silencing women, the deprivation of their freedom of speech, often accompanies confinement, the deprivation of women’s freedom of movement. Thus confinement of women is another form of violence. Confinement of people is a political way to punish those who oppose the *status quo*. The women are thus incarcerated as punishment of their revolt against the political power. Despite men’s propensity to confine women, many women in the plays transgress their traditionally assigned confines - their private sphere. These women are all brave enough to risk possible danger in the course of their transgression in societies where women’s place is presumed to be the home. They defy cultural, moral, social, and even political restrictions imposed upon them in the pursuit of what is important to them.

In the course of their revolt against oppression, many women in the eleven plays engage in some form of celebration: festivals (*The Love of the Nightingale* and *Agusutine (Big Hysteria)*); dances (by the four women in *Crux* and of a fox in

Thatcher's Women), destruction of a patriarchal symbol (*The Taking of Liberty*).

The women's celebration is an example of French feminists', mainly, Cixous'.

Irigaray's, and Kristeva's, support in women's writing of *jouissance*.³⁸ Ann Rosalind Jones argues that *jouissance*:

promises a clarity of perception and a vitality that can bring down the mountain of phallocentric delusion...to the extent that the female body is seen as a direct source of writing, a powerful alternative discourse seems possible: to write from the body is to re-create the world. ('Writing the Body', p. 366)

Most women in the plays delight in what they achieve against the constraints patriarchy imposes on them and their actions are attempts to challenge constraints in order to free themselves from them.

The reaction to the violence done to the women in these plays in most cases is anger which sometimes appears as madness. As Ann Rosalind Jones explains in her article, 'Writing the Body: L'Écriture féminine':

Women, for Kristeva, also speak and write as "hysterics," as outsiders to male-dominated discourse, for two reasons: the predominance in them of drives related to anality and childbirth, and their marginal position vis-à-vis masculine culture. Their semiotic style is likely to involve repetitive, spasmodic separation from the dominating discourse, which, more often , they are forced to imitate.³⁹

As hysterics, women write their violated bodies and speak the unspeakable. The women's anger is a subversive power which enables them to fight back against their oppression. Most of the women are marginalised by their societies because of their acts of protest.

In conjunction with writing their bodies, most of the silenced women in the plays find their voices, or other ways, to express their pain. Writing the body is of significance, as Jones argues:

We need to know how women have come to be who they are through history, which is the history of their oppression by men and male designed institutions. Only through an analysis of the power relationships between

men and women and practices based on that analysis, will we put an end to our oppression - and only then will we discover what women are or can be. (Jones, p. 369)

I suggested earlier that power relationships between men and women are among the most significant factors in sexual violence. In order to put an end to these unequal power relationships, women have to move outside male-centred concepts and have to write their bodies as alternatives to phallocentric restrictions.

In discussing the politics of ‘writing [the] body’ in her article, ‘The Politics of Writing (the) Body’, Arleen B. Dallery applies *écriture féminine*, which she characterises as a deconstruction of a phallic organisation of sexuality. As Tami Spry outlines the definition:

Écriture féminine views the body as a text upon and within which a woman constructs a discourse of ‘multiple otherness,’ and alternate way to view bodily knowledge which displace dualistic oppositional structures of Western thought and patriarchy.⁴⁰

As Dallery argues, ‘Writing the body, then, is...performative. It signifies those bodily territories that have been kept under seal; it figures the body.’⁴¹ In this context, the narratives of sexual violence in the plays are what Spry calls ‘autobiographical’ texts (Spry, p. 31) written on many different bodies with many different patterns and colours. Thus their bodies become inscribed texts. As Dallery argues:

The characteristics of women’s writing are, therefore, based on the significance of a woman’s body: the otherness *within* the self in pregnancy; the two lips of the labia, both one yet another, signify women’s openness to otherness in writing...Writing the body is writing a new text - not with a phallic pen - new inscriptions of woman’s body separate from and undermining the phallocentric coding of women’s body that produces the censure, erasure, repression of woman’s...*alterite*. (Original italics, Dallery, p. 59)

The women in the plays are the narrators of their stories and the foci of attention when they are brought centre stage to perform their experiences of oppression.

Their ‘writing/telling/performing’ (Spry, p. 32) compare and contrast with each other in the course of this thesis, thus hopefully providing valuable and multiple insights into sexual violence.

Through writing their bodies in the eleven plays, the female characters mostly liberate themselves from the phallocentric restrictions of language and concepts of sexual violence, thus freeing their voices to verify on stage the universality, diversity, and continuity of sexual violence on stage. As performance theorist, Elisabeth Bell has noted:

Locating the *power* of performance in the performer is a historically, culturally, and aesthetically frightening strategy, for the excesses of performer as/is woman are abundant, dangerous, and subversive. (Original italics.)⁴²

By writing/telling/performing women’s oppression on stage in alternative ways to phallocentric codes, i. e., from women’s perspective, the issue of sexual violence can be seen more objectively. A variety of techniques have been used to write the traumatised body in the plays I discuss: the use of theatre in *The Love of the Nightingale*, Marguarite’s accusational cry at her execution as a witch in *Crux*, the shocking presentation of segments of mutilated women’s bodies in *The Taking of Liberty*; the contortions of the raped body in *Augustine (Big Hysteria)*; ‘underdisplay’ or ‘overdisplay’ of the woman’s body (discussed in Chapters 6, 8 and 10); an alter ego in *Beside Herself*; a mime of sexual assault in *Low Level Panic*. These approaches, among others, create powerful images of the traumatised woman’s body on stage. Through images which have direct appeal to audiences, women dramatists have sought to raise the awareness of the reality of sexual violence among their audiences and to find ways to alter the situations that give rise to it. British women’s theatre thus provides a precious forum to explore women’s oppression.

As sexual violence is primarily associated with rape, Part One starts with a story of Philomela, a Greek myth and one of the oldest stories of rape in western literature.

NOTES

- ¹ The statistics are taken from 'Equality Day', *One Week* ed. by Students Union, University of Warwick (Coventry, 1997).
- ² Ibid., p. 6.
- ³ Jane Ussher, *Women's Madness: Misogyny or Mental Illness?* (London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1991), p. 31.
- ⁴ Kathleen Barry, 'Social etiology of crime against women', *Victimology*, 10, (1-4), 1985, p. 164, quoted in Liz Kelly, *Surviving Sexual Violence* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1988), p. 40.
- ⁵ Kathleen Barry, *Sexual Slavery* (New York: New York University Press, 1979), p. 86.
- ⁶ Caroline Sheffield, 'Sexual Terrorism' in *Women: A Feminist Perspective*, ed. by Jo Freeman (Palo Alto, Ca: Mayfield Publishing, 1984), p. 3.
- ⁷ S. F. Agudelo, 'Violence and health: preliminary elements for thought and action', *International Journal of Health Services*, Vol. 22, No. 2, pp. 365-76 in Hannah Bradby (ed.), *Defining Violence* (Aldershot: Averbury, 1996), p. 5.
- ⁸ Janette Forman and Jan Macleod, '2. Working against violence against women and children' in Ibid., pp. 27-43.
- ⁹ J. S. Mill, *The Subjection of Women*, ed. by Susan Moller Okin (Cambridge, Ia: Hackett Publishing, 1988), p. 31.
- ¹⁰ Helen Andelin, *Fascinating Womanhood* (New York: Bentam, 1975), p. 26.
- ¹¹ Kate Millett, *Sexual Politics* (London: Virago, 1971, rpt. 1992), pp. 23-58.
- ¹² Susan Griffin, 'Rape: The All American Crime', *Ramparts*, 10: 3 (Sept. 1971) 26-35 (p. 26).
- ¹³ Susan Brownmiller, *Against Our Will: Men, Women and Rape*, (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1975), p. 440.
- ¹⁴ Wendy Holloway, 'I just Wanted to Kill a Woman, Why? The Ripper and Male Sexuality', in *Sexuality: A Reader*, ed. by Feminist Review (London: Virago Press, 1987), p. 128.
- ¹⁵ Jane Caputi, *The Age of Sex Crime* (London: The Women's Press, 1988), p. 3.
- ¹⁶ Diana Scully, *Understanding Sexual Violence: A Study of Convicted Rapists* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1990), p. 161.
- ¹⁷ Maggie Humm, *A Reader's Guide to Contemporary Feminist Literary Criticism* (Hemel Hemstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1994), p. 65.
- ¹⁸ Mary Daly, *Gyn/Ecology: The Metaethics of Radical Feminism*, (London: Women's Press, 1979, rpt. 1991).
- ¹⁹ Andrea Dworkin, *Our Blood* (London: The Women's Press, 1992), p. 16.

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- ²⁰ Naomi Wolf, *The Beauty Myth* (London: Vintage, 1991), p. 218.
- ²¹ Deidre English and Barbara Ehrenreich, *Complaints and Disorder: The Sexual Politics of Sickness* (New York, Old Westbury: The Feminist Press, 1973), p. 28.
- ²² Una Stannard, 'The Mask of Beauty' in *Woman in Sexist Society*, ed. by Vivian Gornick and Barbara K. Moran (New York: New American Library, 1971), p. 189.
- ²³ Judith R. Walkowitz, *City of Dreadful Delight: Narratives of Sexual Danger in Late-Victorian London* (London: Virago, 1992), p. 198.
- ²⁴ Judith R. Walkowitz, *Prostitution and Victorian Society: Women, Class, and the State* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), p. 4.
- ²⁵ Jeffrey Weeks, *Sexuality* (Chichester: Ellis Horwood, 1986), p. 38-9.
- ²⁶ Rosalind Coward, 'Sexual Violence and Sexuality', in *Sexuality: A Reader* (London: Virago, 1987), p. 308.
- ²⁷ Sandra McNeil and dusty rhodes, eds., *Women against Violence against Women* (London: Only Women Press, 1985), p. 10.
- ²⁸ Marilyn French, *The War against Women* (London: Penguin Books, 1992).
- ²⁹ M. Koss, 'The women's mental health research agenda: Violence against Women', *American Psychology*, 45:3 (1990), 374-80 (p. 375).
- ³⁰ Lizbeth Goodman, *Feminist Stages: Interviews with Women in Contemporary British Theatre* (London: Harwood Academic Publishers, 1996), p. 17.
- ³¹ Lizbeth Goodman, *Contemporary Feminist Theatres: To Each Her Own* (London, Routledge, 1993), p. 69.
- ³² Some plays analysed in this thesis are selected from *Plays by Women* series, Nick Hern Books and Aurora Metro Press. I also acknowledge my indebtedness to Gender in Performance series, especially the above two books I have quoted for the information so far I have cited in Section 5.
- ³³ Kate Harwood, 'Women Writers at the Court 1956 to 1990', in *My Heart's a Suitcase* (a play by Claire McIntyre), ed. by Kate Harwood (London: Nick Hern Books, 1990), preliminary section.
- ³⁴ Ibid., preliminary section.
- ³⁵ J. M. Masson, *Against Therapy* (London: Collins, 1989), p. 204.
- ³⁶ Toril Moi, *Sexual/Textual Politics: Feminist Literary Theory* (London: Routledge, 1986, repr. 1993), p. 49.
- ³⁷ Robin Tolmach Lakoff, 'The silencing of women', *Locating Power: Proceedings of 2nd Berkeley Women and Language Conference*, VOL IX (1992), 344-55, (p. 344).
- ³⁸ Jouissance 'Ecstasy (sexual); coming. Also enjoyment of (rights, property, etc.)', definition in *The Feminist Reader: Essays in Gender and the Politics of Literary Criticism*, ed. by Catherine Belsey and Jane More, (London: Macmillan, 1989), p. 246. The three theorists in common with each other 'oppose women's bodily experience to the phallic-symbolic patterns embedded in Western thought' (Jones, p. 366).
- ³⁹ Ann Rosalind Jones, 'Writing the Body: Toward an Understanding of l'Écriture féminine' in *The Feminist Criticism: Essays on Women, Literature and Theory*, ed. by Elaine Showalter (London and New York: Pantheon Books, 1985, rpt. Virago Press, 1986), pp. 361-77 (p. 363).
- ⁴⁰ Tami Spry, 'Gender, In the Absence of Word and Body: Hegemonic Implications of "Victim" and "Survivor" in Women's Narratives of Sexual Violence', *Women and Language*, Vol XVIII, No. 2 (1996), 27-32 (p. 31).
- ⁴¹ Arleen B. Dallery, 'The Politics of Writing (the) Body: Ecriture Feminine', *Gender/ Body / Knowledge: Feminist Reconstructions of Being and Knowing*, ed. Allison M. Jagger and Susan R. Bordo (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1989), p. 59.
- ⁴² Elizabeth Bell, 'Performance Studies as Women's Work: Historical Sights/ Sites/ Citations from the Margin', *Text and Performance Quarterly* 13 (1993), 350-374 (p. 370).

Part One. Philomela and Her Sisters in the Past

As J. M. Coetzee comments in *Foe*, ‘myth is demonstrated to be no less oppressive than history...’¹ Oppression which will be discussed in the Philomela myth continues to exist in history. There have been women who have suffered in reality as much as Philomela in the myth does and who have been silenced by their victimisation. But some of them, like Philomela (especially in Ovid’s version), have refused to be victims and have found ways to express and represent themselves. These women have had the spirit to fight against their oppression and overcome their trauma. Part One focuses first on a dramatic representation of Philomela, a re-working by a woman dramatist in the twentieth century, following an examination of various male-authored versions of Philomela’s story, and then on female characters based on women in the past who were literal and emotional survivors.

The stories of these women who suffer from diverse types of sexual violence are based on the true facts of the past in the four plays following *The Love of the Nightingale* in Part One. All these plays were created following research each individual playwright conducted. Women’s pain dramatised in a mythic past setting in *The Love of the Nightingale* continues to exist in these plays of the past and is still felt in others in the present-time. All these female characters are given voices different from the voices of their dominant cultures, thus making us see these women from many different viewpoints.

Chapter 1. Philomela's Story

1. The Origin of the Story

The story of Philomela, which is based on a Greek myth, was, C. T. Prouty writes, ‘probably first told in literary form in Sophocles’s lost tragedy of Tereus, but after this it appears frequently in literature.’² The story is later related by Ovid (43 B. C. - 17 or 18 A. D.) in Book VI of *Metamorphoses* (8 A. D., lines 424-674). As Allen Grossman comments: ‘The Philomela story is *simple*,’³ (my italics). The Athenian king, Pandion, has two daughters. The elder sister, Procne, is given in marriage to a barbarian king from Thrace, Tereus, who came to the Athenians’ aid in war. Procne, in her loneliness five years after she arrives in Thrace, sends Tereus to fetch her younger sister, Philomela, for a visit. Tereus, who is aroused by the beauty of the younger sister, rapes her, cuts out her tongue so she cannot tell her story and incarcerates her in a dark forest. ‘At this moment of violation and atrociously blocked communication’, as Allen Grossman observes, ‘there arises a founding instance of woman’s text - a textile which is an epistle addressed in the older versions of the story’ (*Ibid.*, p. 240). Confined in a small hut, Philomela weaves a tapestry which describes her rape and mutilation by Tereus. During a Bacchic festival, Philomela delivers the messages of her violation woven into the tapestry to Procne and is rescued by her sister. Together they avenge themselves upon Tereus by killing Tereus’ child, Itys, who is also the son of Procne, and feeding the body to the brutish husband and father. Philomela completes her revenge by throwing the child’s head on his table. Wrathfully, sword in hand, Tereus pursues the two sisters and all three are transformed into birds: Tereus into a hoopoe, Procne into a swallow, and Philomela, a nightingale.

Although it is *simple*, Philomela's story is, as Grossman argues, 'omnipresent in history in the same way that pain is omnipresent' (*Ibid.*, p. 239). Her story has been retold throughout Western literature where Philomela has become one of the paradigmatic victims of sexual violence. The name, Philomela, thus represents the diverse pain that women in Western literature have suffered from abduction, adultery, exploitation, incarceration, incest, infanticide, mutilation and rape. In the *Metamorphoses*, as K. Sara Myers argues, '[Ovid's] intention is to write a sort of *universal history* (my italics), a chronological survey of the metamorphosis theme from the origins of the world to the present.'⁴ Her argument, thus, articulates the fact that Philomela's pain is 'universal' as it is 'omnipresent' and 'diverse.' Suffering and death in *Metamorphoses* are frequent, as G. Karl Galinsky observes, 'because they are traditionally a part of many myths.'⁵ Particularly in creation myths, violence prevails. Jane Caputi in her book, *The Age of Sex Crime*, writes that '[T]he content of numerous 'creation' myths..., from a female perspective, would more accurately be named *destruction epics*' (Original italics, Caputi, pp. 8-9). According to Caputi, Adolphe Jensen in *Myth and Cult among Primitive Peoples* and René Girard in *Violence and the Sacred* argue that creation coincides with violence.⁶ In many such myths, sexual murder of women occurs in the course of creation 'as a male god slays and dismembers a primordial female in order that *he* might refashion the cosmos and claim himself as its creator' (Caputi, p. 9). Murder and mutilation, especially of women, are 'ubiquitous' in creation myths in many cultures.

In the myth of the nightingale in Ovid's version, instead of being murdered as in a creation myth, Philomela is raped by Tereus and her tongue is cut out by him so that he can repeatedly take sexual pleasure from her while she cannot tell her rape. Ovid describes the scene of Tereus' mutilation of Philomela as follows:

But even as she poured out her scorn, still calling out her father, and struggling to speak, he grasped her tongue with a pair of forceps. and cut it out with his cruel sword. The remaining stump still quivered in her throat, while the tongue itself lay pulsing and murmuring incoherently to the dark earth. It withered convulsively, like a snake's tail when it has newly been cut off and, dying, tried to reach its mistress' feet. Even after this atrocity, they say, though I can hardly bring myself to believe it, that the king in his guilty passion often took his pleasure with the body he had so mutilated.⁷

The scene is extremely violent, yet after the mutilation, there is no reference to Philomela as the subject. Instead, the tongue severed from Philomela is the subject focused and described in every possible detail. Philomela has become only a helpless, passive being upon whom male power is brutishly exercised and a senseless object upon which the male sexual urge is enacted. Rather than the pain of Philomela's mutilated body, Tereus' repeated penetration of her body is emphasised.

The scene in which Procne kills Itys is as cruel as the scene described above:

[Procne] hesitated no longer, but dragged Itys away to a distant part of the lofty palace, like some tigress on the Ganges' banks, dragging an unweaned fawn through the thick forest. He realized what was in store for him and, stretching out his hands, cried 'Mother, Mother!' and tried to throw his arms around her neck. But Procne drove a sword into his side, close to his breast, and did not even turn her face away. That wound alone was enough to kill him, but Philomela took the sword, and cut his throat as well. While his limbs were still warm, still retained some vestiges of life, the two sisters tore them apart; the room was dripping with blood. Then they cooked his flesh, boiling some in bronze pots, and roasting some on spits. (*Ibid.*, p. 151-2)

The scene is focused on the brutality of the two women in minute detail. Procne is portrayed as a barbarous, pitiless murderer of her own son despite his cry of 'Mother.' Philomela is a cruel avenger who kills her nephew, Itys, who is already dying. Philomela's revenge is as cruel as her own violation and mutilation. In the two violent scenes, Philomela is used as an agent to display the worst conceivable brutalities committed by human beings. In one scene she is the victim of violence, in the other the perpetrator of it. As Galinsky maintains:

Ovid's version is another outstanding example of tragic material to the taste of his time and to his own taste. Sophocles wrote a *Tereus* and we can be sure that, in accordance with the nature of Greek tragedy and Sophoclean tragedy in particular, inner qualities took precedence over external events or manners. Ovid's version is another example of untragic presentation of tragic material. The story is deprived of its tragic spirit, and its external aspects predominate. Grotesque actions, hyperbolic gestures, and exaggerated cruelty take the place of the tragic idea, and the reader is treated to a spectacle of gestures rather than moved to pity and fear...[H]is way to view it with indifference and amusement are as varied as the rest of his *oeuvre*. (Galinsky, p. 132)

Ovid's version, then, focuses on brutality, violence, mutilation, and revenge.

Female mutilation and destruction are not found only in ancient mythical stories. They are ubiquitous, modifying their form through changing times, both in fiction and in real life, from the past to the present. Female mutilation and destruction express the continuing existence of patriarchy. Philomela's story is therefore told somewhat differently and evokes different responses at different times, while the main theme of her violation remains almost unaltered.

2. Philomela in Medieval Times

Ovid's story of Philomela was well known and often quoted by medieval writers, though the women's names appear as Philomel and Progne, and were therefore slightly different from the originals. As Edgar Finely Shannon observes, '[Ovid's] two works that appear to have had the greatest influence upon medieval literature are the *Metamorphoses* and the *Ars Amatoria*.'⁸ In the context of *Legend of Good Women* by Geoffrey Chaucer (1340?-1400), for example, Shannon observes: 'The truth of the growing development of Chaucer's genius under the influence of Ovid is evident' (Shannon, p. 170). The concepts of Ovid's time were, however, different from those of Chaucer's in the medieval times. Ovid, for example, at least saves Philomela from

being killed by Tereus and turns her into the nightingale. In the *Metamorphoses*, Tereus obtains Philomela by force and after his violation of her he compares her to a lamb in the power of a wolf, or to a dove at the mercy of an eagle. Chaucer, however, in the *Legend of Philomela* (lines 2228-2393), likens her to these same figures *even before* Tereus' attack. While Ovid vividly accounts Philomela's rage at the rape and her calling for aid from her sister, her father and all the gods, Chaucer omits the expression of her fury. Chaucer's story ends when Progne finds Philomela. In his *Legend of Philomela* the two women don't even take revenge upon Tereus. Philomela is described as a good woman who is unfortunate enough to be raped by her brother-in-law, Tereus, who feels a tyrannical lust for her. Chaucer focuses on the image of Philomela as the suffering victim of a man's lecherous passion. In this medieval work, Philomela is weakened and naive as a model for medieval women and the enforced loss of her virginity is emphasised and evokes sympathy from the reader.

In the fifth book of *Confessio Amantis* (c. 1390) by John Gower (1330?-1408), the tale of *Tereus and Procne* (lines 5551-6047) is more of a warning against the sin of 'avarice' or rape rather than an exploration of Philomela's pain. Gower omits the cutting out of Philomela's tongue. He also leaves out Philomela's rescue from imprisonment and most of the shocking accounts of the death of Itys and Tereus' feasting on his flesh. Gower also focuses on Philomela's shame rather than her anger, as R. J. Dingley explicates:

The nightingale will not sing in winter-time...for very shame. The trees and bushes are bare and offer no concealment for a maiden embarrassed at her lost virginity so that silence is her only means of remaining inconspicuous. In spring, however, she resumes her song, apparently out of joy that she is invisible... Gower, in fact, seems here to be infiltrating elements from the courtly tradition of the nightingale as harbinger of love in order to counterbalance and temper the morally barren conclusion of the Ovidian narrative.⁹

The nightingale is silenced in the winter, and still hidden in the shadow in the spring even though she gains her voice and sings. The shame of Philomela's defilement buries her in silence and in darkness alternately. In Chaucer and Gower, the nightingale sings amorous songs rather than crying with pain and anger as it might be expected to do as a result of her defilement. Philomela's rape is romanticised. In medieval literature as in the *Legend* and the *Confessio* the women are even more powerless than in Ovid's version so that Philomel is a mere passive object upon whom violence is inflicted. Philomel and Progne don't dare to take revenge as they are not supposed to have autonomy over their destinies in medieval times. As Dingley comments:

Like Chaucer...Gower needs to preserve the image of Philomel in particular as a victimised embodiment of virtue and so has to differentiate her transformation from that of her ravisher. (Ibid., p. 79)

Philomela is presented by both Gower and Chaucer as a woman of virtue who has been raped and simply laments over it, replete with shame.

3. Philomela and Her Sisters in Elizabethan Times

Ovid's peculiarly grisly rendering of Philomela story had a strong appeal for Elizabethan readers. Prouty argues, 'The Renaissance saw it as an incidental reference or allusion,...a moral narrative in Gascogne and Pettie and a potential source for *Titus Andronicus*' (Prouty, p. 254). In the metrical version of *The Complaynt of Philomele* (1576) by George Gascoigne (1530-1577), for example, Philomela's sad tale is recounted. The poem is, Prouty points out, 'ultimately didactic' (Ibid., p. 252). The verse relates the suffering of the innocent Philomela and concludes with the results of Tereus' lust - the severe punishment of his sin. Gascoigne's *Steele Glass* opens with Philomela's story and Prouty argues that Gascoigne's fate is reflected in Philomela's:

The lamentableness of the harsh fate of Philomela's was, as we have seen in connection with The *Steele Glass*, very real to George Gascoigne. He found the cruelty of Tereus to the innocent Philomela analogous to his own persecution by a world that attacked his verses, banned his books, and refused to forgive the repentant sinner. (Ibid., p. 252)

Gascoigne made use of Philomela's story in order to describe his own unhappy situation.

George Pettie (1548-1589) incorporated the tale of *Tereus and Progne* in *A Petite Pallace of Pettie His Pleasure: Containing Many Pretie Histories by Him Set Forth in Comely Colours and Most Delightfully Discoursed* (1586). George Pettie, while admitting Tereus' atrocity against Philomel, was still shocked at Procne's cruelty, as Dingley comments:

After all, not merely does it constitute an especially sensational revenge narrative, but it also gives rise to some absorbing moral questions. Which, after all, was the worse offender; the incestuous Tereus or the infanticide Procne? (Dingley, p. 73)

Pettie ends the story as follows:

It were hard here, Gentlewomen, for you to give sentence, who more offended of the husband or the wife, seeing the doings of both one and the other near in the highest degree of devilishness-such unbridled lust and beastly cruelty in him, such monstrous mischief and murder in her; in him such treason, in her such treachery; in him such falseness, in her such furiousness; in him such devilish desire, in her such revengeful ire; in him such devilish heat, in her such haggish hate, that I think them both worthy to be condemned to the most bottomless pit in hell.¹⁰

Pettie raises the issue of the whole problem of the morality of Tereus' violence and lust and of vengeance in Progne's extreme measures. Dingley argues:

Progne's brutality, moreover, plainly aligns her with the termagant woman...whose indecorous assumption of the masculine role formed a fashionable target for antifeminine satirists in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. (Dingley, p. 73)

Rather than sympathising with Philomela's pain because of her defilement and mutilation or describing Philomela as a victim as in Gower and Chaucer, Pettie

concentrates more on the wrongs and morality of Tereus' incestuous act and Progne's infanticide.

The diverse, continuing, and universal pain Philomela suffers from abduction, adultery, rape and mutilation is also embodied in one of the most popular of Elizabethan tragedies (at least, at its own time), *Titus Andronicus* (1594) by William Shakespeare (1564-1616). The drama makes a number of references to its Ovidian source. As Eugene M. Waith observes: 'Ovid exerted a more direct influence. References in the play leave no doubt that his telling of the Philomela story in his *Metamorphoses* was fresh in Shakespeare's mind.'¹¹ In *Titus Andronicus*, when the heroine, Lavinia, is brought on the stage with '*her hands cut off and her tongue cut out, and ravished*' (II, iv), her uncle Marcus says:

Crimson river of warm blood,
Like to a bubbling fountain stirred with wind,
Doth rise and fall on her roséd lips,
Coming and going with thy honey breath.
But sure some Tereus hath deflowered thee. (II, iv, 22-6)¹²

Marcus therefore contrasts Philomela with the mutilated Lavinia who had 'those sweet ornaments', 'lily hands' and 'that sweet tongue' (II, iv, 16, 44, 49), evoking Lavinia's fragile, but sensuous femininity. The brutal violation of the heroine is romanticised and fantasised in *Titus Andronicus*. Lavinia, however, is not even able to weave a tapestry (like Philomela) to tell her story since her hands are cut off, as Marcus laments:

And he hath cut those pretty fingers off.
That could have better sewed than Philomel. (II, iv, 42-3)

Lavinia, however, tells her story by attracting attention to a Philomela's story in *Metamorphoses*:

TITUS

Lucius, what book is that she tosseth so?

YOUNG LUCIUS

Grandsire, 'tis Ovid's *Metamorphoses*... (IV, i, 41-2)

TITUS

For worse than Philomel you used my daughter,
 And worse than Progne I will be revenged.
 And now, prepare your throats. Lavinia, come.
 Receive the blood, and when that they are dead
 Let me go grind their bones to powder small,
 And with this hateful liquor temper it,
 And in that paste let their vile heads be baked.
 Come, come, be everyone officious
 To make this banquet, which I wish may prove
 Most stern and bloody then the Centaur's feast. (V, iii, 194-202)

Lavinia, a Shakespearean version of Philomela, is a victim of politics in addition to men's desire. Titus takes Progne's role as revenger of Lavinia's violation and mutilation. In contrast to the *Metamorphoses* the avenger is male, not female. In addition, instead of revenging herself, Lavinia is killed by her own father because she has been soiled and thus Titus wants to save her from her shame. In place of Tereus, the Empress, Tamora, is portrayed as a monster eating her sons and she is also killed by Titus. Women are either a victim in the case of Lavinia or an evil creature like Tamora in *Titus Andronicus*.

Another work of Shakespeare's, *The Rape of Lucrece* (1594), again goes back to Ovid, in this case, *Fasti*, related to a Greek myth. In *The Rape of Lucrece*, like Philomela, who voices her anger and protest after her violence, Lucrece is vocal after her rape, though not directly to her rapist, Tarquin, who is also her husband's cousin. With rhetorical fervour, Lucrece simply apostrophises Night, Opportunity and Time, cursing Tarquin in her lengthy complaint before she decides to kill herself. Lucrece also mentions Philomela, but unlike Philomela, who accuses her rapist of her violation, Lucrece blames the victim herself. Also, as in the medieval works, neither Lucrece nor other women in the play act as revengers. In this poem Shakespeare presents an image of women's reaction to rape and, as Jane O. Newman observes, of 'women's political agency'.¹³ Lucrece internalises her guilt and commits suicide because of the shame that she believes she has brought to herself and her family. As Newman comments:

'Women's response to rape and their participation in political renewal are thereby limited, ideologically speaking, to actions that require their self-destruction' (Ibid., p. 312). In place of active response by a woman, Lucrece's husband's friend, Brutus, uses this occasion as an opportunity to lead the Romans to stand against Tarquin's tyrannical rule and to establish themselves a republic. Lucrece's rape has been used by men for political purposes.

Both Lavinia and Lucrece face their destruction after their 'defilement' as a way of purifying their society. Worse than Philomela's situation in Ovid's version and worse than that of the counterparts in the medieval works, Philomela's Renaissance sisters, Lavinia and Lucrece, are forced to become scapegoats of the sexual politics of patriarchal domination.

Philomela's story has been told, recounted and incorporated by many male writers in different times to suit their readers and the moral values of their times. Its legacy remains with us today. Many women are still raped, mutilated and killed both in real life and in fiction, in horror movies and pornography. But in the 1980s, Philomela returned as 'Philomele' in a drama by a woman, *The Love of the Nightingale* (1988) by Timberlake Wertenbaker. The play takes Ovid's story as its source, but then changes it in a number of ways.

4. Timberlake Wertenbaker and Philomela's Story in the Twentieth Century

Timberlake Wertenbaker, the author of *The Love of the Nightingale* I am going to discuss, was born in America, educated in France and attended university in the

United States. She lives and writes in London. Her diverse cultural backgrounds and the places she has resided in label her as an ‘Anglo-French American’ or a ‘British playwright of French-Canadian-Basque ancestry.’¹⁴ Consequently, as Sue Carlson argues:

Wertenbaker’s plays, in fact, are often about the making of identity and about the place of the individual in a world never easily defined by nationality - or gender or ideology. Her characters are dynamic and unpredictable products of various cultural, social, political, and gender forces. Her work insists on a re-visioning of values; and the proper name which denies categories has become a siphon for the expression of uneasiness she enacts. (Carlson, p. 268)

The diversity of her cultural roots has resulted in a diverse range of places, times, cultures, characters and themes in her work. For example, *New Anatomies* (1981) is about Islamic cross-dressing in the nineteenth century; *Inside Out* (1982) is based on a Japanese legend; *The Love of the Nightingale* (1988) is set in ancient Greece; *Our Country’s Good* (1988) takes place in an Australian penal colony; *The Grace of Mary Traverse* (1989) is derived from the Gordon Riots of 1780, where Wertenbaker explores diverse geographical spheres in which women’s lives are reshaped; *Three Birds Alighting on a Field* (1991) describes the art world in London in the 1990’s. One of her major plays is *Our Country’s Good*, based on Thomas Keneally’s novel, *The Playmaker*, a historical reworking of a production of Farquhar’s *The Recruiting Officer* by prisoners at a penal settlement in Australia.¹⁵ As Trevor R Griffiths comments, Wertenbaker explores issues of identity with ‘geographically and temporally distanced subjects.’¹⁶

Along with issues of identity, Wertenbaker focuses on issues of gender. She comments:

I do not like naturalism. I find it boring. My plays are an attempt to get away from the smallness of naturalism, from enclosed rooms to open spaces, to something wider. My plays often start with a very ordinary question: If women

had power, would they behave the same? Why do we seem to want to destroy ourselves? Is the personal more important than the political?¹⁷

The Love of the Nightingale deals with sexual politics in a mythic Greek setting as well as in modern society. By connecting the mythic past with the present, Wertenbaker manifests the diversity, omnipresence and continuity of Philomela's pain. As Wertenbaker comments:

I don't think you can leave the theatre and go out and make a revolution. That's the naïvety of the 1970's. But I do think you can make people change, just a little, by forcing them to question something, or by intriguing them, or giving them an image that remains with them. And that little change can lead to bigger changes. That's all you can hope for. (*Ibid.*, pp. 696-7)

In *The Love of the Nightingale*, Wertenbaker uses Philomele and the other women in her play, as 'political agents' in the hope of effecting changes relating both to gender issues and to wider changes in society.

The Love of the Nightingale

I'll speak your deed, and cast all shame away...
 My voice shall reach the highest tract of air,
 And gods shall hear, if gods indeed are there.

Ovid *Metamorphoses*

If you are an unwilling victim, if you reject the role, the penalties are high.
 Susan Keppeler *The Representation of Pornography*

The Love of the Nightingale, a retelling of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* by Timberlake Wertenbaker, was first staged by The Royal Shakespeare Company at The Other Place in Stratford-upon-Avon in October 1988 and had subsequent performances in London. Wertenbaker has reworked the Philomela myth in order to explore the power of language, gender roles, and male and female identities. For this purpose, Wertenbaker has added many elements, and has made slight alterations, to Ovid's story. One of the additions is Niobe, whose island home was conquered by the Athenians and who has

become Philomele's servant. Through the character of Niobe Wertenbaker explores the rape of countries alongside the rape of women. Another character Wertenbaker has added is the Captain, who is killed by Tereus out of jealousy on the journey to Thrace because Philomele falls in love with him. These two characters, Niobe and the Captain, reflect the impact of political power on individuals. Other new elements added are a male and female chorus, who each express a variety of opinions, especially on Tereus' violent act and a play-within-a-play about the tragedy of Hyppolytus and his step mother, Phaedra. This play serves as a warning to Philomele, who leaves home with Tereus to visit her sister, Procne, and as a catalyst to make Tereus realise that he passionately desires Philomele. A further alteration is that, instead of weaving a tapestry about her rape and mutilation, Philomele sews dolls with which she enacts her story. In *The Love of the Nightingale*, Wertenbaker employs these two elements (the play-within-a play and the use of dolls) as a means to provide diverse perspectives on the function and power of theatre. Towards the end of the play, Philomele, not Procne, kills Itys, and the child's body is not cooked or eaten. When she is transformed into a nightingale, Philomele tries to make her nephew ask questions about what happened and thus to make him see her story from a different angle. As in Ovid's version, the play is basically about rape. Furthermore, the drama demonstrates what happens to women who voice their violation. The price Philomele has to pay for her protest against her ravishment by a man of authority is being silenced, mutilated, abducted, and incarcerated. However, Philomele refuses to remain a victim and avenges herself, regaining her voice through the power of theatre she employs.

The play begins with a war scene in Athens. The enactment and discussion of the brutality of war, therefore, prefigure further confrontations later in the play. As the Male Chorus say: 'We begin here because no life ever has been untouched by war' (p.

1). The inevitability and the far-reaching consequences of war shroud the protagonists in destruction and silence in the course of the action. It is against this grim backdrop of the war that Philomele and Procne discuss men and sex in Scene 2. Philomele is inquisitive, instinctive, and passionate, while Procne is serious, rational, and sensible. Philomele is beautiful, whereas Procne has an air of dignity. Men and sex in Philomele's sexual fantasy are something she wants to feel inside her body, to touch and to see; she even wants to see the sexual act performed by others. The thought of sex makes Philomele feel as if warm waves of light run through her body. To Procne, sex is just a vague idea and theory formed from what she hears from older women. The penis, Procne explains, is a 'sponge', powerful enough to be autonomous and independent, 'getting bigger and smaller and moving up and down' (p. 3). She thinks that it detaches and is an organ pretty uncontrollable by man himself. If Philomele sees man and sex subjectively, as expressing her own feelings, Procne sees them more objectively, largely citing the impulsive nature of man's sexuality as perceived in her society. Philomele expresses her strong sexual curiosity by barraging Procne with questions, while the latter is evasive and bats her questions back. Procne is sensible enough to know that she may have to leave Athens when she marries and that sex is something they would come to know and perhaps talk about when they reach womanhood. Their discussion of sex is really a game in which they toss words to and fro and try to catch them. It seems to Procne and Philomele that the war they are watching during their word game is itself another game. However, the reality of war and its effects are demonstrated when Procne is given to Tereus in marriage as a reward for his military support to Athens. More a chattel than a free individual, Procne is not allowed to decide her own destiny but has to abide by the custom of her society.

Philomele's fantasy of love and sex ends in her disgust when she becomes a victim of violence and is eventually deprived of her power of language.

Language is one of the attributes of civilised Athens, with its plays and philosophers, in contrast to repressed Thrace where there are no plays, but only the bloody ecstatic Bacchic festivals. Procne in Thrace misses her Athenian language: 'Where have all the words gone?' (p. 6) she asks. Even though Procne talks with the Thracian women, there is no mutual understanding of each other's words: 'The words are the same, but point to different things' (p. 7). According to Procne, the way the Athenians express truth is different from the Thracian way. The Athenians believe that happiness lies in truth and truth is good and beautiful. They revel in truth through words. However, Thracian truth, as Procne laments, is 'full of darkness' (p. 7). Because of the more repressive nature of the society, it is buried in silence. In Thrace Procne misses the joy of using words that once gave meaning to her life in Athens. She does not appreciate the Bacchic festivals, just as the Thracian women would fail to understand Athenian words. Procne has been silenced by her displacement in a foreign land where her search for communication through speech is in vain. She needs Philomele in order to make her words meaningful and understandable, and craves the enjoyment of words they shared when they tossed them back and forth to each other. Surrounded by the vacuum of silence, Procne is insulated and isolated from the rest of Thracian society. She belongs nowhere, neither to Athens physically nor to Thrace culturally and emotionally. Yet Procne wishes to exist in order to belong somewhere and this is possible only through a mutual understanding of her language. Thus Procne desperately wants Philomele to be with her in order to fill her silence. The joy and power of language can prove her when language is understood by, and shared with, others.

Language is also an important ingredient of performance, as is manifested in the play-within-the-play that is performed in Athens (Scene 5). Through this play, King Pandion of Athens tries to seek an answer to Procne's wish for Tereus to bring Philomele to Thrace: 'Perhaps this play will help us come to a decision' (p. 9). In this play, Phaedra falls in love with her stepson, Hippolytus. Its result is that Phaedra kills herself and Hippolytus is killed by sea-gods. The play-within-the-play works on two planes: one relates to the characters in the main play and the other to the audience. The illicit love inflames and seems to vindicate Tereus' lust for Philomele, leading him (he later claims) to commit adultery and incest by betraying his wife and raping his sister-in-law. Philomele is seemingly likened to Hippolytus, who has been sent by gods out of his 'father's lands to meet with such disaster from the sea-god's wave' (p. 12). This may be a warning to King Pandion. However, Philomele is firmly determined to see her sister even though she weeps at the play's sad ending. Despite Philomele's refusal to parallel herself and Tereus with Hippolytus and Phaedra, adultery and incest actually take place in the main play. This play's ending, the inevitability of the destruction of the characters described by the female and male choruses, may foretell the audience what is going to happen later in the main play.

As Geraldine Cousin comments with regard to the response of the on-stage audience in her book, *Women in Dramatic Place and Time*, at the beginning of the play, both the on-stage and actual audiences watch, with detachment, the play which tells a distanced story from a Greek myth. The on-stage spectators, King Pandion, the queen, Philomele, and Tereus - 'themselves creatures of myth'¹⁸ - interpolate their comments on the play, and its characters and on theatre. Their inserted comments serve to detach both audiences from this play, but at some points Philomele emphatically and sympathetically responds to the fervent love and the sad ending, thus also involving

the audience. Later, Philomele withdraws the empathetic involvement by brushing the story aside as simply a play. At the end of the play, however, King Pandion's comment, 'And now we must applaud the actors' (p. 13), as G. Cousin argues, 'by drawing attention to the fictive nature of what has just taken place, invites a dual response: at once involved and critically distanced' (Cousin, p. 118). Scene 5 is the point of conflict between the affirmation and negation of the irresistibility of Philomele's fate predicated by the play-within-the-play and by the male and female choruses throughout the play.

Philomele's trip to Thrace is composed of a series of questions. As Cousin argues, '*The Love of the Nightingale* is an interrogative play' (*Ibid.*, p. 115). Philomele relishes questions, which she incessantly asks throughout the play. The relevance of questions in this drama is, Michale Billington suggest, that 'true liberty depends on endless questioning and that speech is a symbol of freedom increasingly subject to sudden, arbitrary extinction.'¹⁹ Questions and answers between Philomele and Procne have produced enjoyment and established a strong bonding of mutual understanding - the bonding which the two sisters miss so much, but which Tereus is eager to avoid and break. On her journey to Thrace, Philomele's delight in asking questions of the Captain of the ship brings the two of them on the brink of falling in love with each other. But their love results in the Captain's destruction by Tereus, who is jealous of him. The interaction of questions and answers between Philomele and Tereus exposes Philomele's innocent sexuality and further kindles Tereus' disastrous and incestuous passion for Philomele, a passion which leads him to violate her. Even after her rape, Philomele asks Tereus: 'Why? The cause?' (p. 34) and her tongue is cut out by Tereus to prevent her from revealing his assault upon her. From Tereus' perspective, Philomele asks too many questions. Her questions affirm her revolt against his

authority. Before the rape has taken place, the soldiers also ask questions of Tereus in their case why he procrastinates and does not continue their journey. Their words rebel against Tereus' tight control which attempts to confine people in silence so that he can increase his power. At the start of the voyage to Thrace, Tereus has removed the Greek guards King Padion has sent for Philomele's safety. Those characters who have the potential to challenge Tereus' power are abruptly silenced in some way or another. Instead of keeping silent, however, Philomele directly challenges his power through asking her questions and her rebellion against him. The cost of her rebellion is her tongue being cut out by Tereus.

The use of questions in the play also leads the audience to look at what is happening from many different perspectives. The questions guide the audience along, giving clues as to how they should see the action of the play. At the same time, the fact that the questions are responded to either with something evasive or empty, or with enforced silence, creates a kind of vacant space which the audience can fill with their own thoughts and understanding. In this play questions are speech freed from restraints and lead the audience to have a definite response the author wants.

Tereus' infatuation for Philomele prior to the rape induces him to attempt to break the female bonding between Philomele and Procne and to bury Procne in darkness by lying to Philomele, telling her that Procne is dead. Philomele's mourning for this loss of Procne makes her more beautiful to Tereus and further increases his desire for her. Even though Philomele says no to Tereus many times, her words are powerless and Tereus rapes her. At first, Philomele blames herself for her defilement: perhaps she is the cause in that she shouldn't have been on the beach with him alone. Shortly afterwards, however, Philomele knows where to place the blame. She makes an oath to tell the world what Tereus has done, at the same time mocking his puny

manhood. The moment Philomele gains power through her language she threatens Tereus, who then cuts out her tongue so that she cannot tell. As Elissa Marder notes in her article on the Philomela story in *Metamorphoses*:

The text appears to stage two “rapes”: one “literal” and the other “symbolic.” While one might assume that the literal rape rapes the body and the figurative rape violates access to speech, the text reverses these two registers. The first actual rape is accompanied and preceded by a speech act that announces the crime. The act of speaking rape is supplemented by the act of “raping” speech - the cutting off of the tongue - that occurs later.²⁰

Philomele has been raped twice: literally in her body and figuratively in her speech. She also has been silenced twice. Her refusal of Tereus’ love has been silenced by his rape. The moment she gains her voice through criticising his crime, she is again silenced through the cutting out of her tongue. Tereus’ act of raping Philomele and cutting out her tongue is, thus, a double rape and a double silencing of Philomele.

After her violation, Philomele is cleansed by Niobe, her servant/chaperone, in order to get rid of all trace of Tereus’ body fluids. Even after the ablution, however, Philomele feels that the dirt and its smell remain on her. This is reminiscent of the opening speech in *Ficky Stingers* in which a girl scrapes her hands until she sees blood in order to get rid of a putrid smell which is later connected with rape. The character of the Woman in this play is also washed and comforted by her friends after her rape. (See *Ficky Stingers*, p. 153.) In *Beside Herself* by Sarah Daniels, Evelyn and her alter ego, Eve, also clean their hands together on a towel in an act of cleansing of the abuse Evelyn once suffered at the hands of her father. (See *Beside Herself*, p. 178.) Like the girl in *Ficky Stingers*, Philomele is psychologically unable to rid herself of Tereus’ smell, though Evelyn is washed white after the cathartic act of cleansing. Rape is always followed by purification in these plays since it is self-evidently filthy regardless of how it happened and/or what its circumstances were.

Philomele's rape is additionally connected with the long ago military occupation of Niobe's island by the Greeks. The island, which, according to Niobe, had nothing but a few olive trees on it, was 'raped' and then, later, neglected, like women, Niobe says, who are wanted only when they are fresh. Different from Philomele, who voices her anger at her defilement, Niobe is resigned and submissive about the occupation. She is unable to protect Philomele from Tereus and reacts to the rape as something which is probably unavoidable. Nostalgic about her home and displaced as a servant to the princess of the occupier, however, Niobe also suffers from the island's political rape.

As he had earlier attempted to do figuratively with Procne, Tereus buries Philomele literally in the dark by incarcerating her in a remote hut, ravishes her over a period of five years and lies to Procne, telling her that Philomele is dead. Silence makes Philomele more beautiful to Tereus as she cannot denounce him. She is seen, but never heard, like women in pornographic images who are presented as sexual objects for men's carnal desire. (See *Low Level Panic*, p. 211.) It also apparently makes her more submissive. Her hollow mouth where her tongue is missing signifies her silence and her erasure from existence. Philomele seems to have been reduced to a mad girl whose sole preoccupation is sewing dolls. On a Bacchic night, Niobe leads Philomele to a public place where she re-enacts her rape with larger-than-life-size dolls she has sewn, one representing Tereus and the other, Philomele. By applying the power of theatre, she delivers the message of her rape to the Thracians and to Procne, who is among the on-stage audience. Procne cannot believe at first that Philomele's story is true. She remembers that Philomele used to be curious about sex and thinks she may have a willing participant in the act. The hollow mouth is the proof of her ravishment, which makes Procne believe what has happened to her sister. The dolls are her

detached tongue and it is through these dolls that Philomele has found an alternative route to express her voice - theatre. Philomele uses and controls the space allowed to the Thracian women exclusively for their Bacchic festival. The enactment of her story through the dolls is Philomele's celebration of her survival from her violation. Procne's acknowledgement of her husband's violence against her sister restores their female bonding.

The Bacchic festival is a female forum which Thracian men are forbidden to enter even though they have a strong curiosity about what is taking place there. As Jane O. Newman observes: 'Dionysianism was identified with the immorality, licentiousness, and frenzy of its female devotees' (Newman, p. 318). In the Bacchic festival, women were reputed to be violent, drinking and dancing with weapons in hand like the Amazons. In Euripides's *Bacchae*, for example, Pentheus, as Newman describes, 'is torn limb from limb by his own mother under the influence of the god...Dyonisianism...involved ritual slaughtering, cooking, and consumption of the victim' (Ibid., p. 318). The rituals involved the cleansing of sin with blood. The wine Procne and Philomele later drank infuses them with Bacchic fervour. Empowered by this Bacchic atmosphere, in *The Love of the Nightingale*, Philomele kills Procne's son, Itys, while Procne holds him. This scene is briefly shown but is soon hidden by the female chorus, a difference from the lengthy description of the killing in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (noted on p. 47). The women have become the priestesses of the Bacchic ritual, killing Tereus' son. The future of Thrace is dead, as the boy, the future king, is dead. The dead child is the reflection of Tereus upon whom the two women take revenge. By doing this, the women cleanse Philomele's defilement and the crime of Tereus. Philomele and Procne join in and exploit the Bacchic tradition, unlike Lucrece in *The Rape of Lucrece*, who ends up sacrificing herself. Yet the play is not

just about Tereus' betrayal of trust and the women's revenge. Through Philomele's manipulation of the dolls, she finds other means of language, a silent, sign language. Through killing Itys, the two women challenge Tereus' power and authority in patriarchal society.

Procne also challenges Tereus directly after the murder and urges Tereus to explain about his actions. However, Tereus finds no words for them as they were 'beyond words' (p. 46). For Tereus, his passion for Philomele can be governed neither by words nor by rules. Procne, who has obeyed all the rules of her parents, her marriage, and her loneliness, claims that she help him find the words to explain his actions. She then reveals the body of Itys, whom she identifies with Tereus as his reflection, and accuses him of having 'bloodied the future' (p. 47). Seeing his dead child, Tereus makes an effort to find words to explain his action: 'I loved her. When I silenced her, it was from love. She [Philomele] didn't want my love. She could only mock, and soon rebel, she was dangerous' (p. 47). Procne tells Tereus he does not mean love but coercion, as he 'wanted something and took it' (p. 47). Tereus defends himself, saying that he did not know what love was as there was nobody to tell him. Procne replies: 'Did you ask?' (p. 47). Like Philomele who kept asking Tereus questions, Procne does the same. Both women thus challenge Tereus in word and deed.

Tereus, enraged by the women's rebellion, pursues the two sisters, with Itys' sword in hand. Philomele then turns into a nightingale, Procne into a swallow and Tereus, a hoopoe. Without these metamorphoses, Philomele believes that 'the bloodshed would have gone on forever' (p. 48). At the end of the play, Philomele regains her voice and her silence is therefore transformed into a song, which Itys likes to hear. However, first she makes him ask her questions about what happened first. In this way she tries to make Itys understand 'why it was wrong of Tereus to cut out' her

tongue (p. 49). As their conversation progresses, the initially bored Itys becomes more enthusiastic about asking questions, and eventually asks: ‘What is right?’ (p. 49). Philomele, the murderer of Itys, is reconciled with her victim in the course of these questions and answers. The reconciliation and the cleansing of cruelty seem to halt the reverberation of the myth as Philomele refuses to be a victim and resumes her role as questioner.

The story in Wertenbaker’s play is based on a Greek myth, which still echoes in the present. As the male chorus explain: a myth is ‘[T]he oblique image of an unwanted truth, reverberating through time’ (p. 19). The male chorus (who double as sailors) are ‘journalists of an antique world’ (p. 14), but they also provide a modern view of the Philomela myth, foretelling events, guiding the audience, and allowing them to reflect on what has happened. Although they know Tereus’ design on Philomele, they fail to warn Philomele against this, as they are there ‘only to observe, putting horror into words, unable to stop the events...’ (p. 14). Thus the journalists ‘choose to be accurate’ and ‘record,’ but they are powerless to intervene in Tereus’ acts. Even though, at one point, they ask Tereus questions regarding his motive for the delay in their journey, they soon stop questioning. They do not wish to know what is happening, asserting that they saw nothing. Nor do they wish to take ‘the pain of responsibility’ for the future, (p. 24) as they believe the future is in someone else’s hands. In order to sleep soundly, the male chorus become silent and blind with regard to Tereus’ cruelties.

Ripples of the myth in the present are explored in Scene 20 by the female chorus, who ask questions about the modern-day atrocities, including war, the extermination of other races, torture, the silencing of blacks, the disappearance of people who are thus silenced, and the rape and murder of little girls in the ‘car parks of dark cities’ (p. 45).

In contrast to the male chorus who stop asking questions in fear of Tereus' coercion, the female chorus (who play Procne's companions in Thrace) question Tereus' violence. Like the male chorus, they also describe what has happened and foretell the action in the play. The questions the women characters ask evoke responses to these issues from the audience. The resonance of the myth buries Philomele and Procne in the dark again in *The Love of the Nightingale*. Yet the two women break through silence and darkness, and soar into the skies. Their flight is the sublimation and metamorphosis of their pain.

As Wertenbaker mentions earlier, her plays are 'an attempt to get away from the smallness of naturalism, from enclosed rooms to open spaces, to something wider'. Philomele goes into open spaces when she begins her journey by leaving her father and his protection in order to visit her sister in Thrace. Her father's protection is transferred to Tereus, her brother-in-law and to the Greek guards the King sends with her. As she travels, she encounters abduction, rape, mutilation and incarceration, committed by Tereus, who betrays King Pandion's trust. Yet, Philomele gains an insight into what has happened to her and what she wishes to do against these cruelties, which she vows to make known to the world. Philomele again leaves from her incarceration to an open space where she tells her story. Her initial journey reveals the oppressive male power against women and the cost women have to pay for their challenge against it. The second, brief travel demonstrates Philomele's, and later Procne's, fighting spirit against this oppressive power.

NOTES

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- ¹ J. M. Coetzee, *Foe* quoted in Graham Huggan, 'Philomela's Retold Story; Silence, Music, and the Post-Colonial Text', *The Journal of Commonwealth Literature*, 25 (1), (1990), 12-23, (p. 17).
- ² C. T. Prouty, *George Gascoigne: Elizabethan Courtier, Soldier, and Poet* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1942), p. 253.
- ³ Allen Grossman, 'Orpheus/Philomela: Subjection and Mastery in the Founding Stories of Poetic Production and in the Logic of Our Practice', *Triquarterly*, 77 Winter (1989-90), 229-248 (p. 240).
- ⁴ K. Sara Myers, 'Preface,' *Ovid's Causes: Cosmogony and Aetiology in the Metamorphoses* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1994), p. vi.
- ⁵ G. Karl Galinsky, *Ovid's Metamorphoses: An Introduction to the Basic Aspects* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1975), pp. 129-130.
- ⁶ Caputi quotes Adolphe Jensen, *Myth and Cult among Primitive Peoples*, trans. Marianna Tax Cholsin and Wolfgang Weissleder (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1963); René Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, trans. Patrick Gregory (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University, 1977).
- ⁷ Ovid, *Metamorphoses, Book VI*, translated with an introduction by Mary M. Innes (Harmondsworth: Penguin Classics, 1955), p. 149.
- ⁸ Edgar Finley Shannon, *Chaucer and the Roman Poets* (New York: Russell & Russell, 1964), p. xiv.
- ⁹ R. J. Dingley, 'The Misfortune of Philomel', *Parergon: Bulletin of the Australian and New Zealand Assoc. for Medieval and Renaissance Studies*, 4 (1986), 73-86 (p. 80).
- ¹⁰ George Pettie, *A Petite Pallace of Pettie His Pleasure: Containing Many Pretie Histories by Him Set Forth in Comely Colours and Most Delightfully Discoursed*, Vol. I, ed. by Professor I. Gollancz, (London: Chatto and Windus, 1908), p. 70.
- ¹¹ Eugene M. Waith, 'The Metamorphosis of Violence in *Titus Andronicus*', *Shakespeare Survey*, 10 (1957), 39-49 (p. 39).
- ¹² The lines of *Titus Andronicus* quoted here are from *Titus Andronicus* (125-152) in *William Shakespeare: The Complete Works*, ed. by Stanley Wells and Gray Taylor (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991).
- ¹³ Jane O. Newman, "And Let Mild Women to Him Lose Their Mildness": Philomela, Female Violence, and Shakespeare's *The Rape of Lucrece*', *Shakespeare Quarterly*, Fall 45:3 (1994), 304-326 (p. 304).
- ¹⁴ Bob Evans, 'The Ultimate Post-Bicentenary Event', *Sunday Morning Herald*, 30 May 1989. quoted in Sue Carlson: 'Issues of Identity, Nationality, and Performance: the Reception of Two Plays by Timberlake Wertenbaker', *New Theatre Quarterly*, 35 (1993), 267-89 (p. 268).
- ¹⁵ For the list of her plays, see 'WERTENBAKER' in *Contemporary Dramatists* (London: St. James Press, 1993) or *Contemporary Women Dramatists* (London: St. James Press, 1994).
- ¹⁶ Trevor Griffiths, 'Timberlake Wertenbaker' in *British and Irish Women Dramatists Since 1958: A Critical Handbook*, ed. by Trevor R. Griffiths and Margaret Llewellyn-Jones (Buckingham: Open University Press, 1993), pp. 73-6 (p. 73).
- ¹⁷ *Contemporary Dramatists*, p. 696.
- ¹⁸ Paul Arnot, Independent (23.8.1989) in Geraldine Cousin, *Women in Dramatic Time and Place: Contemporary Female Characters on Stage* (London: Routledge, 1996), p. 117.
- ¹⁹ Michael Billington, *Guardian* (11.11.88), 'The Love of the Nightingale', *London Theatre Record*, Vol 8, Issue 15, (1988), 1599-1602 (p. 1602).
- ²⁰ Elissa Marder, 'Disarticulated Voices: Feminism and Philomela', *Hypatia* 7 (2) (Spring 1992), 149-175, (p. 158).

Chapter 2. Witches

Women in the thirteenth to the seventeenth centuries, like women in other periods of their history until very recent times, had no rights of their own and no control over their lives. Most women suffered from poverty of one kind and another, under their fathers' dominance and then in their husbands' hands. Most of them accepted their fate, but some of them were desperate to escape from this predicament and to turn elsewhere in order to improve their situation or remedy their plight. Their hardship perhaps made them more vulnerable to accusations of witchcraft. Antonia Fraser, an English feminist historian, quotes William Perkins, who wrote in 1608, on witchcraft: 'The woman being the weaker sex, is sooner entangled by the devilss [sic] illusions with this damnable art than the man.' Fraser continues, 'Witchcraft and sorcery represented perhaps the extreme forms of the devil's attention to womankind.'¹ Women who were accused of exercising witchcraft and were executed as witches in Europe in the thirteenth to the seventeenth centuries were usually unconventional in their daily and sexual lives. These women were social outcasts - mostly spinsters and widows whom men did not have direct access to and thus were beyond men's immediate control. They were often accused of sexual impurity.

These women were hunted by inquisitors and tried. They were pushed into water. If they floated, they were regarded as witches and burned at the stake (or hanged in England). If they didn't float, they were innocent, but drowned. It was a Hobson's Choice for them: they were either killed by water or by fire (or hanging) once they were taken for trial. They were also pricked for the inquisitors to see if there is any devil's mark. They could not escape the man-made social conventions which bound women. As Susan Griffin notes:

The idea that the sight of a woman's body calls a man back to his own animal nature, and that this animal nature soon destroys him, reverberates throughout culture. Eve brought deaths into the world. And this mythology entered the reasoning minds of monks who shaped an ideology for the burning of witches. Thus in *Malleus Maleficarum*, Sprenger and Kramer write that when men see and hear women, they "are caught by their carnal desires," for a woman's voice is "the hissing of serpents".²

The *Malleus Maleficarum* (the Hammer of Witches) is a comprehensive witch-hunter's guidebook. As Rosemary Ellen Guiley writes, it is 'by far the most important treatise on prosecuting witches to come out of the witch hysteria of the Middle Ages and Renaissance.'³ It was first published in Germany in 1486 and later 'proliferated into dozens of editions throughout Europe and England and had a profound impact on witch trials on the Continent for about 200 years' (Ibid., p. 221). Its authors, Heinrich Kramer and Jacob Sprenger, Dominican inquisitors, insisted that 'All witchcraft comes from carnal lust, which in woman is insatiable.'⁴ Furthermore, they stated that women are 'chiefly addicted to Evil superstitions' because they are feeble-brained, 'intellectually like children,' weak in body, impressionable, lustful, have weak memories and are by nature liars.⁵ The *Malleus Maleficarum* is fraught with misogyny. This misogyny rather than women's weakness or insatiable lust can be seen as the origin of European witch-hunts and witch trials. The women's real faults would have been a refusal to obey men, in an effort to redress their own misery, and a strong penchant for independence. Men were threatened when women showed any sign of challenge against them. They labelled them as heretics and executed them as witches.

There is another reason believed for witch-hunts. By the late sixteenth century, the collapse of the feudal system led to the fact that the poor were essentially the responsibility of local ratepayers. Rather as happens today, some of those ratepayers were resentful and saw some poor people as undeserving. In times of stress or

economic privation these members of the undeserving poor could be seen as witches.

As Dworkin describes witchcraft:

Witches are accused of flying, having carnal relations with Satan, injuring cattle, causing hailstorms and tempests, causing illness and epidemics, bewitching men, changing men and themselves into animals, changing animals into people, committing act of cannibalism and murder, stealing male genitals, causing male genitals to disappear. (*Our Blood*, p. 17)

The majority of people who accused others of being witches really believed in the existence of witches. This is clearly portrayed in Caryl Churchill's *Vinegar Tom* (1976).

Another play, *Byrthrite* (1986) by Sarah Daniels set during the Civil War, is about the seventeenth century witchcraze. In *Byrthrite* Daniels focuses on a period of social change when, among other things, women's ancient role as midwives was beginning to be taken over by men. In her play Daniels explores the women who are accused of witchcraft as victims of this process. *Witchcraze* (1985), also a play about witches, was written by Bryony Lavery. The action begins at a pre-historical time of 'magic' and then moves on to the death of magic and the beginning of history. After the birth of the religion (Christianity), the god of the old religion becomes the devil of the new. *Witchcraze* also goes through the advent of Christianity, patriarchy and capitalism under each of which women have suffered. In *Crux* (1990), April de Angelis explores late medieval France before the *Malleus Maleficarum*. The women in all these plays are impoverished. They starve and are victimised. Sometimes they are hanged or burned. Among these plays, *Crux* will be discussed below in order to achieve another perspective of how women who wanted independence were perceived and treated in the past and how they protested against their male-dominated societies.

Crux

Ancient legends among the Ona and Yahgans of Tierra del Fuego bear a chilling resemblance to the European witch-hunts. According to Ona legend, witchcraft and the magical arts were known only to women in the old days of Ona-land. The women kept their own Lodge, which was closed to men. They had the power to cause sickness and death, and the men lived in total fear of them. Finally, the men decided they had had enough tyranny and that a dead witch was better than a live witch. They massacred all the women and adolescent girls. They spared only the smallest girls who had not yet begun their training in witchcraft, so that the men eventually would have wives again. To prevent the girls from banding together and reasserting their power when they grew up, the men formed a secret society and Lodge, protected by fierce demons, which excluded women. The men kept their dominance over women from then on.

Rosemary Ellen Guiley *The Encyclopedia of Witches and Witchcraft*

Originally commissioned by Paines Plough Theatre Company in 1989, *Crux* was written by April De Angelis. It was first staged at The Towngate Centre, Basildon in 1990, had a subsequent national tour and then transferred to the Lyric Studio, Hammersmith. De Angelis is also the author of a number of plays including *Ironmistress* (1989), a play set in the time of the Industrial Revolution, which explores women having power in a male-dominated commerce world. Her other plays are: *Breathless* (1983), the Frankenstein story in a gothic light; *Women and Love* (1988); *Hush* (1992), a story of young people who gather around at a weekend. Her most recent play, *The Positive Hour*, was performed by Out of Joint Theatre Company in 1997.

April de Angelis' commission from Paines Plough was to write a play about the crusades. In the course of her research, she came across a thirteenth century religious doctrine - the Doctrine of the Free Spirit. As she explains:

[T]he followers of this doctrine believed in a sort of radical pantheism; that they were made from the same substance as God and therefore they could not sin, did not need to own property (how can you supplement God?) and had no room for a concept of guilt. These free spiritters lived in houses scattered across medieval Europe and one of these houses was a house of women. I was fascinated by the

idea of women that lived with such an overwhelming commitment to a sense of self-love.⁶

The Doctrine of the Free Spirit was opposed by the Church and its followers were persecuted. In 1309, as the playwright explains, ‘a woman called Marguarite Porete was burnt at the stake for refusing to renounce her ‘heresy’’ (*Ibid.*, p. 48). *Crux* dramatises the life of Marguarite Porete and her fictional companions, who were brave enough to attempt to break away from the hard male grip which was strongly backed by the Church.

In *Crux* the protagonist is Marguarite and there are three other women: Agnes, Joan and Madelaine. Living away from their families and together in ‘a house of Voluntary Poverty’, the four women try to lead an independent life in their society of early fourteenth century France. As Anthony Curtis describes Catherine Armstrong’s set: ‘A collection of mediaeval memorabilia hanging from the ceiling...’⁷ The memorabilia include ‘chevaliers’ leg-armour, a golden altar-piece, a scales of justice heavily tilted’ which obviously ‘remind us of the medieval period’ (*Ibid.* p. 502). The drama suggests that, as in so many periods, the Middle or Dark Ages – the time of crusades – were times of persecution for women. The pursuit of the Doctrine of the Free Spirit by the four women is suppressed by the male-dominated Catholic Church, represented in this drama by the only two male characters: the Bishop, who becomes the Pope, and the Man. The women in the play are the scapegoats of men’s fear of women achieving independence and power through their pursuit of the doctrine of their choice. However, the four women demonstrate their power, tenacity, communal trust and solidarity.

The play starts with a speech by Maguarite, which includes an image expressive of the overall feeling of the play - the burning of a woman on a pyre, surrounded by

children while male authorial figures watch them. The pain of Marguarite's burning is felt by the audience in colour and sound as Marguarite delivers the speech in a red light: 'Someone is crying...it's me! Fire on the sticks. It's me...' (p. 49). Yet, like the readers of Ovid's Philomela story who may have enjoyed her suffering in medieval times, the surrounding people including children and executioners do not seem to sympathise with Marguarite and are nonchalant about her burning pain. The opening speech foretells what is to come in the course of action and shows particularly how Marguarite has been silenced and turned into ashes. However, Marguarite comes alive again on the stage to tell us her story in this drama. Marguarite's story begins when she is confined in a small room, weaving all day, and hears about the free spiritters. Something like fire inside her stirs and makes her leave her community and poverty for a better life in spite of the advice from the weaver she works for: 'Don't listen...Shut them out' (p. 63). Marguarite rebels against the Bible, which says, 'You must live by the sweat of your brow' (p. 63). This is the ordeal of pain and toil, which, it has been believed, Eve's sin brought into the world. Women have long been blamed for the sin Eve committed and have been hated. However, men and women have been expected to accept the inevitability of their fate. Marguarite resists her fate, accusing her employer of exploiting her: '...must you live by the sweat of my brow...' (p. 63). In doing so, she likens herself to Eve: 'Now I make myself like an Eve with her own clay' (p. 63). The Church has placed women under oppression because of original sin and punished them if they transgressed the space allocated for them. Especially, in medieval and Renaissance times, rebellious women were regarded as witches and burnt or hanged. In the same context, Marguarite is punished by being burnt because of her rebellion against the Church.

The life Marguarite had dreamed of turns out differently from what she expects in that she moves from one kind of poverty into another. In the latter case, however, poverty is deliberately chosen in that Marguarite becomes the leader of a house of the Voluntary Poverty. This house to which the women give constant care by repairing with stones and mud provides them with spaces of their own - a shelter for their security, freedom, and autonomy. Marguarite has a strong impulse to express herself; she wants to write a book on the Doctrine of the Free Spirit - her version of egalitarianism. Geraldine Cousin in her book, *Women in Dramatic Time and Place*, writes with reference to *Byrthrite* (1986) by Sarah Daniels, 'The skills that women hand down are of two kinds: the traditional art of healing and midwifery, and newly acquired, speech-based skills' (Cousin, p. 94). Marguarite has the latter skill which has been traditionally exclusively allowed to the men of the privileged classes. Throughout this drama Marguarite, empowered with her speech skills, preaches her Doctrine to the people as well as to the women she shares the house with. Like Rose, who has written a play in *Byrthrie*, she has a desire to write her ideas of the Doctrine she pursues. Marguarite's speech-based skills and her knowledge of the Doctrine pose a threat to the existing authority, the patriarchal Church. Marguarite claims she is equal to God, let alone men. This is strongly opposed by the Church, which is determined to destroy the house. Marguarite and her companions originally live on people's donations, but, when these are no longer forthcoming, they again suffer from abject poverty as they have no means by which to live. Still, they refuse to give up hope. They continue to collect mud and stones to mend the wall of the house even though the house is becoming deserted. Even when the other women renounce their belief, Marguarite continues to defy the Church's persecution. Later during her inquisition she dares to defey the Pope, voicing her opinion with regard to the Doctrine of Free Spirit.

Marguarite insists that God is in her, she is God, a blasphemy to Christians of their time who believed that God meant and ruled everything. Her belief has transformed her life. Marguarite controls her own life, declaring that she can be anything after the nothing she was when she worked for the man, the weaver. Marguarite refuses to renounce her beliefs despite the efforts of Madelaine, one of her companions, and her own knowledge that she will be burnt as a witch. She therefore accepts her martyrdom in furtherance of her cause.

A quartet of women live in the house of the Voluntary Poverty. However, the focus of each of their lives is different. If Marguarite is devoted to the dissemination of her belief that God and human beings are equal, Madelaine pursues her sexual freedom: she is unconventional in her sex life. A prostitute perhaps before she joined the community, she later refuses to be a whore by rejecting the money offered by the man she has sex with. She wants to be equal to him rather than sexually serving him for money, but he does not understand her. In her refusal to confine herself to a relationship with one man, Madelaine demonstrates her independence: she wishes to go her own way when she loses interest in a man, instead of depending on him for her living even though she does not love him. While living in the house with the other women, from time to time she leaves to see the Man. One of the other women, Agnes, on the other hand, pursues the Doctrine, through practising abstemiousness, though she suffers from the desire for a man. Different from Marguarite, who is unperturbed by hunger, the more down-to-earth Madelaine suffers from hunger a great deal when there is no more food available. She knows exactly what men or the Church would do to the house and the inhabitants - destroy it and them - while the idealist Marguarite refuses to accept it. To rebel against the Church in her time means excommunication and to be socially outcast. Being practical, Madelaine eventually accepts the Church, renouncing

her beliefs in order to comfortably settle down. Even though Madelaine apparently renounces the Doctrine, she, however, continues to be sexually free. Later she becomes pregnant with a baby whose father is unknown. Her practice of the Doctrine is different from that of Marguarite and Agnes, but Madelaine dares to rebel against the Church, especially, in terms of sexuality.

Women in medieval ages, as in many other times, were so oppressed in their societies that they had no choice but to suppress their longing for freedom. Like the three other women in this drama, however, Agnes leaves her home. Her longing to be free from the shackles of poverty and patriarchal institutions is regarded by her society as devilish. Nonetheless, Agnes cannot resist her impulse, despite warnings from her father. She has a longing for a man and at the same time her yearning is also towards Jesus Christ, who died, bleeding on the cross - the yearning so strong that it has a strong sexual element. Perhaps to Agnes, a man and Jesus are one entity.

AGNES alone in the forest

AGNES: Are you here?...

Close my eyes. Imagine you're here.
 I imagine your curly beard...
 Feel it on my neck, rubbing that soft bit behind my ear.
 Or on the hollow that leads to my shoulder like a river leads to a sea.
 You could get inside my dress with me and we could pray.
 I love you. You're all I think of.
 As if we'd swapped bones.
 I'll wait for you. (p. 56)

Agnes is at a crossroad because of her desire to pursue simultaneously both Christ and sexuality and this is not possible within her society. Her sexual impulses are expressed in sexual fantasy, unlike Madelaine's, which are expressed in actuality. She is masochistic and hurts herself in order to suppress her sexual longing. As Ljubima Woods argues, *Cruix* 'raises some important questions on the influence of religion on a susceptible mind as in the case of Agnes who believes flagellation to be the only

virtuous pain in life.⁸ However, Marguarite strongly believes and tells Agnes that the flesh is as important as the spirit. She compares the importance of the flesh, which keeps the bones warm, to the walls of their house. Her doctrine is not however acceptable in her society.

Through her chastity and religious faithfulness, Agnes is associated with St. Agnes, who ‘died burning on a giant wheel’ and ‘lit a whole port doing that’ (p. 77). Agnes has a vision of a woman being burnt at a stake:

AGNES: ...all your nice hair flaming up and going to black ash and falling off so you look like inside a bad egg and all your hands and feet crisping up like bacon... (p. 71)

The woman experiences a living hell tied to the stake and is unable to escape from the fire even after death, for Agnes’s vision also includes images of people being burnt forever in hell. Agnes foresees what is to come to women who don’t conform to the Church in her time. Her vision is also a warning to her close friend, Joan, that anybody who revolts against the Church will be punished by being burnt. Agnes does not want to upset God who she thinks is listening to her conversation with Joan. She wants to be ‘a nice girl’ (p. 71). Like Madelaine, Agnes renounces the belief. However, her strong penchant towards Christianity leads her to become a nun. In the end, therefore, Agnes adopts one of the female roles sanctioned by the Church. It is important however to remember that she initially had the courage to leave her home in order to explore her desire.

Joan, the fourth character, and the final member of the house of Voluntary Poverty, always carries a bucket with her, as though it is her companion. This makes her look funny and innocent. Like Marguarite, Joan also has left her community, yearning for a new, better life. In her home in which she had no place of her own, and which was always filled with smoke (the only outlet of which was a hole in the

ceiling), Joan used to look up at this outlet in the hope that it might provide a release from her sense of suffocation. It seems to her that the hole was a channel through which she could reach outside, perhaps even to heaven, and, further, an exit from her confinements. Having left home, she has the freedom to go anywhere as ‘no-one would try and stop’ her (p. 49). Her freedom also makes her feel that she is confident and that she can do anything. Even though she is not sure about the result of her decision to leave her home, she at least knows that she can form thoughts and then put her thoughts into action. When Joan first comes to the house, the four women celebrate their freedom by dancing, an action which Madelaine suggests. Women at the time were required to be calm and static. Yet, the quartet of women join together and wildly move their arms and legs, spinning round with joy. What Madelaine calls the ‘devine inspired dance’ (p. 55) Joan devises exudes the ecstasy of their liberation from their constraint. (It has some similarity to the fox Marje sees dancing on Wandsworth Common in *Thatcher's Women*, p. 195.) The women are overjoyed by their apparent freedom from oppression even though this freedom is not guaranteed permanently, but remains ultimately subject to their male controlled society. The joy of the dance they share establishes a female bonding among the women, which is demonstrated later when the other three women surround Joan to give her support in her new life.

Joan works hard to collect mud to build the house, which shelters her and gives her autonomy. She has friends: a chicken (which she later eats when she has no other food), Agnes, and the company of the bucket that is always in her hand. Like the other women in the house, Joan wants to be free from her confinements, including those within her. Her yearnings are always soaring into the skies: ‘I wish I had something. A feather’ (p. 74). Joan weaves mats for the house and also for people’s comfort and rest. After the house is closed by the Church, she wishes to start a new independent life in a

town by making mats - some with patterns of feathers which would lift her up into the skies and make her free like a bird. The mats she weaves are the expression of her yearnings, whereas Marguarite wants to express herself by writing a book on her doctrine. In *The Love of the Nightingale*, Philomele sews dolls when her tongue is cut out and Philomela in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* weaves a tapestry. Each woman having lost the means of speech - her tongue - expresses her anger and desire to communicate through external means. Joan too finds a way of demonstrating her desire. Like Philomela, she weaves a woman's 'text' - in Allen Grossman's words, 'a textile...an epistle.' Later, after she has left the community Joan designs her own house (as Marguarite designed their communal house) and designs and weave mats which will provide others with comfort. Though she deserts her doctrine, Joan is full of hope for her new life. Towards the end of the play, she sees fire which will lighten up her future and illuminate her. In addition to its destructive power as is seen in the opening scene, fire is therefore also a constructive force.

The male characters are portrayed as absurd, timid, funny, yet also cruel. The Bishop, who later becomes the Pope, represents Christianity in medieval times. He is confined to his chair and his position, from which he wants to get away from time to time. He also feels as though he is suffocating like the women, but he remains where he is unlike the women who leave their suffocating environments. As Ljubima Woods comments in her review, '*Crux* represents a sharp exposé of the hypocrisy of the Church and its total alienation from life's reality' (*What's On*). The Bishop has a microcosmic view: he cannot see beyond what is around him. To him, even God is as tiny as a raisin: 'I could feel my spittle beginning to drench our lord./ Beginning to turn into a great river and wash him down my throat' (p. 62). The Bishop exaggerates himself by miniaturising everything else. He has a vision in which Jesus says: 'There's

work to be done' (p. 62) and is obsessed with a 'holy war' against the women, the followers of the 'heretic' Doctrine of the Free Spirit. Just like the crusaders who stormed walls and slaughtered Mohammed's people, he is set to crush the house. Or perhaps he is determined to do so because his attendant, the Man, was sexually rejected by Madelaine, one of the inhabitants of the House. The battle of the holy war the Bishop experienced presents an image of decay, from stinking bodies and burning cities, the latter being much associated with the burning of witches. While committed to his holy mission, he nevertheless experiences vile, sexual lust, which constantly obsesses him. Although he wishes to be godly in appearance as he declares that he is a 'man of God' (p. 85), inside, he is deluged with erotic fantasies which are very pornographic. Despite being a clergyman, who is decreed to be celibate and abstinent by the Church, the Bishop is a sexual pervert, desiring to take sexual pleasure from others' secretions.

The Bishop is hollow and without substance. He speaks a dream-like language, reminiscing about his triumphs over the Muslims in a holy war or repeatedly talking about God's work. However, he is full of phobias and often has nightmares, perhaps suffering traumas from the brutalities Muslims have committed against Christians in the holy war. The brutalities he witnessed with horror haunt him persistently.

BISHOP: The city of a nation waiting to swamp Christ's lands.

(He approaches the MAN in a threatening manner.)

If they come across you, a christian, they'd behead you, or disembowel you, no questions asked. First though, they'd cut off your feet and wave them in your face and sneer 'Where's your god now'!

That's what they'd sneer.

Then they'd drink your blood.

Then fuck you both before and after you'd passed over. (p. 64)

He constantly feels threats from under his chair in the form of creeping creatures with many 'feet' - perhaps spiders - as evils. He believes the threatening images could ruin his position and his constant fear creates hallucinations.

(The women come to life around the men. They cannot see the men but continue their daily ritual.)

BISHOP: I can see them. Should I speak to them?...They're are taking off my clothes.

(BISHOP is taking off his own clothes.)...

BISHOP: They're waving my shoes in my face and they're shouting...Where's your god now? Where's your god now? (pp. 65-6)

In his hallucination the Bishop's nightmarish experience in the holy war is re-enacted and this time he is mocked by the women, instead of the Moslems. The cut-off feet waved in face by Moslems are now replaced by his shoes waved in his face by the women. His shoes represent his feet, signifying the mutilation and immobilisation he dreaded so much in his holy war. To the Bishop, the women pursuing the Doctrine of the Holy Spirit, like the creeping creatures under his chair, have a subversive power in the context of men, including himself, and eventually may defy his authority and challenge his power. The Bishop is eager to crush the threats - these women, like the Moselms, who would also 'swamp Christ's lands'. The Bishop identifies the holy war with God's work to be done against the women.

The Man, perhaps representing generic man, is a sycophant to the Bishop. He has a relationship with Madelaine, but it ends when Madelaine loses interest in him and decides to go her own way, which makes him feel humiliated. From time to time he plays the role of jester to the Bishop. He believes that the Bishop's glorious past in the holy war ensures his present power and authority. The Man and the Bishop re-enact a scene where the Bishop met a girl in a city which was stinking with corpses. The girl sneaked into the city and pillaged precious things from dead people. The secret way the

girl entered the city gives the Bishop an idea of approaching his city and rounding up the women: ‘If it’s against you, burn it,’ he says (p. 73). Together, the Bishop and the Man daydream about a long siege, another ‘holy war’ against the women in the name of God. The men fear that their power is on the edge of collapse because of the women. Like the Bishop, the Man has no sense of reality: they are both religiously superstitious and corrupt. Both men fear the women becoming stronger, a threat to themselves and their institutions. The Man, rejected by Madelaine, and the Bishop, fearful of the Doctrine of Free Spirit becoming more popular, are thus united to crush the house and terminate the women’s doctrine. Both the Bishop and the Man have lecherous desires for women, but, at the same time, they hate and fear women for the possible subversive power of their sexuality.

Women drown in water during the witch trials, as in Noah’s time when people were also tried by water. Women are burned at the stake as witches if they don’t follow patriarchal norms. The four women want air to avoid suffocation. Unlike other women of medieval times, who mostly stayed at home except for their work in the fields, the four women leave their enclosed spaces and trespass into open spaces, despite the warnings from their family or friends and despite the fact that they may eventually wish to return home when they find it hard to endure the hardship they may face outside their protected confines.

AGNES: You’ll end up like a stone turned up by a plough wishing someone would put you in their pocket and bring you back. (p. 56)

Marguarite goes about preaching her doctrine. Joan and Agnes together go to the woods to collect stones and mud for their house, which they hope will protect them and provide them with a space of their own. Madelaine leaves the house from time to time for her sexual freedom. Though living by begging, they resist all patriarchal

religion and morality. Their poverty is so abject at the end that they wait for a miracle, which never happen. The quartet of women (like the trio in *Thatcher's Women*) hope and struggle to get out of poverty and oppression and try to control their own lives. However, they are accused of being parasitic upon the godfearing community by the male-dominated Church, which eventually destroys Marguarite. Still, the remaining three women sustain themselves in their endeavours for their freedom. The women are not wicked, as the Christian authorities of that time consider them to be, but ordinary women trying to get out of their plight and to escape the victimhood of their times. These women are brave, risking expulsion from their own society and the security which would have protected them if they stayed at home (at the cost admittedly of their oppression). Although their cause is aborted, they have made at least a step towards changes for women's freedom and independence.

NOTES

¹ Antonia Fraser, *The Weaker Vessel: Women's Lot in Seventeenth-Century England* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1984), p. 2.

² Susan Griffin, *Pornography and Silence: Culture's Revenge, Against Nature* (London: The Women's Press, 1988), p. 31.

³ Rosemary Ellen Guiley, *The Encyclopedia of Witches and Witchcraft* (New York: Facts On File, 1989), p. 221.

⁴ Originally from *Malleus Maleficarum*, quoted in Mary Daly, *Gyn/Ecology*, p.180.

⁵ Originally from *Malleus Maleficarum*, quoted in Guiley, p. 221.

⁶ April de Angelis, a foreword to *Crux in Seven Plays by Women: Female Voices, Fighting Lives*, ed. by Cheryl Robson (London: Aurora Metro Press, 1991), p. 48.

⁷ Anthony Curtis, *Financial Times* (19.4.90), 'Crux', *London Theatre Record*, Vol 10, Issue 8 (1990), p. 502.

⁸ Ljubima Woods, *What's On* (25.4.90), 'Crux', *London Theatre Record* (1990), p. 503.

Chapter 3. Women in Social Turmoil

Women and men both suffer from many kinds of deprivation and turmoil: war, natural disasters, social commotion, political oppression and hunger. However, it is upon women that these factors have more impact than men. Traditionally women have been excluded from the decision on, and direct participation in, hostilities, though they have been present on the sidelines in order to support men. In the course of this involvement, they have suffered hardship. When women are without protection by their husbands, fathers or brothers, they become easy prey for rape and other forms of victimisation such as bullying, abduction, and mutilation by invading armies. In times of political oppression, when men and women are taken and incarcerated because of their political opinions, women are often raped and sexually humiliated as part of their torture. Some of these victims try to redress their situation, but mostly, they have no way out of their plight and are obliged to suffer it. Most men and women are forced to comply with people in power during social upheaval for the sake of their security and lives.

Some brave women however fight in order to preserve their lives, and the stories of some of them figure in my chosen plays. Cheryl Robson's play, *The Taking of Liberty*, is such an example where women suffer from social turmoil - the French Revolution (1789-1799). Darline Gay Levy and Harriet B. Applewhite observe with regard to the French Revolution in 'Women of the Popular Classes in Revolutionary Paris, 1789-1795':

Political change in eighteenth-century France affected political institutions in Paris and touched the lives of common women, foreshadowing the revolutionary experience of their daughters and granddaughters. The administrative centralization of such governmental concerns as taxes, justice, police public works, and natural resources that occurred during the long period between the seventeenth century and the Revolution had complicated and contradictory

impacts on people's lives: their religious practices, their work, and their subsistence.¹

The two scholars describe marches and protests in which common women in Paris participated from the early eighteenth century until the time of the French Revolution. The women's actions were primarily concerned with their basic livelihood: the prices and supply of sugar, bread, and other essential necessities. Particularly, during the Revolution, for example, market women marched with bread and flowers to express appreciation to Sainte Geneviève, the guardian of Paris, for relieving hunger in August and September 1789. On October 5, 1789 women marched to Versailles to demand bread from Louis XVI. Fishwives marched around the meeting hall of the National Assembly during the October Days in order to praise its president for supporting M. le Veto and laundresses petitioned the Jacobin Club to demand 'the death penalty for horders and speculators in foodstuffs and bleach' (*Ibid.*, p. 9). When uncertain power struggles, or economic hardship were uncontrollable, as in the summer of 1791 and the spring of 1793, more women joined in protests. The two above-named historians observe how they participated in their democratic, political activities:

Women signed petitions, marched and demonstrated, attended meetings, formed deputations, and persuaded, frightened, or coerced political authorities to accede to their demands. (*Ibid.*, p. 28)

Even though these democratic movements were suppressed by the French Government after the Revolution, they are remembered as initiating the fight for 'popular control of political power' (*Ibid.*, p. 28). This is the situation which forms the background against which *The Taking of Liberty* is set. The play depicts brave women who fight for themselves in order to preserve the benefits of their relatively stable past, defying coercion by the French Revolutionary Forces.

The Taking of Liberty

AGATHE: If a woman, a friend, is murdered for what she believes, we're all violated. All stained, all stitched together - a puzzle of knots, not a fine lacework cloth but blood-drenched rag of a thing dragged from one execution to another.

Cheryl Robson *The Taking of Liberty*

Philomele's spirit of resistance against her violation and her refusal to be a victim lives on in *The Taking of Liberty*. This drama is also a continuation of *Crux* in that women refuse to be the victims of authority and its coercive practices even though they are victimised for their beliefs. Like *Crux*, there are four major women in this play: Agathe, Jeanne, Catherine and Thérèse, who strongly voice their protest against oppression. The difference is that in *Crux* the women refuse the authority of the patriarchal Church in medieval times, but in *The Taking of Liberty* the women want to restore Christianity following the French Revolution in the late eighteenth century. Their relatively stable life under the Church and the Monarchy has been succeeded by devastation when the Revolutionary Army begins to rule Saint Germain-Laval in South France. In both plays, however, women fight for their lives and some refuse to renounce their beliefs, no matter what the cost may be.

The Taking of Liberty was first performed by Man in the Moon Company in August 1992, in the Woman in the Moon season. The playwright, Cheryl Robson, is also the author of *Bata Ya*, *Scream and Dream Again*, and *O Architect*. *The Taking of Liberty* was the winner of the South London Playwriting competition at the Croydon Warehouse in 1990. Cheryl Robson was inspired to write this play by 'a documentary on the French Revolution made by Alan Ecreira in 1989' on television and she conducted research on the Revolution by making use of 'the French source material in

the British Library.² As the author writes on the background of *The Taking of the Liberty*:

The play is based on an account of real events which occurred in Saint Germain-Laval, a small commune near Lyon, in a deeply conservative region of France which rebelled against the Revolution and fought to keep the institutions of the Monarchy and the Church alive. A period of savage repression by the revolutionary forces followed.

In such a rural community, agriculture and religious observance tended to provide the structure for society. With both of these under attack and disempowered - the former by the loss of men to war, poor harvests, fixed price trade limitations and the latter by the dechristianisation rulings, the sense of community broke down and fear and insecurity became all-pervasive. (Ibid., p. 222)

As in the opening scene of *Crux*, where Marguarite is being burned, the opening scene in this drama is also associated with death in that bodies are strewn around the stage. In contrast to the burning scene of *Crux*, where Marguarite is silenced, however, in *The Taking of Liberty* Agathe is committed to find her voice and make it heard. On the public level of her speech, Agathe calls for those who have been silenced to speak out. Agathe beseeches people to explore new ideas and stand up for their cause. On the personal level, she wishes to make herself heard and refuses to be silenced come what may. She is also determined to think and act for her cause, even if this means risking her life. The speech is literally repeated near the end of the play, when it demonstrates the insight Agathe has gained as a result of her refusal to be silenced. Despite the backdrop of death against which Agathe speaks forcibly, the opening speech implies hope and a dream of a future in which women may find unity and freedom.

Scene Two opens in the market-place in Saint Germain-Laval in the winter 1793. A stone cross is situated on a plinth centre stage. The Church which has been the centre of people's lives, along with agriculture in Saint Germain-Laval, is banned by the Revolution. With the backbone of their society collapsing, people in this region are fearful for their security. Agathe, a miller, Jeanne, the wife of the Mayor, and

Catherine, the owner of a cotton-factory, are among those who are concerned about the Revolution's attempt at obliterating the Church and about the worsening condition of their lives. In the market-place Jeanne and Catherine sweep up autumn leaves and put them in a brazier. During the women's cleaning operation, Agathe enters, goes to the cross, removes the leaves, dusts the cross and puts winter flowers at the base. She crosses herself. The stone cross has been neglected by the townspeople. The women tell Agathe that placing flowers anywhere near the cross is forbidden by the Revolution and Jeanne explains that Agathe's observance of God will get the priest into trouble, as he 'has sworn an oath' (p. 224) to the Republic. Embarrassed by Agathe's act, Jeanne hurriedly removes the flowers, which are then thrown in the brazier by Catherine. Agathe strongly voices her opposition to the Revolution which has prohibited the Church and the old values of her father who 'put up this cross' and 'loved God' (p. 228) and 'would never have sworn to love Robespierre before God' (p. 224). The sweeping up and the presence of the brazier on stage signify a desire to clear up the market-place, but as Agathe maintains, they cannot serve to 'clean up what can't be cleaned up'. Agathe tells the women to leave the leaves 'to rot where they are' (p. 224), since the atrocities the Revolution inflicts on people cannot be cleaned up no matter how hard Jeanne and Catherine try to sweep the place. Agathe's rebellious acts and thoughts accelerate throughout the play to its end where she decides to devote herself entirely to the fight for women's freedom.

The first victim of the Revolution in this play is Marie Lebrun, who is found sleeping with her baby under a large pile of leaves. Marie is the wife of a Royalist captain who has been hounded down by the Revolution for his rebellious attack on the revolutionary government in Lyon. With a baby to feed, but with nobody to turn to and with no shelter, Marie is starving. She begs the women to take the baby and to offer

her a hiding place, which the women hesitate to do as they are not allowed to aid the Royalists. Instead, as a temporary measure, Jeanne offers the child her breast and Agathe gives Marie bread. Before the three women can do anything to save Marie, a group of men make a sudden appearance. They are Javogues, the Proconsul for the Loire region, Lapalus, a Commissioner, and Jean, a recruit. Jeanne hides the child beneath her shawl, but Javogues threatens Marie and forces her to produce the child: ‘Search the town and bring out every boy you find,’ he says. ‘Line them up here and shoot them one by one until we have the child’ (p. 226). Lapalus also threatens through the brutal manner in which he rakes the fire in the brazier with a sword which he brandishes. Then, Jeanne, threatened by the men’s verbal and physical behaviour, hands the baby over to Javogues. He tortures Marie physically and mentally so that she will sign a list containing the names of the royalists who are involved in the attack on the revolutionary government in Lyon. As Javogues threatens to drop the child in the brazier, Marie has no choice but to sign the document, but then, realising the terrible thing she has done in endangering the lives of those in the document, she throws the document and herself on the brazier. Marie clings on to the brazier despite Lapalus’ effort to remove her. Later Marie is pulled and dragged out by Lapalus. Falsely accused by the Revolutionary forces of ‘aiding and abetting Captain Lebrun’ (p. 226) in the rebels’ attack, Marie and her child are victimised for no reason but their relationship to their husband/father.

The three women, Jeanne, Catherine, and Agathe, are menaced and horrified by Marie’s victimisation and the Revolution’s cruelties. When Marie signs the document, Catherine and Jeanne pity both Marie and those on the list, envisioning the outcome of this act. However, Agathe is so shocked by the manner in which Marie is threatened and by possible brutalities that may be inflicted on her and the conspirators by the

Revolution that she almost faints and Catherine and Jeanne have to support her, though they also urge her to forget the incident. After Jeanne and Catherine have hurriedly left the scene, overcome by the shock, Agathe strongly voices her anger.

AGATHE:...The future is supposed to gleam. But all I see are men who want to trample, slash and tear at things. It makes me wonder, when will paradise break out of the belly of this age of killing? (p. 228)

She yearns for the past, blames men, condemns the Revolution, and doubts the future. To Agathe, her paradise was the past and the present is a living hell full of violence and deceit with no bright future in sight. Her defiance against the Revolution is tenacious enough for her to place again a flower that she gets from Christophe, a former slave and a woodcutter, at the base of the cross. The impression Marie made on her will not leave Agathe: 'There was a woman here...', she says (p. 229). Even though Marie fails to revolt effectively against the forces currently in power and will be executed, her rebellion lives on in the women's spirit since it serves as a basis upon which the three women build up their struggle and fight for their cause throughout the play.

Along with Agathe, Jeanne also rebels against the Revolutionary authorities in order to keep her faith. When Thérèse, a former prostitute disguised in the uniform of a soldier, brings the body of Jeanne's brother, Jean-Marie, from the battle field, Jeanne wants to bury him in consecrated ground as she had promised him she would do despite possible penalties and condemnation from the Revolutionary Army. Although she is advised to use the common pit for Jean-Marie, who is rotting and stinking with his insides drippings out, Jeanne strongly believes that he'll go to God only if he is buried in consecrated ground. Agathe then suggests a charnel-house under the church for Jean-Marie's burial. Jeanne breaks open the wall of the church crypt by the light of her lantern. Through the hole she sees the whiteness of the bones of her ancestors like

ghosts, who are ‘stacked and stored with care’ (p. 242). Jeanne believes Jean-Marie will be in the right place for his eternal life if she places him next to her and his ancestors’ ‘limbs and ribs woven together to hold in place for centuries’ (p. 242). In order to preserve her old world in connection with her religious beliefs, Jeanne dares to violate the regulations set up by the Revolution.

The Revolutionary forces which abused Marie Lebrun have made inroads into the old world and the church whose valuables, as Henri, Catherine’s husband, says, have ‘melted down, and transformed into guns and ammunition for the people’s army’ (p. 229). St. Germain-Laval was arguably called after a martyr to the Christian cause, a name later changed to Montchalier (after ‘Chalier’, ‘the noble martyr of the Revolution at Lyon’ (p. 230)). Jeanne abhors the destruction of the church while Agathe criticises the new name, Montchalier. According to Agathe, Chalier introduced a guillotine to Lyon from Paris as he couldn’t kill enough people by shooting them. Ironically, he was the first to be beheaded. Chalier’s fate reflects the irony of the Revolution. This is the first time that Agathe articulates her views against the Revolution. Both Henri and Claude, the Mayor and Jeanne’s husband, warn Agathe to watch what she says, advice which Agathe ignores. She wants to be heard and calls the two men slaves to Lapalus. Agathe begins to voice her anger and resistance against what has been done to her town and her world.

The ostensible effect of the liberation by the Revolution from the Church’s oppression is to bring about a more humane new world. In reality, however, the Revolutionary Army tightens its grip on the community through a Committee of surveillance, headed by Henri and it spreads deception and distrust among the people in St. Germain-Laval. The aristocratic oppression is now replaced by the Revolutionary repression. Below the surface of their compliance to the Revolution,

some of the men are not happy about what is happening to their lives. Henri hates this revolution, as Saint-German Laval has become disordered and he yearns for normality. Nonetheless, it is the men who take advantage of this lack of order, especially when prices are going up and grain is becoming scarce and paper money has lost its value in Saint Germain-Laval. For example, one night, Jacques, Catherine's lover, secretly sells a sack of flour stolen from Agathe's mill. Later Jacques steals more sacks of flour for gold, leaving others to starve. If Jacques continues to steal and people have no flour, Agathe will be blamed. While men are forced to work for the Revolution or engaged in making profit out of the Revolution, women struggle to make ends meet. Catherine is unhappy with her husband's involvement in the Revolution. She complains to him that she is unable to run the cotton factory single-handedly. Women are not allowed to make political decisions, but they are all affected by the decisions that men make. They are needed to help manage men's lives, while men manage the affairs of state. Catherine and her husband, Henri, argue over the disruption of the routine of their lives, (especially in the context of making a living) which has been caused by the Revolution. Domesticity, which has always been the responsibility of women, becomes more onerous to them in times of turmoil when they run the risk of losing their men. The severe impact of the Revolution is thus strongly felt, especially in the daily lives of the women.

The destruction of the Church by the Revolution is symbolised on-stage by the replacement of the stone cross in the market-place with a statue of a naked women on a plinth. The statue is then clad in a bonnet and a tricolour sash, a red pike is placed in one of her hands and a stone tablet with the Declaration of Human Rights engraved on it in the other. The men who have replaced the cross with the statue are complacent about what they have achieved by the Revolution. However, Catherine is horrified by

what she sees as the monstrosity of the statue. Agathe wants to get rid of the statue because it insults both the Church, in that people are being requested to adore a naked body instead of the cross, and women because the naked woman may provoke men. Jeanne worries that ‘Widows won’t be safe in their beds’ (p. 234). Christophe, a former slave and a woodcutter, has a different view on the statue. Even though he laughs at it, he pities the naked woman when he sees the rain wash the red paint from the pike in her hand down her body, so that it collects at the navel. He also identifies with the statue: he has toiled for thirty years, and he has now been ‘liberated’ by the Revolution, though all this means is that he is in rags and that he has to struggle to feed and shelter himself against the cold winter. Like Christophe, the statue, which used to be kept by the local nobleman, the Count, is now removed from his Château by the Revolution to the open space with only a hat and a ribbon.

The supposed statue of liberty has in reality brought to the town commotion and argument rather than liberty. It has also made a distinct division among the men and the women. The statue is stained with red paint from the red pike when the rain washes down its body. The red paint then runs down from the ‘devil’s gateway’ (p. 243) as if the woman is menstruating, and people are embarrassed and horrified by the obscenity. Jacques, Claude, and Henri believe that the red water trickling down the body is a sign of a curse upon their town, and thus they should root out the wicked figures that brought this curse. Henri argues that the red water is a sign of punishment on women as all evil comes from the flesh of Eve and women are the reminder of original sin. Claude blames the women for their praying for God’s intervention. The men ascribe what has happened to the statue to the women, associating the red liquid with evil and the destructive power of Eve. The women openly rebuke the men’s misogynist remarks by articulately voicing their faith in God. Jeanne says it’s a sign which urges the men

to pray for forgiveness because they destroyed the cross in the market-place. She also argues that women's monthly bleeding and their reproductive role and force are not God's punishment. Catherine insists that the red stain on the statue is God's message, a miracle. It is a sign of mourning for the dead, who are 'murdered in the name of Liberty' (p. 244), Agathe adds. She interprets the bleeding statue of liberty as commiseration for all Frenchmen who have bled because of the Revolution. The men's brutality, she adds, has angered God and 'God sent the wind to bring the rain to mix with the paint and stain the statue red' (p. 243). The three women contend that the red stain is anyway not women's fault, but men's as the latter erected the statue and painted the pike red. The women thus praise God for his wonders, his revelations and his power, and give warning of the destruction of those who disobey him. In all, differently from the men who reproach women for the red stain, the women attribute what has happened to the statue to the work of God. This confrontation between the men and the women serves as the first opportunity for the three women to voice their faith and opinions.

The statue's lower half is covered after the red stain is discovered. While the men want to clean the statue and purge it of the filthy water, the three women are determined to get rid of it. One foggy night, Agathe, Catherine, and Jeanne gather around the statue and after ritualistically evoking the day of judgement, they lever the statue off the plinth with a crowbar so that it falls to the ground. They then smash it into small pieces with a sledgehammer and throw the pieces into the river. The women's smashing of the statue demonstrates their defiance against the men's compliance to the Revolution and furthers their protest against it. The act of destruction also represents their resolution not to surrender with regard to worshipping God even though they are prohibited from doing so. It constitutes the direct cause of

the women's later ordeals when they are incarcerated and victimised. However, the women's act of vandalism celebrates their fighting spirit, similarly to the Bacchic festival where the women indulge in a drinking and dancing orgy in *The Love of the Nightingale* and the dance in which the four women exulted in their freedom in *Crux*.

In Act Two, Scene One, the destruction of the statue results in a strong reaction from the Revolutionary Forces. People gather in the Town Hall, where Lapalus speaks against those who have destroyed the statue and insulted the Revolution. He also complains that people in the village do not behave in such a way as to deserve the village's name, Montchalier. The three women come to the Town Hall and start to speak out, making use of the people's gathering. Catherine wants proper church services and sacred rites for the burial of their people and demands a right to vote. She abhors the rules established by the Revolutionary government. The other two women join Catherine, expressing in their turn complaints against and demands upon the Revolutionary authorities. Agathe wants opportunities to speak and for women to be represented in the Assembly. Jeanne blames the Revolution for men's lost lives and makes explicit her determination not to give up her God. This is the first time that the three women voice in public their opinions on the observance of their faith and women's participation in politics. The women resist the Revolution in deed, first (through the destruction of the statue) and this time, in word. However, their voices are soon suppressed by the Revolutionary authorities. After calming down the women, Father Tiquet makes misogynist comments about women. He evokes the names of the women whom the Bible or legend has called the destroyers of their societies: Helen, Jezebel, and Cleopatra and remonstrates that the world is again troubled by women's malice. As is often the case, women are condemned for things that happen adversely to

men. If a woman speaks out, she is accused of creating a disturbance and is often soon silenced in the name of order.

Thérèse is the fourth women to join the fight against the Revolution. Her encounter with Agathe, Catherine, and Jeanne is through the dead man she has brought to his sister, Jeanne. Thérèse escaped from prison when the Revolution broke out and disguised herself as a soldier in order to protect herself. She made friends with Jean-Marie, a soldier, on the battlefield and carried him on a cart when he was wounded, but on the way home he died. As a result of keeping her promise to bring him home to Jeanne, Thérèse meets the three women. In Jeanne's cottage, she also comes upon Father Tiquet, who recognises her from her trial, where she was mocked and humiliated for her life of prostitution. Knowing that she has been a famous whore who entertained many men, and thus possessed with a desire to have her, Father Tiquet rapes her. While being raped, she recalls her life. At twelve her father sold her to an old Marquis and beat her when she tried to avoid the old man. Thérèse was a chattel to her father and had no right to decide events in her own life. Having learnt about pain, fantasy and revenge, however, she ran away to Paris. She learned how to deal with men: 'The more audaciously she set her value, the more demand there was from dukes and counts and generals' (p. 245). Thérèse enjoyed an extravagant life, going to the opera, ballet and theatre. She achieved her independence until she was put on trial for prostitution. It is from this trial that Father Tiquet remembers her face. She was then sent to rot at the Salpétri  re, where she was shackled and suffered from inhuman treatment. When the Revolution broke out, she witnessed the Parisian mob inflicting a variety of brutalities on the women in prison: murder, mutilation, rape, slashing and cutting babies from wombs. The mob justified their atrocities because madwomen, whores and orphan girls were all regarded as dangerous and wicked and thus deserved

this brutality. Women were commodities to their fathers or husbands. They sometimes went mad because of oppression at home or became prostitutes in order to make a living when there was no one to depend on. These women easily fell prey to men's sadistic victimisation of them (as frequently happens today). The overlapping of her rape by Father Tiquet with her past victimisation powerfully juxtaposes the continuity, diversity and omnipresence of the pain women suffer from their victimisation - the pain Philomèle and Marguarite also experienced.

Thérèse develops friendships with the three women, especially with Agathe. She recognises Agathe's stress from her marriage: 'A heaviness of heart that all wives carry from being slaves to simpletons' (p. 239). Unlike Jeanne's and Catherine's husbands, Agathe's husband, André, never appears on stage, but keeps to himself in Paris studying and writing about 'astronomy, cosmology' - things away from the earth. Geographically and emotionally, Agathe is distanced from her husband. He does not wish to dominate Agathe and insists that women should enter the professions, speak in the assembly, and become elected representatives. Though he supports women's independence, André does not take responsibility for his family, but is an autocratic father and husband. When he is at home, he won't let his children play in the day because he sleeps then. They wait until the evening when he wakes up to study the heavens. The children are frustrated by their father. In a different way Agathe is frustrated. At night she lies 'aching, with an ocean of room' beside her, 'always empty', and 'never filled' (p. 240). Her heart is cold and heavy like the ice in the river she watches washed downstream. Thérèse advises Agathe to 'let go of him' - the 'dead man' (p. 240) who doesn't care about her and his family and to stand on her own. Some men like André are engrossed in their own work, others may become involved with another woman and hardly take care of their families. When women are largely

left unloved, but responsible for their households, their hearts can become as cold as ice. Like Catherine, who has lost her husband to the Revolution and runs her household on her own, Agathe takes sole responsibility for her family, while her husband is engaged in his own occupation. In times of war or peace, women frequently have to carry the burden of responsibility for their families, a burden which is often accompanied by loneliness.

In addition to encouraging Agathe to stand on her own when they initially meet each other, later in prison, Thérèse nourishes Agathe in her to fight for freedom for herself and other women after the two women, along with Jeanne, are charged with the destruction of the statue. Even though the three women are chained, they continue to make their voices heard. Jeanne admits that she is guilty, insisting that it was she who conceived of the idea of destroying the statue as she hated what it represented. She refuses the help her husband offers her as this would involve lying. Agathe used to be confined in her home, but now she has transgressed the confines which have been imposed on her as a woman, speaking out and acting in public places like the market place and the Town Hall. She will not waive her determination to fight for her beliefs, insisting that one should grab at freedom if one wants it like Eve, who grabbed the apple ‘for a bite’ (p. 253). Like Marguarite in *Crux*, who equates herself with Eve, in her rebellious power against the Bible and the Church, in *The Taking of Liberty*, Agathe compares those who fight for their lives, displaying resistance against the authority, to Eve.

The way the women are chained, interrogated, and persecuted is similar to the way women were tried for witchcraft. Thérèse is questioned and falsely accused as a spy for the king by Jacques, and of plotting rebellion and of driving the women to an action of defiance for the benefit of the Royalists. Even though she denies that she was

present at the time of the destruction of the statue, Catherine is condemned for incitement to riot as she was the first one to shout out in the Hall for the right to worship God. The women are threatened that they must confess that they destroyed the statue. Claude, the mayor, likens Catherine to a witch: ‘You were possessed! Chanting and ranting and having visions all over the place’ (p. 255). Jacques calls the women ‘an army of she-devils’ (p. 254) for their seditious act. The women who resist the Revolution are denounced in a similar way to the witches who rebelled against the then existing patriarchal dominance of the Church. They are sent to Feurs for trial, a stepping stone to the scaffold (as the trials of witches). In many times and places women who have encroached upon male prerogatives have been punished by men for their attempt at autonomy.

In Scene Three, the four women are in prison in Feurs, where they can be executed more easily. It is cold and they do not have enough food and clothing. Jeanne hallucinates, but in this state she tells the truth about her condition: ‘So much ice...growing every night...freezing me...ice blades between my ribs...ashes in the mouth. My body turned to skin and bones’ (p. 258). Like the ice that Agathe used to have in her heart, the ice around and inside Jeanne never seems to melt, but only to grow in order to swallow her. Jeanne has come to believe in the sin Eve brought to women: ‘Woman was born to serve...serve the ice, serve the cold, serve the darkness...’ (p. 259). Unlike Agathe, who associates Eve with fighting power, Jeanne relates Eve to the sin that has resulted in the pain women suffer. Agathe is different from the person she was before as the ice in her heart has melted. Against the gloomy backdrop of the prison in the cold winter Jeanne goes mad, Agathe, by contrast, imagines herself on a soft sandy beach in the sunshine with blue skies above. The light embraces her, then penetrates her and melts her inside. She has a vision of herself

being freed from the shackles of the earth and lifted up over the blue sea into heaven - paradise.

Thérèse also dreams of an island, this time, with thick blue-grey mountains - Saint Dominique. The two women first dream of escaping to utopia, but Agathe then chooses to remain in France despite Thérèse's invitation to travel with her to Saint Dominique where she once lived before with a planter. Agathe wants to put down roots, not to escape. She prepares to fight Javogues by sending a petition for an early trial or their release. The prison is filled with the women's fighting spirit, but their bright hope for their future subsides when Catherine is pushed into the cell. She has been in another prison where she lost her baby son and where the inmates suffered from cold and hunger to such a degree that one woman even tried to lick up the baby's blood. Under the coercive power of the Revolution, the men, Claude, Henri and Jacque, are unable to help their women. Moreover, Catherine's husband, Henri, is enraged when he finds out that Catherine is pregnant with Jacques' child. Instead of trying to protect the women from his village, especially the pregnant woman, Herni is determined to hunt down all the traitors and punish them because of Catherine's betrayal in their marriage. The four women have nothing else left. Even though Agathe wants to appeal for mercy, she does not have the means to write with. They utter supplications which nobody hears, but themselves. Jeanne dies and the other women are seemingly without hope.

In prison in Feurs, Thérèse associates Agathe with Saint Agathe who 'dared to turn down a man and so he sliced off her breasts and threw her in a fire' (p. 265). The atrocity of mutilation and murder done to Saint Agathe was committed simply because of Saint Agathe's disobedience to a man, for which she had to pay a severe penalty (like Philomele who protests against her rape by Tereus and then is mutilated by him

when he cuts out her tongue). Women in these situations had no right to choose. If they had any right at all, it was the right to be chosen. As Agathe has disobeyed those in power and has been imprisoned for this, like Saint Agathe, she expects to die for her cause and hopes that Thérèse will die with her. Yet Thérèse never gives up and continues to look for a way out. It is Thérèse who sustains Agathe to survive the hardship and fight for her life whenever Agathe falters, losing hopes and wanting to give up the struggle.

Unlike Agathe, Thérèse is not emotionally attached to France and tries to get help from Christophe, who is from Saint Dominique. She strongly denies involvement in the vandalism and, despite her sympathy for Agathe, blames Agathe for initiating the resistance by destroying the symbol of the Revolution, an action Thérèse notes, for which they have all paid a heavy price. In contrast to the three other women, Thérèse rejoices in the statue of the naked woman whose provocative pose and blood between her thighs, she sees as exhibiting women's sexuality and their strong reproductive power. To Thérèse, the sight is preference to that of Christ on the cross, a man 'tortured to death on two stumps of wood!' (p. 266). Thérèse has gone through great struggles to overcome hunger and the insecurity of her life, while Agathe has been leading a more stable life, engaged in domestic concerns such as taking care of her family and a house. The women are divided in their opinions at this, failing to understand each other's position, yet, housewife or whore, they suffer from similar oppressions.

When Jeanne next enters, it is in the form of a ghost, with '*a large fishing net full of bones and other bits of bodies, which she drags behind her as she walks*' (p. 266). When she was alive, Jeanne had the idea that people belonged to assigned places, as was seen in her endeavours to add her brother's body to the ancestors' crypt.

Marie's ghost has remained tied to the place where she was found under from the mounds of leaves and to the people who killed her, but as a ghost, Jeanne transcends time and place as she has been travelling back and forth in time and to many places, collecting the discarded fragments from women:

JEANNE: Thrown away by the world these were. Not of sufficient value. But I collect them. Feet, broken and bound in China, hands, cut off in Persia, eyes, gouged out in Asia, genitals, removed in Africa, ovaries destroyed in Germany, bodies burned in India, minds, blanked in America. Women's they were. Done for their own good, it seems. (p. 266)³

These women's fragments have resulted from the violence perpetrated by 'husbands, sons, brothers, lovers, doctors, lawyers', and 'priests' (p. 266). Women have been oppressed by male authorities all over the world throughout their history, with their bodies being tortured and their minds tormented. Through transcending time and place as a ghost, Jeanne has gained the power to unveil the 'diversity, omnipresence and continuity' of women's pain, of which Jeanne's is a part. She has found her voice, telling women's pain more forcibly than her living self did, for when she was alive, she could only weakly whisper about the suffering she believed that was ordained upon women. Jeanne's appearance with the mutilated parts of women attached to her brings together the two women's different arguments. Jeanne's ghost wakes up Agathe's fighting spirit. Though Jeanne saves part of women's bodies which have been discarded as valueless, as she is now dead, she cannot save the world. Instead, she asks Agathe to change the world to one where men would turn into nurturers (like mothers) rather than perpetrators, a request which Agathe says she is unable to fulfil. Jeanne persuades her: 'You've a talent for it. I've seen it. When you spoke out and swayed the crowd. You made them listen' (p. 267). Jeanne inspires Agathe to fight for all women who suffer from oppression under patriarchy.

Jeanne's ghost is followed seemingly by another dream-like figure. This is Christophe, who comes to the prison after it has been deserted by the guards (following a night in peace among the Revolutionary Forces) in order to herald an amnesty that has been granted for the women. As an ex-slave, black Christophe does not belong to 'ordinary' men in France. As a former whore, Thérèse does not belong to 'ordinary' women there, either. The two of them are social outcasts and thus belong to the same class. Marginalised in France, together they plan to leave for the island of her paradise and his home, where 'a black prince grown strong picking sugar, [has] come to wipe us clean of the old world's ways' (p. 267). The two will help the prince to overthrow the old world - perhaps through another civil war. Thérèse thus moves from one turmoil of Robespierre's oppression into another in order to create a new order. They invite Agathe to go with them, but Agathe refuses.

Even though Thérèse refuses to fight against the Revolution and plans to escape to the island of her dreams, she has fighting spirit. This has made Agathe see that 'we can't change the world without a fight' (p. 268); she no longer wants to restore the world that existed before the Revolution. She accepts Jeanne's advice and decides to send a petition for the release of other women in prisons, including Catherine. She has come to believe that 'If a woman, a friend, is murdered for what she believes, we're all violated' (p. 268). The female bonding that has been developed between Agathe and Thérèse now expands to all women. Leaving her old life behind, Agathe makes a journey forward: 'Can't run back to the safety of father's wishes and husband's convictions and God's commandments now' (p. 268). Despite her former wish to go back to the old values, Agathe takes new steps in the snow 'with nobody ahead or nothing behind' (p. 268). She reiterates her opening speech in the belief that her words will be heard and acted upon. The play ends with a song, in contrast to the quiet ending

of *Crux*, where the stage is filled with light and women are silently present surrounding Joan as supporters. This vocally strong ending demonstrates women's fighting spirit for their own revolution.

The quartet of women, Agathe, Jeanne, Catherine and Thérèse, plus Marie in the beginning, resist the Revolution which they believe will destabilise their life and their security. All these women refuse to be silenced and to be confined in their homes, and instead expand their space outside their homes, which, in turn, threatens to shrink men's space and questions their dominance. The action happens in the late eighteenth century, but it has repercussions in the social turmoil of the present time, for example, in Eastern Europe and many parts of Africa.

NOTES

¹ Darline Gay Levy and Harriet B. Applewhite, 'Women of the Popular Classes in Revolutionary Paris, 1789-1795' in *Women, War, & Revolution* ed. by Carol R. Berkin and Clara M. Lovett (London: Holmes & Meier Publishers, 1980), pp. 9-35 (p. 10).

² Cheryl Robson, a foreword in Robson (ed.), p. 222.

³ See Mary Daly's examples of atrocities done to women in the world in the Introduction, p. 13.

Chapter 4. Madwomen

Some women become ‘mad’ because of the grief or hardship they face in their lives. Some women are labelled as ‘mad’ by social attitudes towards women. As Jane Ussher argues in her book, *Women’s Madness: Misogyny or Mental Illness?*, women’s madness has in recent years been seen as the result of misogyny. Discussing women regarded as the Other and oppressed by patriarchy, Ussher maintains:

Women are not mad. Misogynistic discourse deems us so. And if distress and suffering is acknowledged to be real, this is seen as a result of women’s position within the misogynistic discourse, a result of institutional and individual oppression, not some individual pathology within the women. (*Women’s Madness*, p. 20)

Identifying women as mad is one way of expressing misogyny and one of many means of ‘controlling and confining women’ (*Ibid.*, p. 20), in a similar way to the execution of women in the past who were accused of witchcraft. Witches were also regarded as mad, or evil by the Church when they dared to ask questions and speak up against the patriarchal authority. Ussher thus argues that some cures for women’s madness are often performed in such a way as to immobilise and disempower women. These methods will be discussed later.

Some women are regarded as ‘mad’ when they express their anger or protest against what they do not agree to or cannot cope with; or when they are attempting to reject the roles assigned to them by their societies. These ‘madwomen’ are similar to those women who were labelled as ‘witches’ when they dared to attempt to voice themselves and/or not conform to the norms of their societies in Medieval and Renaissance times. This is true of the late nineteenth century, as Elaine Showalter writes in her book, *The Female Malady*:

During an era when patriarchal culture felt itself to be under attack by its rebellious daughters, one obvious defence was to label women campaigning for

access to the universities, the professions, and the vote as mentally disturbed, and of all the nervous disorders of the *fin de siècle*, hysteria was the most strongly identified with the feminist movement.¹

Some of the suffragettes, for example, were taken to mental hospitals for their sanity to be examined. It is often the case that doctors and psychiatrists scrutinise and analyse women's deviant behaviour rather than looking into the root-cause of women's madness.

Additionally, Phyllis Chesler writes in her book, *Women's Madness*:

It is important to note...that men in general are still able to reject more of their sex-role stereotype without viewing themselves as 'sick', and without being psychiatrically hospitalized, than are women. Women are so conditioned to need and/or to service a man that they are more willing to take care of a man who is 'passive', 'dependent' or 'unemployed' than men are willing to relate to, even less take care of a 'dominant', 'independent' or 'employed' women.²

When women reject their roles such as taking care of children and/or serving their men, they may be rejected by their men and pushed into poverty or other kinds of hardship, in many cases, low-paid jobs or prostitution. This situation, in turn, can drive them to becoming psychiatrically ill. The inequality of men and women manifested in sex-role stereotypes contributes to women's unhappiness and despair which are diagnosed as anxiety, depression, frigidity, paranoia, psychoneurosis, and suicide attempts. When men are mentally ill, they are more often described as being violent or as having personality disorders or brain diseases. Since Victorian times, mental illness, Showalter matins, has thus been more often associated with women while crime is associated with men, as a result of 'the rise of psychiatric profession with its attitudes towards women and its monopoly by men' (*Female Malady*, p. 55). Victorian psychiatrists believed that 'the instability of [women's] reproductive systems interfered with their sexual, emotional, and rational control' (*Ibid.*, p. 55), thus ignoring such factors as poverty, women's economic dependence and other

illnesses. The criteria of madness are sex-biased and more women are diagnosed as mad than their male counterparts with similar symptoms. While some women explicitly express their anger or frustration and reject their roles, others withdraw into a position of silence. Both types of women however are likely to be defined as ‘mad’ when they deviate from the course of behaviour expected by their societies. Women’s madness is thus, as Barbara Hill Rigney argues, connected to the female social condition. According to Rigney, most feminists see female insanity as clearly influenced by sexual politics and in most cases, it can be ‘explained by the oppression of women in a power-structured, male supremacist society.’³

When ‘madwomen’ become burdens or beyond the control of their relatives or communities, these women are confined in mental asylums. (Until the sixteenth century madwomen were locked up in private rooms or madhouses or royal towers by their fathers or their husbands.) Madness and asylums, especially to both ‘rebellious’ and depressed women, as Phyllis Chesler writes, are ‘both an expression of female powerlessness and an unsuccessful attempt to reject and to overcome’ their situation (Chesler, p. 15). To these women, the asylums are ‘penalties for being ‘female,’ as well as for desiring or daring *not* to be’ female (*Ibid.*, p. 15). In asylums women are threatened or punished for their unruly behaviour and often are incarcerated in a small space. If women persistently react to such threats and punishments, they are even more narrowly confined into straitjackets, tied to chairs, and allowed no space and no freedom. They often end up being silenced by sedatives or by shock therapy. Madwomen also go through psychotherapies similar, in nature, to the inquisitions that the ‘witches’ went through. Throughout the history of psychiatric medicine, women patients have also experienced rape and harassment by doctors and psychiatrists. Madwomen received violent physical treatments such as the water-cure until the

eighteenth century. More recently, lobotomy and the electro convulsive therapy (ECT) have been used. Lobotomy, the surgical removal of the part of the diseased brain, was performed on thousands of patients deemed mad for a decade between the 1940s and the 1950s, but caused side effects resulting from the massive damage of brain tissues. Electro convulsive therapy (ECT) is still used today for depression, schizophrenia and mania. As Jane Ussher notes, ECT ‘produces memory loss, interruption of ‘abnormal mental process,’ and a generalized sense of well being - as well as disorientation and confusion in some patients’ (Ussher, pp. 152-3). All these cures reduce the ‘madwomen’ to the state of children dependent on male-dominated therapies designed to make their patients more desirable to their societies.

Women’s anger, frustration, and the violence inflicted on women because of their ‘madness’ have been dramatised by a handful of plays by women. *Find Me* (1975) by Olen Wymark is a play about a real person. The drama is based on the information that her parents gave the playwright. It covers the period of the protagonist’s, Verity, early childhood and the age of twenty, when Verity is incarcerated in Broadmoor Hospital after she has been ‘charged by the police with the damage of a chair by fire, value six pounds.’⁴ Verity ‘may not be discharged or transferred elsewhere without the permission of the Home Secretary’ (*Find Me*, p. 101). The play starts with those words, which are repeated near the end of the play, and then five Veritys cry, ‘Find me!’ (p. 126). *Effie’s Burning* (1987) by Valerie Windsor dramatises the story of a woman, Effie, who is in her sixties. At the age of twelve Effie was classed as a moral defective (because she became pregnant as a result of sexual abuse) and has been institutionalised ever since. When, as an elderly woman, she was moved from the mental hospital that had been her home for many years, she responded by setting fire to her room. In her new home, the Laurels, she

encounters a woman doctor, Dr Kovacs, who takes an interest in her case. Both Verity and Effie are therefore considered culpable, Verity as ‘anti-social’ and the latter as morally defective. *The One-Sided Wall* (1989) by Janet Cresswell and Niki Johnson is also based on the story of a real person, in this case one of the authors. The protagonist, Theresa, a married woman with two children, is first sexually harassed by her dermatologist. This eventually leads to her being labelled as mad. She is examined by a psychiatrist and then taken to a mental hospital where she receives ECT treatments. When she is freed, she stabs the psychiatrist who first sent her to a mental hospital. She is then committed to Broadmoor like Verity in *Find Me*. Theresa is also victimised because of her angry protest and she leaves her marriage, the custody of her children, and her liberty. She is not mad. She is angry about how she has been treated by mental hospitals and her society.

In *Ripen Our Darkness* by Sarah Daniels (1981) Mary is tied to her house, especially the kitchen in order to fulfil her wifely and motherly responsibility. She is depressed, but is regarded as mad by her husband, David, a church warden. Mary expresses her anger during an examination by a psychiatrist, who is going to send her to a mental hospital. She does not get help and her situation worsens. Threatened by the prospect of being incarcerated, she gasses herself. Her vicar’s wife, Daphne, is also perceived as insane and is committed to a mental institution. These two women rebel against their roles assigned by their society.

Head-Rot Holiday (1992), also by Daniels, portrays the lives of women who have been labelled as mad and committed to ‘special hospitals’,⁵ and the social control of those women. Like Theresa in *The One-Sided Wall*, Claudia, who also has children is sent to a mental hospital even though she is not mad. She is depressed as she is unable to cope with bringing up her children with the little money she earned, and she

stabs her social worker with a potato-peeler. Another character, Ruth, was sexually abused by her father in her late teens and stabs her step-mother. A third, Dee, a lesbian, was also abused when she was three and was locked up in a room for a few weeks. She tries to look ‘feminine’ in order to get permission to leave the hospital, but in vain. These women are constantly watched and controlled by the nursing staff, who are apparently more mad than their patients, as demonstrated by their unfair punishment and cruelty. The three women are eager to get out of this mental institution, but are trapped in this Head Rot Hotel, a euphemism for Penwell Special Hospital for criminal women.

Daniels’ *The Madness of Esme and Shaz* (1994) is about an aunt, Esme, and her niece Shaz, who have never seen each other before until Esme decides to see Shaz in a mental asylum, where Shaz has been institutionalised after killing her half-sister. The two women, who have never learned to love people before, develop a friendship with each other and Esme takes Shaz to Greece in order to avoid the prying eyes of social workers.

Like *Find Me* and *The One-sided Wall, Augustine (Big Hysteria)* by Anna Furse (1991) is about a real person, in this case a young woman who was diagnosed as ‘hysteric’ after she was raped and later in 1875 admitted to the Salpêtrière in Paris.

Augustine (Big Hysteria)

The hysteric, whose body is transformed into a theater for forgotten scenes, relives the past, bearing witness to a lost childhood that survives in suffering... The history of the sorceress oscillates between the two poles and often ends in confinement or in death. The history of the hysteric, several centuries later, takes place in half-confinement; the hysteric, dolefully reclining, tended and surrounded by doctors and worried family, is a prisoner inside the family; or else, in crisis, she bears the brunt of producing a medical spectacle...The hysteric is indeed a witch’s daughter.

Hélène Cixous and Catherine Clément *The Newly Born Women*

Augustine (Big Hysteria) received its first performance in a co-production with Paines Plough at the Drum Theatre, Plymouth Theatre Royal, on 19 April 1991 and subsequent performances at the Lyric Studio in June 1991, directed by the playwright. The original production toured the Ukraine in 1992. The drama was also performed in the Czech Republic in 1994 and in Copenhagen in 1996. The play's action takes place at the Salpêtrière Hospital of Neurology in Paris during the 1870s. (The Salpêtrière is also the place where Thérèse in *The Taking of Liberty* is institutionalised after she has been convicted of prostitution.) Thus the Salpêtrière acts as a connecting point between the eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries, and as a place of confinement for both 'mad' and 'bad' women, it manifests the continuity of women's pain. Augustine resembles Philomele in *The Love of the Nightingale* because her actions seem mad to people who don't know her story. Like Marguarite in *Crux*, who is the subject of male scrutiny for her suspected witchcraft, Augustine is also scrutinised in this play by mental doctors who believe she is insane. At one point Augustine was pricked for hysterogenic points like witches for marks which were thought to prove that they had copulation with devils. Augustine's pain thus also represents the diversity, continuity, and omnipresence of women's pain. However, like the central female characters in the previous plays so far discussed, Augustine defies her oppressors and their victimisation of her, in her case by leaving the mental asylum in men's clothes.

The opening scene where Augustine cries out in the anguish of her bodily convulsions is swiftly followed by a lecture scene. The amphitheatre in which this lecture takes place is dominated by Professor Jean-Martin Charcot, who was, in real life at his time, a highly reputed neurologist (1825-1893), as Elaine Showalter describes, '[t]he first of the great European theorists of hysteria' (*The Female Malady*,

p. 147). He had turned the Salpêtrière into ‘the first centre of post-graduate study in psychological medicine.’⁶ Dr Charcot developed ‘a theory that hysteria had psychological origins,’ and he also believed ‘that hysterics suffered from a hereditary taint that weakened their nervous system’ (*Ibid.*, p. 147). Charcot experimented with hypnosis in order to demonstrate that hysterical symptoms such as paralysis could be produced and relieved by hypnosis. For Charcot, however, hysteria remained a ‘female malady’ - ‘the majority of his hysterical patients were women’ (*Ibid.*, p. 148). Axel Munthe, a doctor practising in Paris, vividly described Charcot’s Tuesday lectures at the Salpêtrière, which Charcot called ‘our museum of suffering’ and which was under the powerful tutelage of Charcot. The hypnotised women patients put on a dramatic performance before a curious and fashionable audience including actors, actresses, journalists, and writers such as Turgenev and Maupassant.

Some of them smelt with delight a bottle of ammonia when told it was rose water, others would eat a piece of charcoal when presented to them as chocolate. Another would crawl on all fours on the floor, barking furiously when told she was a dog, flap her arms as if trying to fly when turned into a pigeon, lift her skirts with a shriek of terror when a glove was thrown at her feet with a suggestion of being a snake. Another would walk with a top hat in her arms rocking it to and fro and kissing it tenderly when she was told it was her baby. (*Ibid.*, p. 148)

‘The grand finale would be the performance of a full hysterical seizure’ (*Ibid.*, p. 148). However, Charcot’s ‘theatrical’ performances and the fact that similar hysterical behaviour was rarely noted elsewhere led to the suspicion that ‘the women’s performances were the result of suggestion, imitation, or even fraud’ (*Ibid.*, p. 150). One of Charcot’s assistants admitted that ‘some of the women had been coached in order to produce attacks that would please the *maître*’ (*Ibid.*, p. 150). As Showalter notes, ‘Hysteria and theatre have a centuries-old connection.’⁷ In the nineteenth century, she continues, ‘it was a commonplace medical wisdom that hysterics, as one

French doctor noted, were “veritable actresses,” who “know no greater pleasure than to deceive” (Ibid.: xv). In the same vein, Charcot was a director, who put on dramatic shows by manipulating his women patients as his performing troupes.

In addition to hypnosis, as Showalter writes, Charcot also used photography, which had become the most extensive method of recording patients’ behaviour in the psychiatric profession in the nineteenth century. Women were frequently photographed until ‘they became used to the camera and to the special status they received as photogenic subjects’ (Showalter, p. 152). Among Charcot’s most frequently photographed patients was a fifteen-year-old girl called Augustine, who was admitted to the Salpêtrière in October 1875. According to Furse, Augustine was the child of domestic servants, who was sent to the country until she was six, and then to a convent for seven years. A bright, but rebellious and precocious child, she was often severely punished by priests and nuns who doused her in cold water. ‘Augustine was suspected of being possessed by the Devil, then a common diagnosis of unmanageable Catholic girls’ (Furse, p. 2). The punishment deeply traumatised the girl. When Augustine was thirteen, her mother put her in service in a Monsieur C’s household where she herself was the housekeeper. Monsieur C and Augustine’s mother reached a bargain that Augustine would work as a maid and learn proper servant skills while also learning to read and write with Monsieur C’s own children. Augustine was not well treated, however, and she soon learned that her mother was Monsieur C’s mistress and that he also had designs on her. He raped Augustine at knife-point when she was thirteen and continued to sexually abuse her. This abuse her mother possibly knew about, and connived at. Monsieur C threatened Augustine so that she could not tell her story. Augustine was terrified and developed typical hysterical symptoms which included fits, visions, numbness, a sense of suffocation,

hallucinations, hysterical gabbling, and garish nightmares. At the age of fifteen Augustine's mother sent her to the Salpêtrière Hospital where she stayed for six years. She was diagnosed by Dr Charcot as a classic "Grande Hystérique". According to Showalter, 'Intelligent, coquettish, and eager to please, Augustine was an apt pupil' (Showalter, p. 152) of Charcot's at first, but when she was repeatedly photographed, she began to see things in black and white and she became violent: she tore her clothes and broke the windows. During her fits of violence she was anaesthetised and locked in a straitjacket or in a padded cell. But she used her talents which had once made her 'a star of the asylum' and managed to escape the Salpêtrière, dressed as a man, on 9th September 1880. She has never been heard of since.

The play, *Augustine*, is based on this factual background on which most of the research has been done by Elaine Showalter in *The Female Malady*. As Furse writes the origins of her play, *The Female Malady* fascinated and inspired her. She felt impelled to seek further to discover: who this freak-show girl was; why her incarceration was theatrical; how she escaped and in whose clothes. She decided to devote a piece of theatre to her and made an intensive research in the Charcot library at the Salpêtrière, utilising the *Iconographie Photographie de la Salpêtrière*, in which Augustine's photographs are contained.

In Furse's drama Augustine is a young woman between fifteen and twenty years old. Her body is well-built like that of a grown woman, but her mental status is suspended in childhood. There are two male characters: Dr Charcot and the young Dr Freud. As Anna Furse writes:

Freud spent 6 months at the Salpêtrière, as a young neuropathologist, on a travel bursary from October 1885 - 1886. I have chosen to imagine an overlap between AUGUSTINE and FREUD both under the influence of CHARCOT.

It was CHARCOT's work on hysteria and hypnosis which had a decisive influence on FREUD's career. Within a year of returning to Vienna, he began to use hypnosis in his private practice. Psychoanalysis was born. (Furse, p. 15)

The real Freud therefore never met Augustine at the Salpêtrière. However, through this common factor - the Salpêtrière - the playwright merges the time of Freud with that of Augustine. This device is designed to create, from a present, and especially from a feminist point of view, different perspectives on the practice of Dr Charcot's and Freud's, for both of the men (either then, or later) controlled attitudes to women's hysteria.

The monologues and dialogues of the three characters interact and contrast with each other, evoking from the audience a variety of responses to the play. As Furse writes:

In terms of language and gender, in the process of writing the play four layers of text began to emerge: Charcot's academic lectures (masculine theory), arguments between Charcot and Freud (masculine debate); dialogues between Freud and Augustine (masculine/feminine dialogue); Augustine's monologues - hysterical, liberational, incantational and confessional (feminine narrative). So, four different languages. (Ibid., p. 9)

Charcot's language seems to dominate the play at the beginning as he is the scientific authority. However, his language is challenged by Freud, in the second layer from which emerges a 'polite but restrained...struggle between the young Freud and the elder Charcot, pupil to teacher' (Ibid., p. 10), a struggle resulting from their different views of Augustine. The dialogue between Freud and Augustine has a sexual element as Augustine flirts with Freud, who responds with scientific care. This dialogue bonds them however against Charcot and also enables Augustine to start to find her voice. In the fourth layer, Augustine's monologue completely restores her voice which neither of the doctors is then able to silence. Her newly found voice is the celebration of the survival of her trauma and her powerlessness under patriarchal control.

Charcot, in the lecture scene preceded by Augustine's convulsive cries, looks contrastingly exhilarated. Proud and confident, with '*great oratorical charm*' (p. 17), he is a great showman in control of his audience to whom he is eager to show off his cures for hysteria. As Geraldine Cousin comments on the two medical men in the drama, 'Freud is the 'listener', Charcot the 'seer'' (Cousin, p. 25). Just as he photographs his patients for his scrutiny and records, so, too, Charcot is a cartographer, who charts and maps out the contours of the body in order to find out what hysteria is. He believes there are 'hysterogenic points' in Augustine's body '[l]ike secret geysers in the landscape of hysteria' (p. 30). Charcot also wants his Tuesday audiences to 'see' the bodily reactions of 'Grande Hysterie' to his hypnosis. His 'method is a form of vivisection' (p. 18). Charcot does not listen to what his patient, Augustine, actually says, but is concerned only to see the body - the grotesque movements of the hysterical body: 'I'm a visionary! Mine is a SCIENCE of looking' (original emphasis, p. 18). He will not even listen to Freud, his assistant psychologist from Vienna, who reports to Charcot on Augustine's stories. Charcot wouldn't budge an inch from his theoretical stance and refutes Freud, who suggests that Charcot should listen to Augustine, by affirming that 'the answer lies in the BODY' (original emphasis, p. 34). Charcot only 'sees' 'how hysterics scream and shout' making '[m]uch ado about nothing' (p. 30). He does not listen, as hysteria, he believes, is 'the most picturesque of illnesses' (p. 20). As Augustine claims, Charcot never listens, though he claims to listen with his 'eyes.'

Freud is at first a 'listener,' to whom Augustine truly speaks of her stories of violation and nightmares, but he does not understand what she actually says. A quotation from *The Newly Born Women* matches what Freud does in this drama: 'Freud...plays the role of chorus,' Clément writes. 'A witness to misery, powerless to

intervene directly, he punctuates the development of the story with his testimony and immutable knowledge.⁸ Freud pays heed to Augustine's recounts of rape and nightmares, and seems to believe them, but he redirects his initial beliefs with regard to Augustine's fantasies. The real Freud wrote:

During the period in which one was especially preoccupied with discovering the sexual traumas of childhood, almost all patients told me they had been seduced by their father. I finally concluded from this that these allegations were false and I thus learned that hysterical symptoms did not ensue from real facts, but from fantasies. It was the expression of the typical Oedipus complex in women.⁹

Just as Charcot does not look at the depth of Augustine's 'physical unconscious pain' even though he 'sees', Freud does not truly hear and understand her 'mental conscious pain' (Clément, p. 50) although he 'listens.' As Helen Rose has commented:

Freud saw the germs of his future psychoanalysis through the parallels he was able to draw between the streams of sexual images which tumbled from the women's tormented minds and the physical contortions of their abused bodies.¹⁰

Both doctors in *Augustine*, however, examine the area of the myths surrounding hysteria.

Augustine is a rape victim of her mother's lover, Mr Carnot, though her mother appears not to know the source of her hysteria. As already noted, Augustine was raped at knifepoint and threatened by Mr Carnot, who said that she would be killed if she told anybody about what he had done to her. Like Philomèle, whose tongue was cut out so that she was silenced by Tereus, Augustine is silenced by her rapist's threats so that she cannot speak clearly of her rape. She hates her mother for her powerlessness and perhaps, for turning a blind eye to her rape. Augustine's hatred of her mother and her desire to turn to her father to tell him about her rape may be simply interpreted by Freud as 'the expression of the typical Oedipus complex in women' (Freud in *The Newly Born Women*, p. 50). Through her body, however, Augustine expresses her psychological pain ensuing from the rape. The memory

which haunts her is translated into physical pain, for which nobody understands the reason. Augustine is a victim of her society where she belongs to the underprivileged class and sex.

In addition to being a rape victim, Augustine is a victim of nineteenth century medicine which was controlled by men. Two years after her attacks began, Augustine, the traumatised child, was sent by her mother to the Salpêtrière, where she received treatments which were tormenting physically and psychologically. From time to time, in Anna Furse's play, Charcot presses Augustine's paralysed abdominal area with the ovarian compressor, which causes Augustine great pain. (According to Furse, the ovarian compressor was designed to generate or ameliorate an attack by being pressed into the ovaries in order to get the doctor's desired effect. The ovaries of sexually abused young girls were specially sensitive to touch. Thus Charcot could produce similar results by pressing the ovary with his palm.) It is not the body that causes the problem, but the trauma from her rape. She is also constantly anaesthetised with amyl nitrate, which she abhors, when her attacks become beyond control. At worst Augustine experiences 200 attacks a week, Freud reports to Charcot. Through most of the scenes, she has become an object of the male gaze. She is constantly probed by her male doctors, who measure her vaginal discharge. When Augustine is brought in by Freud to the lecture theatre for Charcot to demonstrate his skill in hypnosis on her, she is placed under the scrutiny of the audience, most of whom are men. Charcot is a director and Augustine his 'star' among the women of his performing troupe at the Salpêtrière. Before the lecture theatre and the play's audience, Charcot seemingly hypnotises Augustine into lifting her right arm while her lower right arm is paralysed. His hypnosis and Augustine's performance culminate when Augustine eats paper believing it is a potato and rocks Charcot's top hat as a baby. Augustine is used as a

means to create spectacular scenes for Charcot's theory, but this does not help him to alleviate Augustine's suffering.

Augustine is also an object of another kind of the male gaze. She is constantly sculptured and photographed by Charcot, the 'eye', for his record of hysteria. If Charcot's demonstrations in the lecture theatre present live and moving forms of his work, the photographs of Augustine are the outcome of the collaboration of Charcot as a photographer and of Augustine as a model in a still art form. In the photographs of herself which she later is allowed to look at by Freud, Augustine is different from the way in which she had herself perceived to be. These are the images of Augustine that Charcot wishes to present rather than a true recording of her. The photographs are labelled, for example, 'Amorous Supplication', 'Eroticism' and 'Extasy'. In *The Female Malady*, there are three photographs of Augustine, similarly entitled 'Supplication amoureuse', 'Extase' and 'Eroticisme'. The first shows Augustine in a night-gown seating on a crumpled bed with her hands joined in prayer and her face raised towards heaven. The second depicts Augustine with her arms spread and raised and her face lifted as if she is in an ecstatic state. Her night-gown slipping from her shoulder partially exposes Augustine's right breast and her leg up to the middle of her thigh. In the third, Agustine poses as if she is sleeping or dead with her arms crossed over her breasts, the left one of which is partially exposed. These are some of the photographs Furse uses in her play and they present Augustine as an eroticised object. As Showalter writes of the original photographs, Augustine's postures are 'exaggerated gestures of the French classical acting style, or stills from silent movies' (Showalter, p. 154). In a sexual image Charcot, in Furse's play, immobilises her by putting her into a death-like sleep which he jokes may be for perhaps a hundred years. She is confined in her photograph like Sleeping Beauty encased in the glass coffin,

waiting to be kissed and wakened by a prince. Augustine is photographed in order to be looked at in the way in which Charcot wants others to look at her.

Augustine also suffers from hallucinations and visions as a result of her rapes.

At one point she is encouraged by Freud and speaks in an half-hallucination.

AUGUSTINE:...eyes...cat's eyes, green and bright and shiny as topaz. The eyes were following me, watching me, out of the darkness. I screamed out loud. My nose was bleeding...The doctor said I had become a woman...and gave me some strips of white cotton to put between my legs...I hurt between my legs where the rat had been...But the wound stopped bleeding after a few days, and I haven't needed to use the rags. (pp. 28-9)

She constantly sees eyes, perhaps the threatening eyes of her rapist, Mr Carnot, prying and searching for a chance to grab her. (In real life 'Monsieur C used his eyes to control Augustine both during and after rapes' (Furse, p. 3).) Perhaps because of this, Augustine does not like the eyes of the lecture-theatre audience watching her acting and reacting to hypnosis. Even though they see her suffer, those around Augustine do not pay attention to what really have happened to her.

In her state of semi-hallucination, Augustine sees herself being threatened by moving phallic objects.

AUGUSTINE: You're so heavy! You're HURTING ME! Put that snake back in your trousers! Oh, the peacocks...with their big tails cluttered with eyes! Get your rat out of my botto[m]..Oh, the pig! The pig! I still can't get that big fat pig out of my mind... (Original emphasis, pp. 40-1)

Augustine is remembering suffering the pain from anal and vaginal penetration by the rapist's penis. The pain and horror of her rape also appear in her nightmares.

AUGUSTINE: I just remembered my dream...I'm in an abattoir. Inside are lots of pigs, cows, sheep, chicken. I see them kill them. Kill pig...and they lie there in pools of blood. Then everything is soaked in blood...the floor, the walls, the men's hands, my dress...all red... (p. 32)

The pigs she describes in her dream may be her rapist who kept violating her. She is terrified by the blood that came from killing the pigs, but she may also wish to kill her

rapist. Additionally, the blood may also be linked to the blood she painfully shed after she had been raped. However, to Freud, the blood signals the start of her menstruation which happens soon after the dream. Augustine's pain is ubiquitous in her consciousness and subconsciousness. Through her hallucinations, visions, and nightmares, which Charcot regards as 'vivid imagination' (p. 34), Augustine's story of rape is recurrent throughout the play.

Augustine suffers, especially physically from her attacks. She has a sense of suffocation, which hurts her throat. She also feels as if something is pulling her tongue. Like Philomele, who looks fanatical when she is absorbed in making her ragdolls, Augustine seems mad when she is overtaken by convulsions. Both of the young women 'write their bodies': one with her substitute ragdoll, the other with her bodily contortions. Like Philomele, who vows to heaven to tell her father what has happened to her, Augustine wishes to tell her father though he never appears on stage. Despite Augustine's wish to tell of her trapped anger and fear, she has to find another way to reveal them, mostly physically, visually and metaphorically.

Augustine is a young girl though her body is fully grown. She fiddles with ribbons in different colours and asks Freud which colour he likes most. The ribbons are some of the few colourful items in her hospital environment. They are also some of the few articles connecting her to the outside world, and perhaps the only things in her possession which satisfy her childish, but feminine nature. Sometimes Augustine passes time by tying knots or bows around the poles of her bed, though with difficulty because of her right arm which has gone numb. Her convulsive pain climaxes when she has lost her sense of the ribbons' colours.

AUGSUTINE: It's all gone!...All the colour's gone!...HELP ME!!! I CAN'T SEE MY COLOURS! THEY'VE TAKEN MY COLOURS AWAY! (Original emphasis, p. 35).

This is the result of Augustine's having been constantly photographed. As Furse notes, '*She takes on the qualities by which she is described by others*' (original italics, Furse, p. 5). Augustine is a photograph in black and white, and she transforms her world into a photographic image. She is also, Furse states, a dramatist who 'interprets her own condition': 'Her art is self-parody' (Ibid., p. 5). Her status is like Genet's marginal status that Sartre analyses: Genet was first 'an object to others' and then he 'had to make himself become the Other that he already was for Others' (Sartre quoted in Ibid., p. 5). Augustine 'embodies that which Others (her medical voyeurs) condemn her to' (Ibid., p. 5). She 'writes her body' (Ibid., p. 5): she is a photograph and she also holds the camera through which she sees the world and takes pictures in black and white.

This loss provides Augustine with a very significant transition from victim to survivor. In appearance, she has become very violent with more frequent attacks after the colour loss. However, she sees her other self through a camera's eye, objectifying this self. She thus splits herself into two by placing her self 'beside herself.' In this state, Augustine screams out her anger and her nightmarish experience. She has regained her own voice which has been suppressed by authority. At a lecture, Augustine sees her rapist and she accuses him in public, the first time after her loss of a sense of colour.

AUGUSTINE: How dare you! How dare you come to the Salpêtrière! A respectable middle-aged man!...With a housekeeper for a whore! What do you want with her daughter, eh?...I'm going to tell on you....If only they'd Listen!!!...
(Original emphasis, p. 36)

Later, Augustine has a hysterical attack to which Charcot responds by seeing 'obscenity' in her 'lascivious choreography' (p. 42).

CHARCOT: All female hysterics cry rape! Fantasy, Herr Doctor! We are an audience for their obscene imaginings!... (p. 44)

On the contrary, however, taking up the centre stage, she reveals the truth through this seeming madness. Her utterance is not a madwoman's babble, but an articulation of her experience. Augustine is no longer a clown puppet tethered to Dr Charcot's fingers.

At some point Charcot likens Augustine to a witch when he pricks her in order to find her hysterogenic regions, Charcot himself becoming a pricker: 'Indeed the comparison between hysterics and witches is not to be passed over lightly,' Charcot says. 'Scratch an hysteric, find a witch!' (p. 24). In a way Augustine is physically abused by being pricked like a witch and her body is used as an object by Charcot who wishes to display his skills. In another way she becomes powerful when she is compared to a witch. Later she calls herself 'the sabbat' (p. 46) - the witches' festival. As Rosemary Ellen Guiley notes, 'The sabbat...may be related to Bacchanalian and Saturnalian rites of the ancient Greeks and Romans' (Guiley, p. 287). The sabbat is the celebration of Augustine's liberation from her trauma. Like the female Bacchic festival in which Philomele and Procne participate in Thrace, this sabbat is a women's festival. It is also the 'upside down festival,' as Cixous notes, 'the spilling of words as a means of liberation, of reclaiming territory' (Furse, p. 10). Cixous continues, '...the sabbat and the hysterical attack provide a return to regular rhythm, the device - setting in complement, face to face, the ones who look and...the women who suffer...requires it' (Cixous , p. 19). In the 'upside down festival' Augustine performs the tarantella in order to dance away her suffering like the women who are bitten by a spider. The tarantella resembles the dance which the four women perform in *Crux*, and the celebration of Agathe, Catherine and Jeanne, after their destruction of the statue in

The Taking of Liberty. It also resembles a fox's dance in *Thatcher's Women*. By breaking Charcot's spell, Augustine wakes up from a long sleep into what she experiences as a volcanic eruption from which hot lava pours roughly all around her. Augustine becomes an explosion which can shatter the memory that haunts her. The festival, the spider dance and the volcano proffer Augustine a path from servitude to autonomy.

Another element in the play which frees Augustine is the setting. In the opening scene the stage has '*an iron four poster with calico white curtain hanging from it. This creates a kind of booth,*' (p. 16) a claustrophobic space into which Augustine is incarcerated. Jeremy Kingston commented on the setting of the first production:

Furse stages her play most cleverly within a triangle of semi-transparent curtains [designed by Sally Jacobs], where a whirling hospital bed and the sight of the men weaving in and out of the curtain expresses in movement the energy of Augustine's tale.¹¹

From this suffocating place Augustine is further confined into a straitjacket and then into a cell with bars, following her loss of colour and increasingly violent attacks. As Agustine is called 'Dubois' which literally means 'from the woods,' 'as a sign of her embodiment of Nature' (Furse, p. 3), she wants to return to where she is from. She longs for the outside world with rows of trees. On one occasion, Augustine escapes into the hospital garden at night soaking herself in the rain, as she cannot stand her suffocation. Her longing for the outside and her practice of escape, her sorties into the garden later lead her into a world beyond the control of Dr Charcot and Dr Freud. In addition, at the very moment of her escape, Augustine suddenly appears on stage, '*bringing warm, rich coloured lighting with her, as though the stage had suddenly switched from black and white to technicolour*' (p. 49). She has brought and restored

what she has lost before - colours. She is no longer a victim of 'emotion pictures!' (p. 49). She frees herself from the hospital of monochrome into the world of technicolor.

The sound effect also acts as a track which guides Augustine out of bondage. The initial soundtrack of laughter, chatter and applause merges into the sound of girl singing, which brings Augustine centre stage. In contrast to the ticking of a clock (or the metronome) which signifies 'classic control' (Furse, p. 14), the rhythms of the violin, Augustine's double, characterise Augustine's convulsive pain. Laughter is also mentioned, even though we don't hear but imagine it. As Cixous argues: 'Women-witches often laugh.' Like 'Medusa's laugh,' this laughter is 'frightening.' and 'petrifying... shattering constraints' (Cixous, p. 30). Towards the end of the play, Augustine is made to take up a praying position and is asked what she sees. She sees the Virgin Mary talking to Magdalena, she explains. 'And she's laughing!!!' (p. 49). As Geraldine Cousin notes: 'In Augustine's vision, the Virgin, 'the sterile woman'...bonds with the whore, and the sign of their pact is their transgressive laughter' (Cousin, p. 29). Laughter thus has a reconciling nature and it is laughter that releases Augustine and allows her to take control. After she escapes near the end of the play, we hear the sound of 'a heavy, purgative rainfall' (p. 49), which cleanses her defilement.

A final route by which Augustine escapes is her 'performance.' Even though she is subjected to the male gaze, she watches the audience and the two doctors watching her in the beginning of the play. In addition to taking over their role as 'voyeurs,' later Augustine takes on the authority of the two doctors through the fact that she escapes her confinement dressed in a mixture of their clothes. She leaves them looking vulnerable, like babies, 'in shirtsleeves and longjohns' (p. 49). Wearing men's clothes and with her top hat on and cane, she is a 'vaudeville drag artiste' (p. 49).

Taking on all her roles towards the end of this drama, Augustine declares she is everything (all bad and good things): a bird, for example, and a snake. Augustine escapes her confinement ‘by the window of light as though performing a conjuring trick’ (p. 49). Through her magic, Augustine flies away like a bird or like a witch. Having learnt histrionic skills from the roles she has played, Augustine disappears into the outside world like a snake, without anybody noticing. She is no longer a young powerless rape victim. Augustine has set herself free from the gaze which tortured her: ‘No more secretions for you! No more exhibition!’ (p. 49). She vanishes into nowhere and is never heard of again. Augustine has become a cartographer who charts out her previously unknown territory.

NOTES

¹ Elaine Showalter, *The Female Malady: Women, Madness and English Culture 1830-1980* (London: Virago, 1987), p. 145.

² Phyllis Chesler, *Women and Madness* (London: Allen Lane, 1972), p. 54.

³ Barbara Hill Rigney, *Madness and Sexual Politics in the Feminist Novel* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1980), p. 6.

⁴ Olwen Wymark, *Find Me in Plays by Women: Volume Two*, ed. by Michelene Wandor (London: Methuen, 1983), pp. 100-126 (p. 101).

⁵ Sarah Daniels, ‘Introduction’, in *Daniels, Plays: Two* (London: Methuen, 1994), p. x.

⁶ Louise Kingsley, *Independent*, (19.6.91), ‘Augustine (Big Hysteria)’, *Theatre Record*, Vol. XI, Issue 6 (1991), pp. 702-3 (p. 702).

⁷ Elaine Showalter, ‘Foreword’, in Anna Furse, *Augustine (Big Hysteria)* (The Netherlands: Harwood Academic Publisher, 1997), pp. xv-vi (p. xv).

⁸ Hélène Cixous and Catherine Clément, *The Newly Born Women*, trans. Betsy Wing (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), p. 41.

⁹ Freud, *New Introductory Lectures*, quoted in *The Newly Born Women*, p. 50.

¹⁰ Helen Rose, *Time Out* (19.6.91), *Theatre Record* (1991), p. 702.

¹¹ Jeremy Kingston, *The Times* (13.6.91), *Theatre Record* (1991), p. 702.

Chapter 5. Working Women in the Late-Victorian Age

The late nineteenth century when the victimisation of Augustine took place in France overlapped the late-Victorian period in England. Queen Victoria reigned from 1837 to 1901, and the end of the Victorian age marks the beginning of the twentieth century. The heritage of the Victorian age has been felt in every aspect of English life throughout the twentieth century. As Erna Olafson Hellerstein writes:

In the ferment about sex roles and the family that characterizes our own time, men and women still define themselves in terms of the Victorians, either living out ideas and defending institutions that came to fruition in the nineteenth century or reacting against these ideas and institutions and against Victorian “repression.” Modern “objective” social science, born during the Victorian period, both incorporated and legitimized Victorian prejudices about gender, family, work, and the division between public and private spheres.¹

The Victorian legacy continues to affect lives in the present time, particularly people’s concept about the roles of women. During the Victorian age, married women, especially, were seen as ‘the angel in the house’. The phrase was taken from the title of a poem by Coventry Patmore, who described ‘the courtship and marriage of a young couple’ (*Ibid.*, p. 134), inspired by his love for his wife, Emily Andrews Patmore (1824-62). The phrase, the angel in the house, expresses the idealisation of womanhood, which confined women in the private sphere. Under this phrase, women were forced to sacrifice themselves and to become passive, selfless wives. To be such, women were educated to take duties in relation to men: they were taught how to please their husbands and win their love. However, these women faced contradictions in reality as they also had to cope with household management and training children according to their respective and expected sex roles. As Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar observes of a selfless woman in *The Madwoman in the Attic*:

Whether she becomes an object d’art or a saint...it is the surrender of her self - of her personal comfort, her personal desires, or both - that is the beautiful angel -

woman's key act, which is precisely the sacrifice which dooms her to both to death and to heaven. To be selfless is not only to be noble; it is to be dead. A life that has no story, like the life of Goethe's Makarie, is really a life of death, a death-in-life. The ideal of 'contemplative purity' evokes, finally, both heaven and the grave.²

In addition to her self-existence denied in their families, Victorian women were disempowered and marginalised legally and economically even though the ideal image of women was highly praised and exhorted in Victorian society. They were often regarded as child-like, sexually frigid, and/or irrational if they didn't seem to devote themselves to their husbands and children. Once women left the home sphere for whatever reason and abandoned duties, they were pushed outside the dominant cultural role models and frequently regarded as fallen women.

Even though the angel in the house was a prevailing phenomenon in Victorian society, the image could only seemingly be achieved in classes which were well-off enough to keep women within the domestic sphere. Women's work was mostly associated with home and household management. As Leslie Parker Hume observes, 'the only appropriate working activities of women were domestic tasks' (*Victorian Women*, p. 273). Thus if their husbands or fathers were not able to feed and clothe them in their homes, women had to work in others people's houses as domestic servants. These women, in a number of cases, were economically exploited. Their work hours were long with low and often irregular wages and they were heavily loaded, sometimes with dirty work. These women were also sometimes sexually coerced by their masters or their sons, as is seen in the cases of Augustine in *Augustine (Big Hysteria)* and of Annie in *The Gut Girls*. With the Industrial Revolution in progress, many women had to earn their living away from their homes in factories, mostly related to textile industry. Their work hours were long and hard like those of domestic services. Even though these women were paid better than maid-

servants, their working conditions were sometimes unhygienic and their work was dangerous and monotonous. Often their work space overlapped with that of men. In their work place, too, like domestic servants, women were often sexually harassed, as they were vulnerable without immediate family protection. In addition, according to Hume, female factory workers were often accused of 'taking jobs away from men and undercutting and undermining male wages' (*Ibid.*, p. 287). This accusation reflects 'men's fears that the extra-domestic employment of women in factories would erode patriarchal authority' (*Ibid.*, p. 287).

When women lost their menial jobs, some of them had no choice but to take to the street. Far from being the angel in the house, these women were frequently humiliated. They were treated as social evil, a disease that was feared to contaminate Victorian society. However, most prostitutes were victims of their society which offered limited alternatives to them. Often men's sexual drives, denied by the women of the respectable classes, were projected on these women. The polarisation of women's images within the social spectrum - virgin or whore - was strongest and most rigid in the Victorian age. As Walkowitz comments, 'The material conditions of working-class women were certainly less conducive to fantasies of female autonomy and self-creation' (Walkowitz: b, p. 73). Poor and sometimes with nobody to support them, Victorian working women were placed under severe oppression.

Sarah Daniels' *The Gut Girls*, which is discussed next in this chapter depicts the lives of a number of Victorian working women. They suffer from various kinds of exploitation, especially economic and sexual exploitation, but they gain a better wage than most women and a degree of independence from their job.

Sarah Daniels

Sarah Daniels is one of major woman playwrights in the 1980s and 1990s in Great Britain. According to Mary Remnant, 'Daniels is one of the very few - some would say the most notorious - of women playwrights in Britain to have reached mainstream audiences...'³ Many critics characterise her as a 'venom-spitting virago of radical feminist theatre' (ibid., p. 7). Despite this accusation, Daniels is a warrior speaking for oppressed women. She places women centre stage: especially marginalised women like Annie and the other working women in *The Gut Girls*; madwomen as in *Ripen Our Darkness*, *Beside Herself* (1990), *Head-Rot Holiday*, and *The Madness of Esme and Shaz*; lesbians as in *Ripen Our Darkness* and in *Neaptide* (1986); environmental activists in *The Devil's Gateway* (1983); and women labelled as witches in *Byrthrite* (1986). By giving these silenced women voices, Daniels deals with a wide range of sexual and class discrimination.

Her first play, *Ripen Our Darkness*, pictures two households - one middle class, the other working class. In these households, Mary and Rene respectively, are expected to be always available to wait on their male family members. Mary even takes her break in her duties not at her own volition but her husband's. She is insinuatingly accused of her daughter's lesbianism and her sanity is questioned. Her final rebellion against her husband and marriage is suicide in order to get out of her oppression. Daniels most controversial play, *Masterpieces* (1983), deals with the issues of pornography and its connection to violence against women. (See *Masterpieces* in Chapter 10.) Her next play staged in the same year, *The Devil's Gateway*, is about women living in Benthal Green who voice their opposition of nuclear weapons. Betty and Enid are also distressed housewives like Mary and Rene,

but later they join their daughters in the cause of conserving their neighbourhood. Another play three years later, *Neaptide*, contains the myth of Persephone, who was raped by Pluto, but was claimed by her mother, Demeter. The story focuses on Claire, Poppy's lesbian mother. Claire, as a school teacher, has to hide her sexual identity in order to keep her job so that she can support her daughter. At school, she has no choice but to be silent even though some of her pupils are condemned for lesbianism. Her sexual identity also puts her child custody battle at her disadvantage, but her mother Joyce smuggles Claire and Poppy out of the country. The drama portrays the discrimination of lesbians and the fact that there is a large number of them in the community as a whole.

Daniels looks at the oppression of women both in contemporary and past contexts. *Byrthrite*, set in the seventeenth century, depicts the changeover to male control of the female body in the process of childbirth, excluding women (midwives) from the process. The issue connects the past to the present. As Hammer argues:

The organisation and development of medicine, particularly obstetrics and gynaecology, and science, particularly human genetics, is fundamental to the situation we find ourselves in today.⁴

In the drama, a midwife, Grace is labelled as a witch and executed because of her herbal skills. Other women who rebel against their system are also feared and punished by their society. Witchcraze disempowers and silences women as scapegoats in this drama. (See Witches in Chapter 2.) *The Gut Girls* discussed below is also about women from the past. Her two other plays, *Head-Rot Holiday* and *The Madness of Esme and Shaz*, depict female insanity. Like these two plays, madness is portrayed in *Beside Herself*. In this play Evelyn, the protagonist, was abused as a child by her own father and suffers from trauma like Augustine. In her father's house her alter ego, Eve, trails her, expressing her anger and frustration. (See *Beside Herself* in Chapter 7.)

Daniels explores women's oppression in terms of gender and class in her plays. According to Lizbeth Goodman, Daniels often conducts research for her plays in order to express 'issues of real importance to women's lives.'⁵ Even though the women in her plays suffer because of their situations or their identities, they establish female bonds with other women. By giving these women voices, Daniels creates a different outlook, especially for marginalised women, drawing different responses from the audience. In her interview with Lizbeth Goodman, Daniels said 'feminism is the awareness that we live in a patriarchal society, with a desire to challenge and hopefully change it.'⁶ Daniels believes that theatre can influence people's lives:

[Theatre] can change or at least affect the way we think, or make us re-think. A play can certainly challenge assumptions, and encourage audiences to examine the way they think or feel about certain issues, and indeed other people. (*Ibid.*, pp. 101-2)

Like Timberlake Wertenbaker's play discussed in Chapter 1, Daniels' plays are oriented towards change for women.

The Gut Girls

Most respectable Victorians distinguished their own social classes from the rest of society on the basis of female virtue and purity, while at the same time leaving poorer women - whether servants, slaves, or prostitutes - vulnerable to sexual exploitation.

Estelle B. Friedman *Victorian Women*

POLLY: Offal by name, awful by nature.

Sarah Daniels *The Gut Girls*

The Gut Girls received its first production at the Albany Empire, London in November 1988. The playwright, Sarah Daniels, comments on how this drama has come into being:

[*The Gut Girls*] was virtually handed to me on a plate with side orders of title and deadline by Teddy Kiendl, then the Artistic Director at the Albany Empire Theatre, Deptford. In May 1988, he asked me if I'd write a piece set in Deptford

at the turn of the century about the young women who worked in the Cattle Market and were turned into domestic servants by the Duchess of Albany.⁷

The drama portrays the economic and sexual exploitation of the young women in both private, domestic, and work spaces in late Victorian times. As the presence of Duchess of Albany suggests, the drama also depicts the clashes of different classes of women. Like the previous three dramas discussed in this thesis, *The Gut Girls* is based on past events. In order to write this play, as Goodman notes, Daniels ‘did a local research into the history of women’s work in the Deptford slaughterhouses.’⁸ Unlike the several characters in the previous plays who survive their victimisation and pain, the women in this drama are pushed into subservience. The gut girls are deprived of their relative autonomy which they enjoyed at the beginning of the play (despite the fact that they were regarded as little better than whores). Some of the girls defy violence and confront the consequences of their resistance. *The Gut Girls*, as the title implies, depicts the fighting spirit of a group of underprivileged women in the late-Victorian age.

The play opens in the gutting shed where Ellen, Maggie, Polly, and Kate are working. Harry, the foreman, comes in and introduces a new girl, Annie, in place of Maud, who has left the workplace after her marriage. The shed is full of animal carcasses and blood which covers women up to the ankles. Claire Armistead describes the setting for the production designed by Kate Owen as follows: ‘Huge animal carcasses dangling overhead as five blood-spattered women go about their daily work.’⁹ The setting is never pleasant in sight and smell. It is the very place which oppresses the women. Annie, on her first day of work, almost faints, horrified by the smell and bloody dead animals. Lady Helena, the Duchess of Albany, visits the shed to talk to the girls in order to invite them to her evening club. Later, at home, she is

unable to stand the smell which has remained on her clothes and tells her servant to burn them. Lady Helena's friend, Lord Edwin Tartaden, who accompanies her to the gutting shed, collapses because of the smell and has to be dragged out by Harry. In this dreadful situation, the women are constantly watched by the foreman, who tries to prevent them from speaking a word in his presence. The gut girls prepare meat - an extension of women's work in the home - for mostly men to consume. Yet, they work as hard as men, gutting and hacking at carcasses, for long hours at that, though they are paid less even than a young, frail boy, Jim, who cannot even lift the carcasses without difficulty. By contrast, Maggie handles them with ease. The shed is controlled by a patriarchal system which discriminates against women. Their workplace is perhaps little different from present ones, especially in many parts of the third world, where many women work in unhygienic places for long hours, constantly watched and controlled by their foremen and in many cases women are exploited by being paid less than men for the same job.

The opening scene also strikingly contrasts with the tidy places of the upper class, occupied by Lady Helena and Arthur Cuttle-Smythe, the partner of the slaughterhouse. The two different places demonstrate the oppression of the working women in contrast to the comfort of upper class people. The gutting shed is also compared to the households where some of these gut girls are later employed as servants. Here, the women have to work very hard in order to keep their places pleasant. As in the gutting sheds, they are watched and controlled. Their oppression does not seem to end wherever they work. The opening scene is also an antipode of Lady Helena's immaculately clean and quiet club where feminine servitude is imposed on the gut girls and where these women are trained to be silenced. These

settings frequently provide the locations for the interactions of different classes which recur throughout the play.

In the apparently oppressive opening scene, however, the working women are high-spirited. In Harry's absence, they dare to tell jokes about men's penises and sausage skins as a means of contraception. They watch Harry, who supervises them, and, despite his attempts to silence them, talk back to him. They tease Jim for his physical weakness which they think makes him unfit for his job. Even though they are less well paid than men, compared to women in other jobs, the gut girls are financially independent, supporting themselves and some of them their families, as Maggie insists:

MAGGIE (to Annie): I tell you girl, you may think this place is hell but we get paid in one week nearly what you get for a whole year in service, so by comparison it makes this place seem more like paradise. (p. 9)

In the shed, their autonomy is well-demonstrated in their unrestrained attitude with which they talk to the Duchess: '...what does your job entail?' she asks and Polly replies, 'Put your finger right on it, madam, entrails' (p. 13). Outside the shed they enjoy their freedom on their routine visits to the pub. They work and drink like men. As a group the women are united and strong. They intimidate Len, the pub-owner, who is afraid to chase them out of his pub where they talk roughly and noisily, thus making men hesitant to come in. They ridicule the music-hall comedian, Madjacko, urging him to leave the stage because he has used them as the butt of his jokes. These women refuse to be humiliated, respecting their own integrity despite the fact that society largely determines people's value by their jobs and the class they belong to. They assert the fact that their morals are as good as anyone's even though they wear outrageous hats and no undergarments - thus offending 'respectable' people. They celebrate their lives as women who are not confined by the expectations the

patriarchal system imposes on women in their society. Without reluctance, these women voice their thoughts and emotions, taking the centre stage in the first half of the play.

While the gut girls revel in their independent lives, they are regarded as ‘bad women’ who transgress the boundaries marked for ‘good women’ idealised by their society.

KATE: ...Most blokes out there think we’re rubbish. I mean as far as they’re concerned, there’s only one thing worse than being a gut girl and that’s being a whore. (p. 10)

The gut girls thus represent a view of working women which is contradicted by some of the other characters in the play. Susan C. Haedicke employs the concept of ‘heteroglossia’ against that of monoglossia (single voice) from Mikhail Bakhtin in her article, ‘Doing the Dirty Work: Gendered Versions of Working Class Women in Sarah Daniels’ *The Gut Girls* and Israel Horovits’s *North Shore Fish*.’ According to Haedicke, Bakhtin’s heteroglossia is ““the living mix of varied and opposing voices” in dialogue with each other, renewing and clarifying each other.’¹⁰ Heteroglossia in this play includes the different voices of the gut girls, the voice of Lady Helena and the male voices of Lord Tartaden and Arthur. These voices conflict and contrast with each other, presenting different opinions within late-nineteenth society. As Haedicke argues:

By placing these women in the subject position so that the spectator must view them from at least two perspectives, Daniels injects heteroglossia into the play world, and that alternative voice means that these women also pose a threat to the status quo: they are outside the bounds of acceptable womanhood, and as such, they must be silenced, domesticated. (*Ibid.*, p. 78).

‘Bad women’ are out of men’s control and dangerous so they must be either annihilated like witches or incarcerated like madwomen or re-shaped into ‘good women’ who become easily controllable and willing to conform to the male ideal.

Lady Helena's contribution to heteroglossia is her determination to devote herself to Christian charity work and to tame these unruly women who display what is called paganism. She sets up a club near the gutting sheds to which she invites the gut girls and tries to infuse into them a form of Christianity which sums up Victorian morality. Her aim is to train them to become docile domestic servants, who she knows will be considered to be more 'decent' by society. In order for them to be of commercial value as servants, and then later good wives and mothers, these women have to be silenced. Then they can no longer enjoy talking freely with men and people from the upper class, as they did with Lady Helena in their gutting shed and with Arthur's wife, Priscilla, who comes to the pub to persuade the girls to attend Lady Helena's evening home-economics class. One evening Lady Helena brings to the club one of her servants, Nora, in order to give the gut girls a good example of a maid. Wearing an impeccably tidy apron and cap, Nora stands with her back straight and with her legs together, looking straight in front of her. Lady Helena points out that Nora does not speak until she is spoken to and Lady Helena also teaches the gut girls how to answer when they are spoken to: they do so 'as precisely and politely as possible' (p. 67). Lady Helena also tells Nora to give a demonstration of serving tea to herself and Priscilla. All Nora utters during this presentation thus: 'Very good, madam.'; 'Thank you, madam.'; 'Will that be all, madam?' (p. 66-7). In their lesson, preceded by this demonstration by Lady Helena's servant, the gut girls practice saying: 'You rang, madam' (p. 67). Like Nora, in order to be good maids, they are supposed to be seen and spoken to but not expected to speak until they are told to do so. They are forced to listen only most of the time. Their silencing places the women in the subservient position as they have to obey the voice of the upper class. The silencing thus restricts their movement and they are not allowed to trespass the

boundary of submissive servants and women. The women exist not as substantial entities, but as shadow figures. They are deprived of their true identity.

Lady Helena's cause is further strengthened when the gut girls lose their jobs. Arthur is forced to sell his slaughterhouse as a result of the development of new technologies which enable foreign traders to export prepared and frozen meat to England. The gut girls are left with a choice either to go on to the streets or to turn to Lady Helena, who responds by putting those girls who have regularly attended her classes into service, while leaving the others to manage for themselves. Either in service or in other jobs the women's exploitation continues, sometimes even worse than that they experienced in their gutting sheds. Even in their own families some of them are exploited. They are sacrificed for the education and well-being of boys, who are also given other priorities such as better food and better clothing. Polly, for example, has younger brothers to support for their schooling. In the shed Polly used to steal meat for her family. During one evening class when the gut girls are taught to sew, Polly finishes first, and holds up, a large pair of knickers with many pockets, shaped like pork chops or other pieces of meat. These are intended for the items she will steal from the gutting shed.

It is Polly's humour and liveliness that causes Priscilla to choose Polly as her domestic servant. However, Polly is humiliated by Arthur, who regards servants as trash. He also wants to get rid of her because she is not silent and docile as servants are supposed to be. He accuses his wife of enjoying her servant's company for its entertainment value rather than disciplining her. Polly's daring spirit is well demonstrated when she retaliates when Arthur tries to hit her with a shovel. Polly does not want to be disgraced by being hit simply because she has spilt coal from the scuttle she was carrying over the carpet. It was not her fault anyway because she had

been almost knocked over by Priscilla, who ran to Polly for help when her husband threatened her. This was because Priscilla had refused to accompany her husband to an occasion that Lady Helena organised. Polly, in fact, entered the room in order to protect Priscilla when she heard her scream. It was Arthur who instigated events. As a result of Polly's action, however, she is charged with assault and taken to jail. Despite Arthur's threatening behaviour to Polly and Priscilla, and Maggie's appeal to Priscilla for help, Priscilla dare not testify against her husband and it seems likely that Polly will be accused of attempted murder. As Maggie points out, if Arthur had hit Polly, no one would be bothered about it. This clash between the privileged and underprivileged classes reveals that the underprivileged are seen as being to blame and have to pay penalties if they revolt against those in authority, no matter what the cause of their revolt may be.

The other girls are more or less in the same situation of exploitation. Kate, the youngest among the five women, also chooses service. She is not allowed to talk to people outside the house where she is employed, especially when she is taking care of her master's son. Even though Annie happens to see her and tries to talk to her, Kate shuns her. Kate is confined and isolated from her companions. She is barred from the freedom of movement she used to relish as a gut girl. Another girl, Annie, was a maid-servant before she joined the gutting shed. She was raped by her young master, made pregnant, and thrown out to the street. The baby was born dead and she was treated like a prostitute. The institutional system did not allow her to live in a place of her choosing, but insisted on her living in approved lodging in order to prevent her from another fall. Like Polly's case, even though her violation is not her fault, she was blamed for it. Annie is a victim of the Victorian double standard under which men from a respectable class project their sexual desire on women outside their class,

while leaving women from their class mostly intact from sexual exploitation. However, after the closure of the gutting shed, she has no choice but to go back into service which victimised her before. There, at one point, she is told to spread newspapers over the carpet so that it remains clean when guests come. Annie witnesses that the respectable class is not so respectable as it looks, but is concerned about how respectable it is seen to be by others.

Maggie is harassed by Edwin, who threatens her with his pocket knife when she refuses his sexual advances. Maggie, however, produces a bigger, meat knife and humiliates him. Because of this, Maggie stops going to the evening classes, but cannot tell Lady Helena the reason, as she thinks Lady Helena would not believe it. Later, she is kicked out of the house by her mother, who cannot keep her. Maggie neither wants to be a washerwoman like her mother, nor wants to marry and have many children also like her mother. She is disillusioned with marriage and has no choice but to go into service if she does not want to sell herself. Maggie, however, recognises Edwin when she visits Lady Helena for a job as a servant and she gives up on the prospect. Maggie is denied even the choice to be a servant. Maggie also has to pay her penalty for rebelling against a man from the upper class. She ends up marrying Len, the pub-owner, who admires her for her audacity, despite her dislike of him. As seen in the three cases, Arthur, Annie's young master, and Edwin think they can do whatever they want to women of a lower class and can get away with it, as these women are powerless and are not able to strike back. Thus the three women are sexually and/or physically abused by their hierarchical society. However, Polly and Maggie strike back even though this means they will be pushed into more difficult situations.

Ellen, the trade unionist, is regarded as mad by the men in the shed. Yet she is independent: she has a place of her own and reads books, particularly to teach herself

and enable her to give speeches in order to raise the consciousness of the need for trade unions among people. She also offers to find a room for Annie in the house where she lives after Annie starts working in the shed. Unlike the four girls who attend Lady Helena's club, Ellen does not go there. She believes that Lady Helena is trying to turn the gut girls into 'the shining ideal of christian womanhood' (p.71), and criticises the unfairness of the fact that it is women's behaviour that Lady Helena wants to change rather than men's. Ellen's refusal to comply with Lady Helena's wishes later makes it difficult for her to get a job at a factory, as girls with references from Lady Helena are given positions. She eventually manages to get a job at a button factory, however, after having promised to have nothing to do with the union.

ELLEN:...we need to be tamed and trained to succumb to their values and orders. What's the point of kicking against it when all you damage is your foot...After all, isn't that what we're here for? You service your husband and children...I don't want to stick out like a sore thumb and be seen as odd. (p.78)

Ellen, the activist, is dominated by society's rules and becomes very different from the revolutionary whom she is seen as at the beginning of the play. As demonstrated by Ellen's case, it is vital for the lower class to comply with the rules set by the class in power. Those from the lower class who claim power have to be silenced or ostracised from their society in order for the class in authority to maintain their power.

Each girl in this drama experiences some form of violence. In the process of altering their images to suit their new jobs, the girls are silenced and are deprived of the autonomy they used to enjoy as gut girls. The working girls are not the only victims of their society. Priscilla is also a victim of Victorian notions of women. As the angel in the house, she is regarded as an ornament in the house while she is expected by her husband to manage the house. However, she is seen as ill and mad by him when she shows apprehension at going out and mingling with people from her

own class. Priscilla is also abused by her husband when he is upset about the closure of the slaughterhouse. Yet she lies to Lady Helena, who is concerned about her, telling her that her bruises are caused by bumping into a door. Instead of encouraging her to improve her self-confidence, Arthur confines her at home in order to avoid possible public embarrassment for himself. Arthur prevents her from helping Lady Helena with the evening club and her effort to boost her self-esteem is thus abortive. Like the other gut girls, Priscilla is also silenced when she is abused and reprimanded by her husband for failing to play her wifely role.

Lady Helena, by contrast, looks confident in her charity work and towards the end of the play she is complacent about what she has achieved:

LADY HELENA: This morning I woke up and I felt like hugging myself...
 It was of course a blow, when the girls were unexpectedly thrown out of work...
 But even that turned to our advantage, giving the coarsest girls a sense of urgency...
 Through diligence and persistence even the rawest material has been transformed into a servant of lower middle class acceptability...
 But I cannot help but marvel, modesty permitting, at the accomplishment.
 (p. 92-3)

She persistently rejects Edwin's attempts at courtship, probably because she knows that Edwin would try to control her actions if she married him. However, Lady Helena is herself a victim of her society as much as the girls. The Christian morals she wishes to infuse into the girls are inspired by the Victorian social conformity which are equally oppressive to her in that they condition her behaviour. Her work may be seen as being good for the women who were laid off; given that the only alternative to domestic service is taking to the streets. However, her work pushes the gut girls into subservience which robs them of their independence.

The last scene alternates between Lady Helena's revelling in her success and the gut girls' changed, and weakened voices. The girls seem to have discarded their

dreams and fighting spirit. Annie wants to get out of service, yet she has no way out. Maggie decides to conform to what is expected of her. Kate seems satisfied with a little 'respect' she earned from her job as a servant. Polly is in the hands of 'justice' which discriminates against her because of her class. In the button factory at the end of the play, Ellen seems to have turned away from trade unions.

ELLEN: But she isn't...She says to me, 'Ellen, we got a right, and a responsibility to speak out.' I looked at her just like Maggie used to look at me an' I says, 'Good job we're only here once.' 'So,' she says, 'you just going to sit there and let it happen again, then?' (p. 94)

Ellen used to raise feminist and class issues, but now, she has given up. However, the other woman whose words are quoted above has not.

Different languages and voices, what Bakhtin calls 'heteroglossia', interact with each other just as different classes and sexes do. The Victorian middle class clashes with the working class, the unionists and the gender structure. Through these interactions, one voice defines and clarifies another. Presented with different voices, the audience is given opportunities to see women from different perspectives and to hear Daniels' contention that women be viewed as subjects rather than the objects they have so often been regarded as. Even though the gut girls' voices are silenced in the course of the action, a new woman (in the button factory) lives on, voicing her demands for change in her oppressive society.

NOTES

¹ Erna Olfason Hellerstein, et al. *Victorian Women* (London: The Harvester Press, 1991), p. 1.

² Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979), p. 25.

³ Mary Remnant (ed.), 'Introduction' in *Plays by Women: Volume Six* (London: Methuen, 1987), pp. 7-12 (p. 7).

⁴ Jalna Hammer, 'Foreword', in *Daniels, Plays: One* (London, Methuen, 1991), pp. 331-3 (p. 331).

⁵ Lizbeth Goodman, 'DANIELS, Sarah', in *Contemporary Dramatists*, ed. by K. A. Berney (London: St. James Press, 1993), pp. 128-9 (p. 129).

⁶ Lizbeth Goodman, 'SARAH DANIELS', in Lizbeth Goodman, *Feminist Stages: Interviews with Women in Contemporary British Theatre* (The Netherlands: Harwood Academic Publishers BGmbH, 1996), pp 99-102 (p. 99).

⁷ Sarah Daniels, *DANIELS, Plays: Two* (London: Methuen, 1994), p. ix.

⁸ *Contemporary Dramatists*, p. 129.

⁹ Claire Armistead, *Financial Times* (11.11.88), 'The Gut Girls', *London Theatre Record*, Vol. VIII, Issue 21, (1988), p. 1674.

¹⁰ Susan C. Haedicke, 'Doing the Dirty Work: Gendered Versions of Working Class Women in Sarah Daniels' *The Gut Girls* and Israel Horovitz's *North Shore Fish*', *Journal of Dramatic Theory and Criticism*, 1994, Spring Issues 8:2, 77-88 (p. 78).

Part Two. Philomela's Sisters in the Present

The feminist movement has brought about many changes in women's situations and status for the better in the 1980s and 1990s. Still, the legacy of Philomela lives on in every aspect of women's lives. Women are beaten, raped, mutilated and/or killed, or degraded as sexual objects in real life and fiction. Because of the development of the media and because of relatively easier access to books and films than before, the general public are more exposed to, and influenced by, presentations and representations of sexual violence through many channels of the media. Nearly everyday we see news of women and female children who are abducted, raped and found dead. In novels and films women are beaten and raped as a way to exercise men's power or in many cases as a means to express men's 'love' for women. This sado-masochistic love is often the main theme of pornography. No women - young or old, pretty or plain - is exempt from sexual violence. In the dramas of Part Two which are set in the present time women suffer as much as Philomele, Marguarite, Agathe, Augustine, and the gut girls depicted in Part One. The prevalent forms of sexual violence against women in the present time are dealt with in this part. As Wertenbaker writes in her play, *The Love of the Nightingale*, which also served as my starting point for this thesis, 'Myths reverberate throughout the history of women.' The dramatists of the plays in Part Two wish to bring women's pain to audiences' attention in order to rethink myths and as a step towards the change in their repetition. Like the story of Philomele's rape, the paradigmatic narrative of men's violence against women, this chapter also starts with a story of rape, in this case, in the present in order to parallel the past and the present in women's pain.

Chapter 6. Rape

Many rape victims keep silent rather than be twice victimised, once by their attackers, and the second time by the judicial system. Until recently in the UK and the USA, many women have not reported rape because they have little faith and trust in the police or courts. According to Ussher in her book, *Fantasies of Femininity*, estimates from crime surveys or research conducted at rape crisis centres, propose that ‘only 10-50 per cent of rapes are reported.’¹ The victims fear being blamed and thus their immediate reaction to rape may be to try to forget the assault. If a victim does report the rape to the police, she has to go through another ordeal in the course of investigation of her accusation and any subsequent trial, where she will have to repeat her account of the rape. In many cases she is treated as if she was the culprit.² In addition to the victim, her family may suffer from anger, and a sense of degradation and shame in the aftermath of the rape. The victim’s past behaviour and her character may be publicly exposed and presented in a negative light. Once the offence is made known, she is not guaranteed her privacy and she may be isolated from her friends and her work, and even from her family. All these experiences remind her of the rape and make her suffer further from a feeling of victimisation. Consequently, many rape victims decide not to report the offence to the police. The victims thus are silenced by rape because of self-shame and because of the foreseeable responses by people around them and social institutions.

Rape victims are often denied adequate help, partly because of the myths that women enjoy rape and that their ‘no’ really means ‘yes’. The myths fantasise and eroticise rape despite its physical and psychological pain. Donna D. Schram describes the horrifying reality, as opposed to the myths of rape:

The sexual act or acts performed are often intended to humiliate and degrade her: bottles, gun barrels, or sticks may be thrust into her vagina or anus; she may be compelled to swallow or perform fellatio with such force that she thinks she might strangle or suffocate; her breast may be bitten or burned with cigarettes. In many instances, her hope is to save her life, not her chastity. Her terror may be so great that she urinates, defecates, or vomits. If she escapes without serious outward signs of injury, she may suffer vaginal tears or infections, contact venereal disease, or be impregnated.³

Schram's descriptions of rape are of the most violent, pornographic cases, but rape is often accompanied by physical coercion such as punching, and verbal or physical threat with weapons as is the case with Augustine discussed in Chapter 4, who was raped at a knife-point. Any type of rape debases women, even if it is committed with minimum violence.

Another rape-related myth is that brutality happens only to certain women: women who live in poor areas; who are sexually active; who take risks; who have previously been abused. These women are seen as already 'unclean' and as deserving violence. Thus those who have raped prostitutes are sometimes punished less than the rape offenders who have attacked 'respectable,' particularly white middle-class women. Cases tend to be dropped, or else the defendants receive lighter sentences if the women have gone out with the rapists willingly, or if the women have had extensive previous sexual experience. If the victim knew the offender previously, especially as an intimate, juries will be reluctant to convict, thinking that the victims assumed the risk of rape, and acquit the offender. However, rape can happen to any woman. Diane Herman argues in her article, 'The Rape Culture', 'Our culture is represented as a rape culture' and thus '[w]omen live their lives according to a rape schedule.'⁴ 'A rape culture' and 'a rape schedule' signify the prevalence of rape in Western society.

Attacked women can also be regarded as 'bad' women because they have been defiled and can therefore become estranged from their families and friends who see them as being complicit in the rape. The victims are blamed for not resisting hard enough. The myth persists that 'an unwilling woman cannot be raped.' Thus rape offenders are prosecuted if the raped women have bruises, look upset and are emotionally disturbed when they report the rape or when they relate their accounts at the hearings. Otherwise, the abused women will be regarded as acquiescent in their victimisation. Proof of rape is often in the form of resistance, yet women are advised not to resist if faced with the possibility of rape in order not to add to the injuries they will suffer. Women's chief concern is to ensure their survival. Resistance can lead to death. Society has traditionally encouraged girls and young women to be feminine - weak and submissive - and at the same time, blames them for the fact that they are not strong enough to resist men who attempt to rape them.

Women are also believed to provoke rape by the way they behave and by being in the wrong place and in the wrong clothes, thus asking for trouble. In an examination of the rape victim, she is often asked whether she frequents bars and/or whether she was wearing decent clothes at the time of rape. A welcome counter to this question is provided by Joan Smith's analysis of a rape trial at the Old Bailey in 1988 in *Misogynies*. According to Smith, a young man named Edwin Fallen, went out with a young woman, Karen Bell for a meal before she invited him to her flat. 'Fallen was 'much encouraged' by the fact that she was wearing a mini skirt.'⁵ When she refused him, he hit her in the face, fracturing her jaw. The defendant's counsel had claimed that the woman's behaviour at a dance they went to 'had led him to believe he could have sexual intercourse with her' (*Ibid.*, p. 1).

[The judge] then made an extraordinary statement. Women, he said, ‘are entitled to dress attractively, even provocatively if you like, be friendly with casual acquaintances and still say no at the end of the evening without being brutally assaulted...Mr Justice Rougier has articulated a new theory of sexual relations. A woman *can* dress as she likes; she *can* dance with a man, drink with him, even go back to her flat with him; and at the end of the evening, she is still entitled to say no without fear of attack. She is entitled, in other words, to the freedoms that men have always taken for granted. (Original italics, *Ibid.*, p. 2)

This case reflects the growing awareness of rape in the late-1980s as a serious crime and of public sympathy with the rape victim. Even though the same rulings might not necessarily be expected to be applied to other rape cases, the case provided a momentum for people who observed it to ponder on the codes of behaviour permitted to women. Rougier denied the established myths and allowed women freedom to express themselves by wearing what they liked and a voice to say no. As Smith comments, ‘His remarks are a welcome sign that things are moving in the right direction’ (*Ibid.*, p. 2).

Perpetrators usually deny their responsibility for rape by placing their actions in some special category if the above myths do not fit specific rape cases. It is often believed that rape is committed by men who are experiencing alcohol or drug abuse, mental instability, psycho-sexual dysfunction or who have experienced abuse in childhood. Rapists, however, do not fit any particular stereotypes. As Amir contends, ‘One of the most surprising findings of studies on rape is that the rapist is normal in appearance, personality, intelligence, behaviour, and sexual desire.’⁶ Herman comments that ‘rape evolves out of a situation in which “normal” males feel a need to prove themselves to be “men” by displaying dominance over females’ (*Ibid.*, p. 23). It is also thought that men with an uncontrollable sexual urge act violently, but in many cases, as most feminists such as Millett, Griffin, Brownmiller, and Scully, assert that rape does not have much to do with uncontrollable sexual urge. Rape is an expression

of power and hate. Men rape women to cause fear and pain and to prove their superiority and humiliate women. That is why rape is so common in war. As Susan Brownmiller argues, ‘in war, men admit that rape is an act of power when committed by enemy’ (Brownmiller, p. 416). Many men want to express their masculinity and aggressiveness in order to dominate and control women.

The credibility of the rape victim is often questioned because the alleged victim is often accused of lying in order to be revenged on the alleged rapist, to protect her reputation, to place the blame on him, or to enforce marriage or to wring money from him. Such views can result from a bias in the criminal justice system based on the myths surrounding sexual violence. Thus, abused women are often discredited even though there is proof that they have been physically assaulted. All these myths are detrimental to the fair treatment of rape victims. The decision by the prosecution to bring a charge of rape is frequently based upon such ideas as these. Medical staff and personnel in the legal profession, influenced by these myths, often respond to rape and decide on its severity. To sum up, existing stereotypes oppress and depress the attacked women, and lead the victims to blame themselves. The way men rape women, and people respond to the actions and treat the victims serves to remind us of men’s physical as well as economic and social power. Other women don’t necessarily sympathise with the victims and sometimes agree with men’s judgements. Male sexuality has been much associated with aggressiveness, while female sexuality with passiveness. This concept has fostered and encouraged men to be aggressive in their sexual relationships with women who are taught to understand that it is natural and normal for men to be sexually aggressive. However, rape victims experience shame, guilt, regrets, humiliation, loss of identity, confidence and self-esteem, and isolation. Women thus are silenced first by rape and then by its aftermath. That is why in many

cases raped women choose to leave the attack unreported rather than being victimised again by their society. The myths surrounding rape in contrast to its reality are well explored in *Ficky Stingers* by Eve Lewis.

Ficky Stingers

Ficky Stingers was written by Eve Lewis, a twenty-year-old student at the University of Warwick and was first staged as part of the main programme of the 1986 Young Writers' Festival at the Royal Court Theatre Upstairs, London, on 16 October 1986. Like Philomele and past victims of abuse, the protagonist of this play is silenced and maddened after her rape. The play centrally dramatises the degrading and damaging rape of a young woman by 'a friend' called Terry (nicknamed Tel). The drama also explores the woman's injured consciousness via her narrative, and the victim's subsequent silencing and alienation without support or sympathy. The woman - the victim - is tormentingly torn between trauma and self-blame. As Mary Remnant, the editor of *Plays by Women, Volume Six*, comments in the Introduction, '*Ficky Stingers* by Eve Lewis is a very short, sharp and truly shocking play which relentlessly and unapologetically tears away at the prejudices surrounding the image of rape.'⁷ The prejudices, in contrast to the reality of the painful act described by the victim, are exhibited by the victim herself, her friends, and the rapist in the play. As the author argues:

[It] is not a play about Terry. The events all take place within the narrative of the Woman and Terry is given no real justification for his behaviour. To make him the focus would distort the whole purpose of the piece.⁸

The play is focused on the victim's experience, thoughts, and feelings and thus rape in this plays is depicted from the victim's viewpoint. The play as a whole is about the

communal trauma of rape suffered by women as is demonstrated in the names of the characters: Woman - the victim, Woman 1 and Woman 2 who also sometimes play the victim's role, and Man, the perpetrator.

The play starts ominously. The opening speech by the Woman pithily but lyrically evokes an image of the ensuing exploration of rape in the drama. The Woman and her friend, Sarah, as young girls went to an isolated spot that they had been forbidden to visit on their own. The Woman remembers the red of the slacks she and her friend were wearing which was strongly visible against the green backdrop of the bushes. They had a good time together, giggling, but suddenly heard a hissing. A water snake was coming towards them. The bushes, signifying a forbidden temptation turned into a dangerous place. Sarah was quick to notice the snake and was ready to run away, while the other girl was lying 'unimpressed' (p. 117). It was only after Sarah left her that the girl realised the snake had become an immediate threat. She tried to run as fast as she could through the reeds, but she fell over. When she stretched to clutch at the grasses, she found herself instead touching a dead dog. Back at home, even though she tried hard to remove the smell of the dog, to an extent that she scrubbed her hands until they bled, it still remained on her hands. The fact that the action in the opening speech may be a nightmare the Woman wishes to forget is hinted at by the comments Andrew Rissik made in his review of the production when he discussed the 'three shrouded female figures'⁹ who are present on stage during the speech at the opening of the performance. Their 'shrouds' blurred the visual image of the three women on stage as in a dream. The dream-like quality of the speech is powerful enough to haunt the Woman with its imagery of colour, sound, and smell, and remains vivid in her memory. The snake is also reminiscent of the snake Augustine cries out about during her hysterical seizures in *Augusitne (Big Hysteria)*.

Thus the snake, a phallic symbol, also signifies rape in this drama. The decaying smell of a dead dog in the bushes foregrounds the horror of the rape and its trauma that the Woman is going to experience in the later part of this drama. As Helen Rose commented in her review in *Time Out*:

The full power of her revulsion returns to the girl in images of putrefaction as she, driven by a Lady Macbeth-like horror, attempts to cleanse her mind and body of the act and its aftermath guilt.¹⁰

Just as the smell on her hands remains although she rubbed and washed them hard, the impact of her rape torments the Woman long after the experience. The image of the prologue parallels and haunts the main action of the play, as it haunts the Woman throughout the play.

The ominous signals in the symbolic prologue are further realised, as Rissik wrote in his review, when ‘a male hand appears and drops first one, then another used durex’ (Rissik, *Independent*). Rape is now moved from the periphery to the centre and became the main act of the play in which Terry, the Man, is in control. He also wants to take control of the women, assuming they all fancy him. As Rissik writes, ‘a cocky master-of-ceremonies Cyril Nri (the actor playing Tel) bounds on to unveil three women in their going-out gear - he’s Tel’ (Rissik, *Independent*). The three women enjoy themselves in pubs on a Friday night. They giggle, gossip, and plan their holiday. But they’re bored later and want to go to a party. Outside the pub at a bus stop the Woman sees Tel whom she knows slightly. He invites the Woman into his room after she has given him a lift. The response the Woman makes to the Man’s invitation to enter his room is interpreted by him as her consent to his rape. The logical conclusion of this idea is that a woman can be seen as inviting attack by her very presence in a man’s room or by any response she might make to his sexual advances. The Man fails to acknowledge her resistance to his sexual approaches, as he says, ‘Don’t try and kid

me. I know you want to' (p. 120). Terry is in control of the situation, in his room, where the Woman is trapped like the girl in the bushes. Just as the girl was threatened by the phallic representation, the snake, so the Woman is threatened by the Man. Shame prevents her from screaming in case his parents may hear and he takes advantage of the situation. While it is the Man who attempts to penetrate her, it is the Woman who feels guilty that she might offend him by resisting too hard. In addition, he insults her through his suggestion that she's not worth having: 'They're are not what they're cracked up to be, your knockers' (p. 121). She is violated and humiliated by both his words and his deeds. All his action on the stage characterises him as a source of dread and also an embodiment of male ego.

The rape myth has it that women enjoy rape. But, in fact, it is an act of cruelty rather than an act of sexual pleasure. It is a deadening experience to the Woman, who expresses protest, fear, and pain. The Woman in *Ficky Stingers* is brutally pinned down by the Man's physical strength, unable to move or resist.

WOMAN: I retch. Like at school forced to eat octopus-eyed gristle. Like a cold ram knuckle in your mouth. Like warm cheese in polyethylene sweating...Did you ever have a pencil poked in your ear when you were little? Do you know what it feels like to have a rolled-up newspaper jammed down your throat? A chair leg rammed up your arse? (p. 121)

The Man's penis is a foreign object which torments and disgusts her and which thus she wants to remove from her body in order to free herself. However, she is penetrated, silenced, and deafened. The rape is violent enough to choke her and temporarily kill her senses except for the pain. Thus she cannot breathe, hear or feel anything except pain. She becomes numbed and paralysed to an extent that she is dead during the rape. She is totally deprived of any strength to stop his assault. She is made incapable of any form of protest. It is a gap or a moment of absence where her life does not exist. As Remnant comments, Terry's 'raw, aggressive dialogue and graphic

(but never pornographic) imagery reveal rape as the brutal and intolerable crime it is, even in the ‘best’ of circumstances’ (*Plays by Women, Six*, p. 12). As Kathleen Barry argues, ‘If one is not free to consent or reject, one is forced; and forced sexual intercourse, whether physically brutal or seductively subtle is rape’ (Barry, p. 40). In whatever circumstances coerced sex *is* violence. (My italics).

During the rape the Woman was angry, all the more because she could not physically resist. She gritted her teeth, her hands clenched. The play demonstrates the fact that sex means power to men and rape satisfies the male ego. Even talking about ‘sex’ gives them a sense of power over women: ‘All the blokes in the pub say they’ve fucked me. I suppose they think it gives them a sort of power over me’, the Woman says (p. 120). Rape is a forcible exercise of male power, a power which degrades and oppresses women, not only when they are actually raped, but also when they are threatened with rape or even sexually approached.

The rape scene, with its sexually explicit language, is ‘graphic (but never pornographic)’. However, ‘never pornographic’ is of great significance, as the author notes, ‘because the play involves sex portrayed on stage with male and female performers, it is very important not to make it visually titillating’ (*Plays by Women, Six*, p. 126). In the same vein, as Elaine Aston argues:

Feminist theatre which foregrounds male-authored violence against the female body...employs a variety of techniques which work to under-display the body. In dominant culture form, the victimisation of the body is re-enacted for the male gaze, as demonstrated, for example, in the flashback sequence of the multiple-rape scene in the 1980s mainstream cinematic text, *The Accused*. By contrast, Franca Rame’s one-woman piece *The Rape* critically distances the rape commentary from the performer’s body (in Hood 1991 [1975]). The spectator is not allowed to ‘see’ the body displayed as victim/object, but is forced into a position which requires her/him to confront the issue of male violence (see also *Ficky Stingers* by Eve Lewis, in Remnant 1987).¹¹

Unlike the film, *The Accused*, in this play the act of rape is distanced from the victim, the protagonist, as the rape takes place through her narrative rather than physically being enacted on stage. In the meantime, Woman 1 and Woman 2, alternately or together, play the role of the Woman and are directly involved in the dialogue with the Man preceding and following the rape. Before the rape, Woman 1 and Woman 2, as the Woman, directly talk to the Man, while the Woman enumerates the situation she was pushed in:

WOMAN 2 *takes [the Woman's] place and goes to leave the room.*

WOMAN 2: I want to go home now.

MAN: Oh no. You don't get away that easy.

WOMAN 1: Fuck off Terry.

MAN: Giz a kiss an I'll let you go.

WOMAN 1: Grow up...(p. 119)

MAN: Oh come on, everyone knows what an old dog you are.

WOMAN 1 & 2: Then why are you doing this? (p. 120)

Then the rape is narrated by the Woman:

WOMAN: He kneels on my hands so's I cannot move and tries to ram it down my throat..It hurts like fuck.

WOMAN 2: (*screams*) (p. 121)

After the rape, it is still the other actor who, as the Woman, talks with the Man while the Woman mainly narrates her defilement.

WOMAN: He soiled me. He soiled my clothes. He soiled me. He lets go straight away and rolls over.

MAN: No one'll believe you.

WOMAN 2: I know. (p. 121)

In addition to her body feeling distanced from the act, like Augustine, who becomes beside herself as she tells her rape story, the Woman becomes 'beside herself,' split into two during her rape. In 'confronting the issue of male violence', the audience are placed in a position to focus on the victim's injured pathos which is the true core of the play. The distancing style thus leads the audience to see the rape from a

perspective different from the traditional one provided by many male authors. And further, as Aston argues, the technique ‘instructs and educates [the spectator] to take action.’ (Aston, p. 96). Even if the spectator cannot take action immediately, s/he may understand the victim’s situation and viewpoint in the drama.

The Woman is violated and defiled by Terry. She smells putrefaction on her body and clothes. At home she burns the clothes in order to get rid of the traces of her rape. Her friends cleanse and wipe her body and comfort her mind. Just like the girl from the bushes scrubbing her hands to remove the odour, however, the Woman still smells her rape. Similarly, in Timberlake Wertenbaker’s *The Love of the Nightingale*, after Philomele has been raped by Tereus, her nurse, Niobe, washes her to purify her from the rape. For both Philomele and the Woman, the trauma of rape remains even after their physical cleansing. Like Philomele whose tongue has been cut out so that she cannot speak of Tereus’ act, the Woman is silenced by rape because of the shame she feels and because she considers herself responsible for what has taken place. She is isolated from her friends. Her friend, Linda, defending Tel, accuses the Woman of being stupid to go to his room in the first place. Another friend, Wendy, has slept with Terry, but she is used to, and thus accepts his violent performance of his sexual acts. Lisa, who also slept with him, takes his rape-like sex as a kind of infatuation with herself and wants to marry him. The Woman simply cannot tell Wendy and Lisa, as her story may not be convincing and they would not believe it. Her mother does not seem to know what has happened to her. She is lonely as nobody understands her. She is tortured both by the rapist, first and then by her indifferent friends. She has no one to turn to and thus is alienated among the crowd, who seem to hurt her and suffocate her as the rape did.

The impact of rape and its aftermath leave a deep scar on the Woman's mind. She has a nightmare in which a man makes sexual approaches to her, but she refuses them. While the man grabs her and nuzzles her neck, hands appear one after another to caress her and victimise her. Hands are all over her body so that she cannot move even though she resists. She is trapped just like the girl in the bushes or the Woman under Tel's body while she was raped. A hand appears under her crotch with a knife and gestures a sharp thrust. The Woman screams very loudly in pain and falls when she is let go. The metaphoric image of rape with a phallic object, a knife, intensifies the terror of her rape the Woman suffers from. The terror extant in the opening speech is echoed in the Woman's actual rape and her rape in the nightmare.

The episode of rape ends with Terry's joke about a drunken dragon vomiting over a little dog. As David Ian Rabey suggests, 'its ostensible humour centres on the dragon's misunderstanding of, even obliviousness to, the dog's suffering, mistaking it for an object of his thoughtless devouring.'¹² The indifferent dragon may be Terry himself who ejaculates over the Woman and is nonchalant in the face of her agony. Or further it may insinuate men who defile women by violating them and forget their suffering. The image of the dead dog in the bushes returns in the filthy image of an unlucky dog covered with the stuff the cruel dragon has thrown up. Just as soiled women, overwhelmed by what has been inflicted upon them, cannot voice their anger, this hapless dog is helpless to deal with the big dragon. Woman 1 and Woman 2, unsympathetically join Terry, laughing at his joke, leaving the Woman alone. Their loud laughter causes anguish to the Woman and their indifference is underscored by the increasing distortion and exaggeration of their laughing movements. The whole image of the play is recapitulated in Terry's joke.

Likewise, the image in the opening speech recurs in the rest of the play. The tempting, but dangerous bushes are paralleled with the pub, frequented by possible assailants, the Man's room, the place where another rape occurs (in her nightmare), and the bush the dog passes by in the dragon joke. In the first four places females are threatened by a variety of phallic image: the snake in the bush, men as potential assailants in the pub and Terry in his room, and the knife in the nightmare. The parallel nature of the settings and the various forms of phallic imagery, the snake and the knife, may also represent the frequent exercise of men's power everywhere. Women are not safe in any place where they may be victimised by men who happen to be there. In no episode is there any sympathy towards the victim. The recurring images in the play reinforce and strengthen its main theme. The play shocks and disturbs the audience and arouses from them sympathy towards the victim, the protagonist. Perhaps more than sympathy, as Rabey argues:

Ficky Stingers follows its protagonist, the Woman, through a variety of settings, attempting to resolve her emotional reaction to violation, and depicts her final conscious impatience with herself and her sex for their passive reactions. But impatience can involve the anticipation of identity. *Ficky Stingers* thus invites its audience to discover what Augusto Boal in *Theatre of the Oppressed* (1979) terms a 'precondition for action' - action in this case involving the resisting of the Man. (*Ibid.*, p. 266)

The repetitive image of the rape leaves a strong imprint on the audience as being shocking and brutal and may induce them to make a more active response to the play.

The depiction of the victim's isolation and her trauma after the rape offer a bleak image. The picture of the play is depressing with violent acts and language that humiliate the Woman. While suffering trauma, the Woman has no intention of taking revenge or of seeking comfort. However, a small chasm is broken to let the light in when, instead of resigning herself, the victim makes an effort to face her assailant

rather than avoid him, determined not to be his victim again: 'No. I won't let him swallow me. I have to go to the pub. If I don't go today I never will' (p. 122). The Woman seems to assimilate the shock and aftermath of her violation, even though very painfully.

The play is short and its plot simple with a small number of characters: 'Man,' 'Woman,' 'Woman 1', and 'Woman 2'. The Man is sometimes called Terry/Tel, perhaps to counteract the three women in the play. Just as this male character is divided into three different names, the Woman is also split into three figures: 'Woman', 'Woman 1' and 'Woman 2', especially in scenes surrounding the rape. The three female figures, as one woman, unanimously resist the Man and his act of rape. These names may represent the generic features of rape of women by men. Rabey notes his experience in playing the character, Tel, the Man:

In playing Tel, I discovered two principal things: firstly, not to make him visibly demonic from the outset, as rapists rarely are - rather, he was shown initially as recognizably laddish, larky, even amiable; secondly, ...the performance was in no way a theatrical celebration of Tel's energies and could not be played or construed as such - the audience are bonded firmly in sympathies with the Woman and against Tel. (*Ibid.*, p. 266)

This is in line with Eve Lewis' remarks on Tel, i.e. that is not to be made the focus of the play. The Man is portrayed, as Martin Hoyle writes in his review, as 'alternately beaming fatuously in masculine complacency or snarling with vicious menace, as the selfish male.'¹³ The character does not receive sympathy and is pushed to the margin of the stage. Thus, even though Tel is in control of the Woman during the rape, the Woman is in control of the whole play through her own monologue. Woman 1 and Woman 2 act as a chorus. They play the Woman's drinking mates; her mother who, unaware of the violation, does not understand her; her apathetic friends; general females; her double or her split-off self who represents her fractured consciousness

during the rape, enacting the dialogue with the Man and speaking the Woman's thoughts. When Woman 1 and Woman 2 embrace, wash, comfort, and encourage the Woman to sleep after her sexual violation, they act as her source of morale and support, helping her to cope with the trauma. They thus establish, if only briefly, a female bonding.

Rape is a disturbing experience. The language is as violent as its action. While the victim suffers the act of violence and its aftermath trauma, the perpetrator is given a free pass to get away with it. However, as Rabey argues,

Ficky Stingers paves the way for its women witnesses to free themselves from the condition of spectator and to take on the status of actor, to cease to be an object and to become a subject, to change from witness to protagonist. (*Ibid.*, p. 267)

The whole picture of the play is painted in the protagonist's own interpretation of rape. Through the victim's words, her distress is felt more powerfully by the audience. The Woman writes her body in pain in a reflective way, while Philomele in *The Love of the Nightingale* writes hers through her double, a doll she has made and Augustine in *Augustine (Big Hysteria)* inscribes her body in her contortions. Even though the three women have been silenced by their violation, they show enough fighting spirit to tell their stories. The protagonist of *Ficky Stingers*, while suffering from trauma, has the courage to be centre-stage in order to disclose her guilt and pain.

NOTES

¹ Jane Ussher, *Fantasies of Female Femininity: Reframing the Boundaries of Sex* (London: Penguin, 1997), p. 367.

² Many rape victims find that the police and prosecution would argue that the victims are in some ways responsible for the rape: 'the women consented to intercourse' if the evidence of resistance is not found, and/or 'the women were drunk or wearing provocative outfit.' According to Colleen A. Ward, a woman named May was raped by two strangers. 'May worked with the police and public prosecutors over the next six months while she awaited the preliminary hearing which would determine if the offenders would be tried for rape in the High Court. She indicated that the police 'made me feel like I was the criminal.'" May often said 'I could not decide whose side they were on' (p. 1). Ward's research shows that 'police had the most negative attitudes toward victims of sexual assault, counsellors had the most positive attitudes toward victims, and doctors and lawyers fell between the two extremes' (p. 59). Colleen A. Ward, *Attitudes toward Rape: Feminist and Social Psychological Perspectives* (London: Sage Publications, 1995).

³ Dona Schram, 'Rape' in Roberts and Gates, p. 53.

⁴ Dianne Herman, 'The Rape Culture' in Freeman, p. 20.

⁵ Joan Smith, *Misogynies* (London: Faber and Faber, 1989), p. 1.

⁶ Menachem Amir, *Patterns in Forcible Rape* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1971), p. 314 quoted in Herman, p. 23.

⁷ Mary Remnant, 'Introduction', in *Plays by Women, Volume Six*, ed. by Mary Remnant (London: Methuen, 1987), p. 12.

⁸ Eve Lewis, 'Afterword', Ibid., p. 126.

⁹ Andrew Rissik, *Independent* (25.10.86) in 'Young Writer's Festival', *London Theatre Record*, Vol. VI, Issue 20, (1986), 1160-1 (p. 1160).

¹⁰ Helen Rose, *Time Out* (29.10.86), Ibid., p. 1161.

¹¹ Elaine Aston, *An Introduction to Feminist Theatre* (London: Routledge, 1995), p. 96.

¹² David Ian Rabey, 'Violation and implication: *One for the Road* and *Ficky Stingers*', *Themes in Drama*, Vol. 13 (1991), 261-7 (p. 265).

¹³ Martin Hoyle, *Financial Times* (23.10.86), *London Theatre Record*, p. 1161.

Chapter 7. Child Sexual Abuse

Sexual abuse of children involves many forms, and varying degrees, of violence and emotional traumatisation. It covers a wide range of sexual acts which may include exhibitionism, touching the child's genitals, making the child touch an adult's, and oral, anal, and/or vaginal rape. Sexual abuse of children has existed for centuries, though it has only recently come into the light of public attention. It is far more widespread than anyone can imagine, even though sexual abuse of children is regarded as taboo in almost all societies. It is committed often by the man whom the child knows and trusts and who has authority over the child such as father figures or carers in day care centres. In the States, according to Ellen Bass, 'the majority of the abuses are not reported,' but the statistics show 'at least 97 percent' of child abusers are men; '75 percent are family members, men well known to the child.'¹ Most of the victims are girls. Those who know it happens are too apprehensive to reveal it and often try to minimise the problem, its pervasiveness, and severity. The abuser may threaten and warn her against telling anyone. Thus child sexual abuse is, like rape, one of the most underreported crimes in Western society. Like rape and wife battery, as Lucinda Joy Peach argues in *Women in Culture*, 'the sexual abuse of children also involves the issue of gendered power and control.'²

Research has found that psychological damage resulting from sexual abuse of children includes chronic depression, suicide attempts, neurosis, revulsion against sex, and self-disgust. Many of the symptoms are often associated with tension, including migraine, stomach ailments, skin disorders, and disabling aches and pains. They are likely to lack self-confidence and to experience difficulties in forming future sexual and emotional relationships. Other symptoms may include eating disorders like

anorexia nervosa, developmental regression, insomnia, hysteria and sudden school failure. Some victims also run away from home. A girl may isolate herself from peer group contact at school and work, because she feels dirty and stigmatised.

Among various forms of child sexual abuse by adults, incest involves particularly families, mostly father and daughter, but often also occurs between young girls and their male relatives such as brothers, uncles, grandfathers. In recent years abuse by father substitutes has been increasing as the divorce rate has soared: stepfathers, foster fathers, mothers' boyfriends. In Great Britain, as Sarah Nelson comments, 'fathers, relatives and father figures are found to be either directly or indirectly responsible for up to 50 percent of reported cases.'³ Incest is a repetition of the exercise of male power within a family. It is likely to happen when the family members are seen as the husband's property. Abuse within a family is even less likely to be reported than sexual assault by someone from outside the family. Motivations for intrafamily sexual abuse are varied and complex. However, Sarah Nelson sees incest as a 'simple and straightforward form of sexual abuse and exploitation of female children by adult men, for the selfish purpose of sexual gratification' (Nelson, p. 6). The father has power over the child, who is thus in a subordinate position and is also taught to obey those who have authority over her - mostly men.

Biases surrounding child sexual abuse, like rape, cause and perpetuate much suffering and distress among the survivors and families. As in the offences of rape and wife battery, attempts are made to transfer responsibility from the male offender to the victim. Like raped women, assaulted children are blamed for wanting, asking for, and enjoying rape, because girls are believed to be seductive or precocious. Analysts too often dismiss real sexual abuse of a child as fantasy. Myths related to child sexual abuse, especially incest, are much influenced by Freud. According to Freudian

psychoanalytic theory, the child contrives her seductive behaviour as a defence against her own genital pleasure and her guilty wish to sleep with her father. Hellen Bass argues with regard to Freud's theory:

When Freud was confronted with frequent accounts of sexual assault by fathers against daughters in his psychiatric practice, he felt that he had discovered major cause of hysteria. But as the enormity of this indictment against fathers became apparent to him, and as he "inferred from the existence of some hysterical features in his brother and several sisters that even his father had been thus incriminated," he revised his opinion and decided that women had fantasized these rapes. (Bass, p. 340)

These beliefs have had strong influence on psychologists and psychiatrists who treat abused children. Bass's argument manifests that there is no evidence that sexual abuse is invited by the girl, is enjoyed by her or is her responsibility. Children's vulnerability is taken advantage of, while men's exploitation is minimised. Like Freud's theory, in recent years, there is a tool which jeopardises the allegations of childhood sexual abuse: 'false memory syndrome'. The proponents of this theory argue that most of the abuse stories are fabricated (though not deliberately by the victims). Under the authority of psychiatrists, some people may make false allegations. However, Peach argues, 'in most cases the abuse is real, and false memory syndrome is suggested by the defence only as a ploy to discredit the witnesses' stories' (Peach, p. 301).

For men who have abused girls, excuses are created to shift blame onto other people or other things: unemployment, stress from work, alcohol, their wife being frigid or unavailable (because of illness, death, or shiftwork). Mothers are also often blamed for their husband's abuse of their daughters, for a number of reasons. Women are expected to nurture and protect their children more than fathers. In some cases, the mother is accused of abdicating her role of wife and mother, forcing the daughter into the mother's role and responsibilities in the family. The mother is thus regarded as a

participant in the incest situation. Mothers are also held responsible for not reporting incestuous liaisons and for not taking any action to stop it, despite evidence that ‘the largest proportion of official reports are made by biological mothers’ (Kelly, p. 58). Fear of exposure and humiliation, and powerlessness keep mothers silent about the abuse. Many women leave home with their children because of incestuous abuse, seeking divorce.

Like rapists, most persons who sexually abuse children, whether strangers or known to the child, do not fit the usual stereotypes of child molesters. Incestuous fathers may come from every social background and type of family. Susan Forward, who treated over 300 incest cases in her practice, has found the average offender to be fairly intelligent, and quite a few were regular churchgoers. She concluded that the families involved in incest come from ‘every economic, cultural, racial, educational, religious and geographical background’ (Forward in Nelson, p. 22). As Nelson analyses this, ‘Respectable ones are merely better at concealing it, and are less likely to come to the attention of social agencies’ (*Ibid.*, p. 22). Incestuous fathers are not confined to lower class alcoholics. Psychologists have tested men imprisoned for rape and incest and find them ‘normal.’ Pauline Bart, who finds rape a paradigm for male control in patriarchal societies, points out that there is little reason to believe that men who commit incest are mentally ill. She cites a study that concludes that incestuous fathers are neither psychotic nor intellectually defective, but are ‘especially hostile towards women’ and ‘see the sex act as an act of aggression’ (quoted in French, p. 199)

Entering the 1990s, one specific form of child sexual abuse begins to receive public attention. As Liz Kelly describes, it takes place ‘in a sex ring context.’⁴ According to Kelly, sex rings have traded children for child pornography and for child

prostitution. In this process children may be abused for sexual pleasure of adults. The rings are also involved in the abuse of children in 'rituals'. Children take part in occult practices and sacrifice of animals and babies. They are used in such abusive rituals as 'cleansing routines, specific postures, statements, chants, songs and costumes' (*Ibid.*, p. 8). As Kelly argues, 'There are connections here with what we know about the practices men pay prostitutes for, which have to be done in exact sequence and manner' (*Ibid.*, p. 8). In the same context, paedophilia has been widely uncovered and received criticism in the 1990s. Like pornography featuring adult women, child pornography also humiliates female children as sex objects. In such films like *Pretty Baby* and *Lolita*, female children are depicted as wanting and enjoying sexual liaisons with adult men. Violence against female children is as widespread as that of adult women.

Beside Herself

The patriarchal tradition holds that the man as head of the household has the right to exert authority, and expect his womenfolk to serve his needs. Traditional attitudes encourage the belief that we should not interfere with what people do within their own four walls, and that families should be kept together, whatever the cost. They also encourage the belief that men are naturally aggressive, have high sexual needs, and cannot be expected to endure abstinence for long.

Sarah Nelson *Incest: Fact and Myth*

The subject of rape explored in *Ficky Stingers* is extended in *Beside Herself* by Sarah Daniels, which was first staged by the Women's Playhouse Trust at the Royal Court, London, in April 1990. It is about child sexual abuse - more precisely incest, a specific form of rape, and its consequences. Like *Ficky Stingers*, where the victim suffers from coercive sex, the drama explores injuries the victims have suffered from

their forced sex - this time, sexual abuse of children and the long-lasting, destructive impact on their lives. Again, like *Ficky Stingers*, the play demonstrates people's misunderstanding of the issue against the grim reality that the victims experience. *Beside Herself* also parallels *Augustine (Big Hysteria)* in that like Augustine, many women characters in this drama were raped as children by male adults, particularly by their fathers or father figures, and the women have become mad like Augustine, who has become a hysteric. According to Daniels in the introduction to the plays in Volume Two of her works, '*Beside Herself* was to become the first of three plays in this volume with the theme of Women and Madness' (p. 8). (The other two plays are *Head Rot Holiday* and *The Madness of Esme and Shaz*.) The disintegration of female characters resulting from their abuse paints the play with a bleak, haunting image, especially when Eve, the double of Evelyn who was raped as a child, follows Evelyn everywhere. The misapprehensions surrounding the issue deny the validity of the women's experience and place the burden of blame upon them. This attitude sometimes aggravates the women's anger and frustration into madness. Shame, guilt, and fear of their abuse being disclosed silence these women, who have no choice but to keep their abuse to themselves. Like *Ficky Stingers*, *Beside Herself* exposes the victims' shattered emotions by bringing them to centre-stage.

The play starts with a prelude where such female figures from the Old Testament as Delilah, Jezebel, Eve, and Mrs Lot gossip in the surrealist setting of a supermarket hell. These women criticise their Biblical misrepresentation which continues to affect the image of women today. They try to set the record straight, comparing their fates and offering explanations for their actions. Delilah discusses the inevitability of cutting Samson's hair, the source of his invincible power, as she was condemned to live with a man who spent an entire afternoon killing hundreds of

people with the jawbone of a donkey. Unlike the other ‘fatal’ women in this prelude, Mrs Lot, who turned back despite God’s order when she left Sodom and was turned into the pillar of salt as a punishment, does not even have her own name. She complains that people make jokes about her: ‘pass Lot’s wife’ (p. 99), instead of ‘pass the salt.’ The first woman in the Bible, Eve, is, in this prelude, taking a tutorial group on ‘The burden of guilt and two thousand years of misrepresentation’ (p. 98), which nobody in the supermarket hell seems to be interested in. Eve has been described as an evil women in Western culture, as she repeatedly seduced her husband in order to eat the fruit of wisdom in the Garden of Eden. Since then, Eve has been blamed for the trouble people have had in their lives: ‘By the sweat of brow you will eat your food until you return to your ground’ (Genesis, 3:19). Jezebel, a figure sometimes connected with Eve, was thrown on the ground and eaten by dogs as a result of her disobedience to God. These Biblical women have become symbolic of rebellion against patriarchal social and cultural norms.

Different from these women, in another corner of the supermarket hell, is Mrs Noah whose seminar on ‘How to survive a barbecue in a storm’ seems to be popular (p. 97). (It is based on her experience aboard.) As Sheridan Morley commented in *The Herald Tribune*:

Daniels’ thesis is that it is still a man’s world, even if the men who inhabit it are for the most part sexually criminal, or hopelessly ineffectual, or else extremely boring.⁵

These women’s main complaint is the sentences passed on them by men who cause them to live in a hell-like world where they are misrepresented, accused of rebellion, and obliged to shoulder heavy domestic burdens. Their complaints also mirror the unfairness of man-made history. As Mrs Lot comments: ‘Isn’t it funny what gets remembered and what gets forgotten?’ (p. 100). The treatment of these Biblical

women reflects a prevailing misogyny, which makes women blame themselves for what men have done to them. The sexual politics of original sin have distorted women's image and caused their oppression. The women who are brought from the past into the modern setting in this play are connected to women of today in terms of the continuity of their image, treatment, and burden in society. This scene is similar to the first scene of Caryl Churchill's *Top Girls* where women from different places and times sit in a present-day restaurant to celebrate Marlene's promotion and compete narratively by detailing their achievements in their past lives to each other.

The prelude is dominated by a cheery mood though its underlying theme is scarcely happy. It is then followed by a serious drama of child sexual abuse, which results in both physical and mental harm, haunting the victims long after the time of the abuse. One of the victims, Evelyn, a middle-aged MP's wife, does voluntary work for a rehabilitation home where most of the play unfolds. As soon as the main drama opens, tension builds up between Evelyn and George, her father, a famous retired doctor, on one of her routine visits to do shopping for him. Evelyn, calm and poised on the surface, tries to avoid direct contact with her father while he keeps nagging her to talk to him.

GEORGE: (*pouring the tea*) I thought you'd like a cup of tea...

EVELYN: No. (*Nicely*) I've already had one thanks, Dad.

She puts the contents of the bag on a work surface where she can see GEORGE, but he has to turn round to see her. Throughout the scene she calmly and methodically places each item in the appropriate place, be it cupboard, freezer or fridge...

GEORGE: There's no rule about not having another one. Come on. It's getting cold.

EVELYN: I've only just had my breakfast. (pp. 105-6)

Although they talk about trivial, everyday things, such as whether to have tea or not, the core of their conversation is George's persistence in drawing Evelyn's attention to himself, in contrast to Evelyn's desperate efforts to avoid directly facing him. In

addition, there is a sense of unexplained sub-text in George's remarks: '...it's...nice to see you on your own for once' (p. 106). For instance, as Paul Taylor commented in his review: 'He makes the statement sound faintly suggestive and there is an odd, complicitous glint in his eye. Perhaps he is sniffing around for sex.'⁶ Perhaps this is one of the reasons why the daughter tries to avoid her father, who, as the audience come to realise, reminds her of his abuse of her in the past. She cannot bear seeing her father and leaves him in a hurry as soon as her duty is done.

Behind Evelyn's serene mask is a frenzied child, her bruised alter ego, Eve, who shadows Evelyn throughout the play. Eve, unseen or unheard except by Evelyn, babbles to her, reminding her of her father's abuse of her as a child. Evelyn seems to have coped with her rage at her father's sexual assaults and tries to ignore Eve's existence. However, Evelyn has in reality repressed her memory of her father's molestation of her, and is on the verge of a nervous breakdown. She is torn between pain and superficial composure under the pressure of her life as a doctor's daughter and an MP's wife. She is also split between her outer and inner self. Her split self is underscored by the presence of Eve, her alter ego. Evelyn is 'beside herself'.

The issue of incest recurs throughout the play until the culmination of the confrontation between Evelyn and George about the abuse he inflicted on her years before. St. Dymphna's is a half-way house for patients discharged from mental hospitals. St. Dymphna is the patron saint of the mad. St. Dymphna was also beheaded by her father on her refusal to marry him after her mother's death. Thus, the name of the setting has an aura of incest as well as insanity. It is also the place where the Management Committee to which Evelyn belongs convene and it is while the Committee are going through some hospital files in order to select residents for the home that the possible incest in the background of two young female patients, Rohima

and Dawn, is revealed. Rohima's trauma, long after her possible abuse as a child, may have led to her nervous breakdown during her first year at the university and to a subsequent suicide attempt. Her anger and frustration at her abuse may have been expressed in the forms of depression, refusal of medication, and her voluntary isolation after her long silence. Dawn's abuse is more obvious than Rohima's case when Greg, a social worker on the Committee, relates her story. Her pregnancy as a result of her sexual abuse by her own father made her run away from home. She had nobody to turn to for help with her baby, but was blamed for her baby's bad burns when she left it to call for a doctor. Dawn was also regarded as mad because of her violent outbursts of anger as a result of the charge of negligence that is brought against her and her baby's adoption. Her loss of hearing from a fall down the stairs and her lack of communication skills make it very difficult for her to make friends and thus Dawn is very isolated. Psychiatrists in the drama, however, ignore the reality of child abuse and regard the abused girls' anger and frustration as madness. Their attitudes aggravate the situation by confining the victims in mental hospital. There they are isolated from their families and friends, but are still blamed for what has happened to them. Lack of support and care for the abused women accelerate their disintegration and result in their depression and madness.

As the play demonstrates, notably through the Committee members, Teddy, Greg and Roy, apathy can result from a biased view of incest. In contrast, the understanding of the reality of incest is expressed by Nicola, a nurse, who herself was abused as a child by her stepfather. While Teddy, a clergyman, believes that incest is confined to backward, rural areas, Nicola insists it is not confined by geography or social class. Even though Greg agrees that incest takes place in all classes, his view is that it happens in 'a dysfunctional family where the man is looking for affection and

nurturing, albeit inappropriately' (p. 134). Thus men are not to blame for incest. All the blame goes somewhere else: to certain subcultures and/or to families where women do not sexually satisfy their husbands. Roy, a psychiatrist, particularly blames Dawn's mother for 'relinquishing her responsibilities' for protecting her daughter or 'turning a blind eye' (p. 133). He also blames the abused girls themselves whom he condemns as precocious. The men's views conflict with what actually happens in this play in that the incest cases which are revealed later do not fit their stereotypes. Evelyn's victimiser is her doctor father, while Nicola's stepfather is described as a caring person. Another woman, who remains off stage, was abused by her uncle, a college student. As Nicola insists, these opinions reinforce the abused women's guilt, self-blame, and self-disgust. Women, as Daniels emphasises, are sexually abused, then blamed and traumatised. Therefore, they are double victims of stereotypical concepts as well as men's power.

During the Committee discussion of the two 'madwomen', Evelyn is afraid to confront the women's case histories and tries to stay away from the subject. She is utterly silent. Her alter ego, Eve, tries to distract her attention from any talk of child abuse, citing all the colours in which she may re-decorate her bathroom. Yet, Evelyn's consciousness of her abuse is raised by the discussion. Her hard-won poise is on the brink of collapse when her father is mentioned by Roy. She narrowly escapes the situation by hurriedly leaving the place as she has done with her father. However, observing Evelyn's hasty departure for another meeting, Teddy is the only person to notice her embarrassment though his response is insensitive: 'Good egg, Evelyn...but absolutely barking mad' (p. 138). Like the women whose abuse has led to their madness, Evelyn, too is mad, in a way, always hearing Eve's voice which is not

audible to others. Even though Evelyn tries hard to repress her memory of abuse, it always remains in her.

Another woman on the Management Board, Nicola, happens to be a daughter of a hostel cleaner, Lil. Like Dawn, Nicola ran away from home after having been abused by her stepfather and has estranged herself from her parents. The mother and the daughter bump into each other only to find that they work for the same hostel. Their encounter is total embarrassment. Since her abuse, Nicola is isolated from the rest of her family and still suffers trauma, while the abuser, Tony, seems to have forgotten about it. A further case of incest revealed in this play is that of Gaynor's daughter who was abused by her uncle and then threatened with what would happen if she told anyone. Gaynor blames herself for her daughter's abuse, while her abuser, too, on the other hand seems to have forgotten what he did.

The recurring theme of incest uncovers a variety of cases: abuse by a father figure - sometimes the biological father, sometimes the stepfather, or uncle. The repetitive cases of incest also show its aftermath: going mad and/or suffering trauma. Though she wishes to forget what happens, Evelyn is constantly faced with the problem, especially, through the existence of her alter ego, Eve, who jeers at her to face the truth. The Committee's discussion of child abuse also works as catalyst to her awareness. The death of a resident in the home, Dave, is the final catalyst to make her explode and confront her father about her abuse. According to Roy, when deluded, Dave believes that he killed his father. Possibly he was also molested as a child. He was sent to a Broadmoor prison for homosexual practices, which were then illegal, and has become unfit for society. While she is showing somebody around the house, Evelyn ignores his death. Her indifference to his death is a form of self-deceit, just as her surface composure is self-deceit. As Eve explains:

EVE: Try and say excuse me but I think something's wrong and I can't cope...

EVE: Don't just pretend it's all right...

EVE *starts to refer to herself in the third person.*

EVE: Are you mad? Are you mad? You are mad!

EVE *weeps.* (p. 162)

It is only on this occasion that Evelyn loses her emotional reserve. As Milton Shulman commented in his review in *Evening Standard*:

It is Evelyn's discovery of a dead homosexual in one of the rooms of the centre, and her ignorance of what to do about it, that makes her realise that the memory of being raped by her famous doctor father has robbed her of any ability to behave as a mature and confident human being.⁷

The abuse has destroyed Evelyn's confidence in herself, replacing it with self-denial and self-deceit. She has been not herself, but someone always haunted by her nightmarish memory and followed by a phantom-like figure.

It is Eve's accusation that Evelyn has behaved in a self-deceit way that makes Evelyn mentally destructive (like the two madwomen, Rohima and Dawn, who became violent).

EVE: While they stand and point and tell each other you're to blame, I am smashing my fist, splitting my skull. Inside my head someone is wielding an axe. I am smashing all the things in my father's house. Everything is splintering around me. Every stick of furniture lies useless and broken. I am crashing my way through the brickwork and plaster, the rendering and the mortar until nothing, nothing is left of my father's house but rubble and dust. And it goes on and on and it will never stop. (p. 172)

Evelyn wishes to annihilate her past, even the memory and existence of her abusive father. She wants to destroy everything that has anything to do with her abuse. She desires to free herself from her trap in which her father caught her and to break free from years of silence and repression.

Evelyn finally confronts her father about his abuse of her, denouncing him for raping her on their trips to the zoo. She used to be afraid to be alone with her father, and tried to lengthen the time they spent around the pond in the zoo in the hope that

there would be no time left for him to rape her on their way back home. He understood this ploy, and responded by raping her on their way to the zoo. The acts of rape were carefully planned by her father in the guise of his caring attention to his daughter in taking her out to the zoo.

EVELYN: I remember pleading with you at first. Then I fought with you but you were stronger. Then later I remember, can still remember, every grain, every pattern, every mark on that car seat while I wished myself away. It was as though I was standing outside the car looking in, looking down on another me that I despised. (p. 184)

Self-denial and self-hatred overwhelmed her to an extent that she wished not to be the person who had been abused. Since then, she has been split into two selves: an abused girl, Eve, and Evelyn, who has been beside herself with her real being robbed. The imprint of her abuse is too vivid on her to forget, while her father, George, has completely forgotten it. As Kate Kellaway commented in her review:

Evelyn's father shows how Evelyn's problem is exacerbated by class. George is unassailably middle-class and seems to have banished his guilt - if he ever felt it. Thus when confrontation between Evelyn and her father eventually comes, his first reaction to her accusations is complete denial.⁸

The class George belongs to is exempt from blame, for such abuse is believed to happen only in the lower rungs of society. Evelyn will be pretty much disbelieved if she discloses it or rather she will be blamed for such abuse. George upbraids his daughter for making up the story: 'It never happened' (p. 184). Evelyn may be thought to have a fantasy of being raped by her father. George makes excuses that he showed his affection for Evelyn by keeping her close to him. Even though George insists that he loved his daughter and never wanted to hurt her, Evelyn feels hurt, despised, and bullied by him. She has been silenced by the abuse and also by her father's authority in society as well as in the family.

After Evelyn has the courage to reveal the truth, she is rid of the pain and humiliation she has long suffered from. She then tries to cleanse herself as she feels dirty, like the Woman in *Ficky Stingers* and Philomele in *The Love of the Nightingale*.

EVE holds out a large bath towel towards EVELYN. EVELYN takes it and slowly starts to wipe her hands and face and neck, carefully, taking pleasure in it. She repeats the action with EVE. (p. 186)

The defiled child, Eve, and Evelyn become one self, after purifying themselves. Eve, who has previously been jeering at Evelyn to voice her thoughts is reconciled with her. Evelyn is not ‘beside herself’ any more: she has become her real self. Encouraged by Eve, she has also broken her silence to Nicola and Dr Roy Freeman about her abuse, telling them that daughters who have run away from home or have gone mad may have been abused by their male relatives. Evelyn affirms that women are not to blame for abuse. The abusers are, however, no matter what excuses they may give. There is also a sign of reconciliation between another abused woman, Nicola, and her mother, Lil, when Nicola, hearing about Evelyn’s abuse, visits her mother whom she has long estranged herself from, since she was abused by her stepfather.

In addition to its focus on the abused women and their consciousness, *Beside Herself* also concentrates on women whose daughters have been abused. Nicola’s mother, Lil, was silent about her daughter’s abuse. When Gaynor discovered the secret of her daughter’s abuse, she blamed herself. Evelyn’s mother, who is dead, might have known about her husband’s molestation of her daughter, but pretended not to. The mothers have also been silenced therefore because of guilt and shame. Nevertheless, the male figures in the play ascribe child molestation to women or to social elements. They are arrogant, authoritarian, and prejudiced. Teddy, a young, timid vicar, is so obsessed with his career, afraid of catching AIDS and of being featured in the

tabloids, that he even recoils from touching Dave, a homosexual, who is dead in a chair. Teddy, Roy, and Greg all refuse to believe the victims of child molestation.

Throughout the play, Evelyn is trailed by a ghost-like girl, Eve. She is the injured, sexually abused girl whom Evelyn has tried to suppress. This Doppelgänger, in pain and rage, criticises Evelyn and urges her to tell the truth. As Paul Taylor observed in his review:

This device of using an alter ego who can speak the unspeakable and express raw, turbulent feelings regardless of the constraining social circumstances is an increasingly common one in women's literature. The best bits of Sarah Daniels's ...new piece...are those where the interplay between Evelyn's two selves most clearly dramatises the split found in many abused women - the empty, smiling husk going through the notions of civilised, adult life, while the buried self dreams of violent, anarchic revenge.

Eve, monitoring Evelyn's behaviour, blames her hypocrisies and speaks out what Evelyn cannot bring herself to say. This girl also embarrasses Evelyn as well as advises her. Eve, terrified in the beginning, becomes strong enough to drive the adult Evelyn to bring up the subject of the childhood visit to the zoo. This alter ego also awakens her consciousness and encourages Evelyn to confront her abusive father. Evelyn's alter ego speaks her inner voices.

There are similarities and differences in split ego between *Augustine (Big Hysteria)*, *Ficky Stingers* and *Beside Herself*. In *Augustine (Big Hysteria)* Augustine becomes 'beside herself' when she splits herself into two: one mad self on the surface, the other self telling the truth. In *Ficky Stingers* one woman is split into three: the other two women complement and support the narrator, especially surrounding the rape scene. In *Beside Herself*, Evelyn is split into two. Though Eve conflicts with Evelyn at the beginning of the play, she complements Evelyn as the latter voices her rage which she was not able to express to her father. The two are reconciled only after Evelyn has confronted her father over his past sexual abuse of her. In the three plays,

however, the split self/selves represent the fractured consciousness of the victims of sexual violence.

The alter ego of Evelyn is named after Eve, as the generic representation of women from the past to the present. As it is already signified in the prologue and as the name 'Eve' indicates in this play, women are presented as archetypal scapegoats, who are blamed even in cases when they are abused by men. Yet, those abused women, standing centre-stage, finally break their silence.

NOTES

¹ Ellen Bass, 'In the Truth Itself, There is Healing (excerpt)', in *Women in Culture: A Women's Studies Anthology*, ed. by Lucinda Joy Peach (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 1998), pp. 338-48 (p. 349).

² Lucinda Joy Peach, 'Sex, Sexism, Sexual Harassment and Sexual Abuse', in *Ibid.*, pp. 284-301 (p. 300).

³ Sarah Nelson, *Incest: Fact and Myth* (Edinburgh: Stramullion Co-operative, 1987, 2nd ed.), p. 6.

⁴ Liz Kelly, 'Organised sexual abuse: what do we know and what do we need to know?' in *Abuse of Women and Children: A Feminist Response*, ed. by CASU (The Child Abuse Studies Unit) (London: University of North London Press, 1993), pp. 1-13 (p. 3).

⁵ Sheridan Morley, *Herald Tribune* (18.4.90) 'Beside Herself', *London Theatre Record*, Vol. 10, Issue 8, (1990), 468-471 (p. 468).

⁶ Paul Taylor, *Independent* (6.4.90), *Ibid.*, p. 470.

⁷ Milton Shulman, *Evening Standard* (5.4.90), *Ibid.*, p. 470.

⁸ Kate Kellaway, 'Reviews', *Plays and Players*, Issue No. 435 (June, 1990), p. 26.

Chapter 8. Women in the Sex Industry

The sex industry results partly from the continuing operation of the Victorian double standard of female sexuality defined by men who dichotomise women as whore and virgin. The dichotomy undermines the way women are perceived in the sex industry. As Jeffrey Weeks argues in his book, *Sexuality*:

Female sexuality has been limited by economic and social dependence, by the power of men to define sexuality, by the limitations of marriage, by the burdens of reproduction and by the endemic fact of male violence against women.¹

In many societies men dominate women through their control of female sexuality. Kate Millett also argues that prostitution exemplifies the social and economic position of women, as she writes: ‘It seems to me that prostitution is somehow paradigmatic, somehow the very core of the female social condition.’² Women are socialised into a traditional female role and the alternatives are limited by their role. As Jennifer James argues: ‘Prostitution is a very natural extension of the female sex role into the occupational arena.’³ Prostitution is a part of sexual inequality in social and economic power.

Women sell their bodies and sexuality specifically in three main ways through prostitution, stripping, and pornography. Many women are engaged in a cross-section of the three. They work there in order to maintain economic independence as housewives, single mothers and single women. As the ECP (the English Collective of Prostitutes) asserts:

We are forced into prostitution by poverty, we are also fighting poverty through prostitution. Getting money for sex is one of the few ways open for women to make some money of our own and be financially independent from men. It’s a way to have better control over our lives and dictate what kinds of relationships we want and on which terms.⁴

Nickie Roberts, a British woman, who became an accomplished belly-dancer in Tunisia, and then worked as a Soho stripper for eight years by the mid-1980s, comments: 'I still maintain that I have more control over my life as a worker in the sex industry than as one in an ordinary factory,'⁵ even though she felt humiliated in her job. Nearly all the women in the sex industry are motivated by a gender-based economic inequality. Those women have nothing to sell but their bodies after they become disillusioned by menial labour as its low wages do not guarantee the survival of themselves and their children.

Many prostitutes are however under the power of pimps. As Kathleen Barry argues: 'Pimping and procuring [prostitutes] are perhaps the most ruthless displays of male power and sexual dominance' (*Sexual Slavery*, p. 86). Thus Barry calls these activities controlling prostitutes sexual slavery. There is also a power relationship between prostitutes and their clients, as men pay women for their sexual services. As J in Millett's 'Prostitution' says, she does not 'mix business with pleasure. I don't get sexually turned on by somebody who gives me money.'⁶ Prostitution is thus a sexual transaction where the client's power is exercised on the prostitute. Men's power over prostitution contains a potential for violence: abduction, beating, rape, robbery, in the worst case, mutilation and murder as in the Ripper cases. For it is believed that prostitutes cannot be further violated as they have already transgressed the space of 'good' women. Thus they are easily harassed by the police. They are also imprisoned, summonsed, and fined by the prosecution for their act of prostitution even though their clients are not questioned.

Like prostitution, stripping can be seen as degrading women in that strippers sell their dignity for money. They are humiliated by the punters at the show and harassed

by the police. Strippers are also regarded as social outcasts and sometimes denied civil liberties on account of the job they do. As Roberts writes of a humiliating experience:

It was as if I were witnessing something so deep and entrenched; centuries of men's associating women with guilt and degradation. I say how sexuality had been twisted and repressed to such an extent that this was the end result: a battle-ground; men heaping their guilty shit on our nude bodies. It was terrible. (Roberts, p. 84)

This is true of women in pornography as Millett argues:

Patriarchal society typically links feelings of cruelty with sexuality, the latter often equated with evil and with power. This is apparent both in the sexual fantasy reported by psychoanalysis and that reported by pornography. The rule here associates sadism with male ("the masculine role") and victimization with the female ("the feminine role") (*Sexual Politics*, p. 44)

Women in pornography are represented as sex objects and as enjoying sexual cruelties. They are victimised like prostitutes and strippers. All these women feel that they are looked at as lower species. Many of them feel degraded by what they do and think of something else while they are selling their bodies. They are often alienated from their work and also isolated from the rest of society as they do not want to talk about it to people outside the sex industry.

The victimisation of prostitutes is dramatised in *Thatcher's Women* while *Money to Live*, a story of strippers, focuses on the impact of female stripping on other women. The abuse of women involved in pornography is briefly explored in my discussion of *Masterpieces* in Chapter 10. Women both inside and outside the sex industry are affected by it.

Thatcher's Women

They were not rootless social outcasts but poor working women trying to survive in towns that offered them few employment opportunities and that were hostile to young women living alone. Their move into prostitution was not pathological:

it was in many ways a rational choice, given the limited alternatives open to them.

Judith R. Walkowitz

Prostitution and Victorian Society: Women, Class and the State

The situation for prostitutes in the Victorian Age was disturbingly similar to that in the 1980s as the play, *Thatcher's Women*, unfolds. The drama is about prostitution, another form of sexual violence against women and in particular, how women struggle in order to survive through prostitution and how these women are perceived and treated by the present-day society of which they are part. Like the working women in *The Gut Girls* who are regarded as slightly better than whores by their society, the female characters in *Thatcher's Women* struggle towards their financial independence even though they are seen as scum or, at best, second-class citizens by the society they belong to. Through this struggle, they, too, show their fighting spirit to overcome their hardship.

Thatcher's Women was first staged by Paines Plough at the Tricycle Theatre, London, on 12 March 1987. The playwright trained as an actress at RADA (Royal Academy of Dramatic Art) and has played leading roles in theatre, film, and television. *Thatcher's Women* was her first full-length play. Adshead was motivated to write this play by a 'late-night discussion programme' she was watching. As she writes about the programme:

A spokeswoman from something called 'The English Collective of Prostitutes' was talking about the harassment of prostitutes in King's Cross. The situation was being made worse, she said, by the appearance, on the streets, of ordinary women, 'housewives' from the north-east, north-west, Midlands and Scotland, coming down to London to work as prostitutes for short periods in order to pay the rent, feed and clothe their children. They were spilling out of the trains onto the station platforms, quite literally, in their thousands!⁷

The King's Cross regular prostitutes called the women travelling from the north of England down to London to work as amateur prostitutes 'Thatcher's women'. To elaborate the situation, as Eric Shorter observes:

Nobody knows when provincial women first began to seek their fortunes in London as prostitutes. Whether our Prime Minister's policies have provoked the drift. *Thatcher's Women*...takes it for granted that our legislators somehow instigated the confusion at King's Cross in 1985 when the professionals and amateurs came into conflict.⁸

The policies of the then Prime Minister, Thatcher, was believed to cause the economic division of Britain between the rich and the poor; between the prosperous south and the economically declining north. The contrasted economy in the two regions was reflected in the conflict of the professional and amateur prostitutes, the latter represented by the three main female characters in this play.

Thatcher's Women dramatises the issues of gender oppression and class, as Daniels' *The Gut Girls* does though their time settings are different. As Elaine Aston argues:

When the first phase of critiquing the 'unhappy marriage of Marxism and feminism concentrated on class relations between men and women, analysis of intra-sexual class oppression became a dominant feature of socialist-feminist playwriting of the 1980s, as feminism had a 'new' oppressive factor to contend with: the 'Superwoman'. Thatcherite politics promoted the image of the high-flying female achiever who was capable of transcending class boundaries and of attaining material success at home and in the workplace. The reality was somewhat different. Very few women were in a position to gain access to paid positions of power which would enable them to combine work and family life. (Aston, pp. 75-6)

Women have been discriminated against with regard to job access. However, the discrimination against working-class women is different from that of middle-class women. According to Aston, this point is well demonstrated by Caryl Churchill in *Top Girls* (1982). 'Top girl' Marlene achieves a success in her career 'at the expense of oppressing her working-class sister, Joyce,' who has taken care of Marlene's daughter, Angie (Ibid., p. 76). Angie believes Joyce to be her mother and admires Marlene as her successful aunt. Another example is *The Gut Girls* in which the protagonists are doubly oppressed as working-class women. As workers, they are exploited and do not

benefit fairly from their hard work. As women, they are also oppressed by their prevailing patriarchal Victorian society and are paid less than men for the same job. As Aston continues:

Foregrounding the working-class women's oppression as different to that of women from the upper and middle classes was also a feature of socialist-feminist drama in the 1980s based on an identity politics of regionalism. (*Ibid.*, p. 76)

Particularly, women in northern England had only limited opportunities for work, mostly in low-paid jobs in addition to mounting difficulties as 'the wives of unemployed working-class men, and the mothers of children with jobless futures' (*Ibid.*, p. 76). These circumstances for working-class women who turned to prostitutes are similar to women in Victorian times. As Judith R. Walkowitz argues:

Placed in a vulnerable economic and social position, some women who could not rely on family, relatives, or lovers, may have found the shorter hours and better pay of prostitution a temporary and relatively attractive solution to their immediate difficulties.⁹

Like those Victorian women, northern women in the 1980s, sometimes with no education or job skills, were doubly oppressed as women and as members of the working-class, and prostitution may have been one of the few ways open to them for their survival. *Thatcher's Women* portrays three such 'ordinary' women, who have been laid off from a meat-pudding factory in Manchester and decide to go to London for a fortnight just before Christmas to earn money to provide for their families.

The play opens in 'a finishing room in a tinned-meat-pudding factory in the north' (p. 15), where the three main characters work: Marje in her late thirties, Norah in her mid-thirties, and Lynda, only seventeen. The scene has much resemblance to the opening scene in *The Gut Girls*. In both scenes women work hard, and are watched by somebody, in this drama, a female supervisor. In place of Harry, the foreman, in *The Gut Girls*, a young man called, Alan, dressed in an immaculate white coat, moves

about to check the work. In this drama, though the women do not hack at carcasses as the gut girls do, they work hard, handling tins which hold meat. The present-day working conditions may be better than those in Victorian times, but the women in this play have to suffer from constant ‘deafening factory noise’ (p. 15) from the conveyor belts which also sometimes cause danger when the workers’ hands or cuffs are caught in them. In this disturbing circumstance, nevertheless, like the gut girls, the women laugh and enjoy talking to each other, sometimes about former employees.

Just as the economic situation in the north conflicts with that of the south, so the opening scene in Manchester is contrasted with the views of Central London Norah sees from a tourist double-decker bus, with her friend, Stan. The grandeur of the panoramic views of big, historical buildings and monuments such as large banks and Trafalgar Square makes Norah feel herself a stranger like the Chinese tourists on the bus. Especially, the women’s work-place in Manchester is an antithesis of Buckingham Palace, which has innumerable windows and high walls with surveillance equipment. People occupying the apparently impregnable palace do not listen to Norah, who aggressively shouts the price of a piece of fried cod at the palace. The clashing economy between the north and south is also well reflected in Lynda’s filthy flat in Manchester where she gets fifteen pounds as a prostitute in contrast to West End clubs, hotels, and the luxury penthouses where, at one point, she earns three hundred pounds (though her trade in London involves sexually more dangerous jobs). Another work-place, especially for Marje, is Wandsworth Common, which is cold and damp in the evening. In contrast to this harsh environment where prostitutes work, there are big, expensive houses where people live in comfort. The images of affluence and poverty clash against each other throughout the play, defining each other as antipodes.

The women work hard in the factory, but they do not get enough to keep their families going. Like the gut girls, the women are laid off when the finishing room closes and they are under pressure to make ends meet. The alternative for the gut girls is domestic service or work in a factory, but there seems to be few alternatives for these women in the north of England, especially if they want to work temporarily for quick money. Among the three women, the youngest, Lynda, is brave, practical, and the most knowledgeable about prostitution. In fact, already living away from her family, Lynda has been working as a part-time prostitute in Manchester after her day-time work. One of his clients, Colin, wants to have a relationship with her, suggesting a secure life for her when he becomes a regular member in the army. Until then, he asks Lynda to go home to her family. However, Lynda is determined to try her luck somewhere else rather than depending on her family, particularly with her father made redundant and her mother working for a low wage. She may be in a situation similar to that of Maggie in *The Gut Girls*, whose mother cannot keep her because of many younger siblings. Thus Lynda may have to manage her life on her own. It is Lynda who eggs on the other two to 'go on the game' in London. Norah, married with three children, is attractive, compassionate, and the most intelligent. The oldest, Marje, with her unemployed husband and two kids, is timid, silent, and introspective; a working-class woman who wishes to live a decent life and who would never have set out on such a journey unless she was desperate. It is only when unemployment drives her husband, Del, to violence that Marje decides to leave for London. As Mary Remnant comments in her Introduction:

I recall, at the time the play was staged, one critic's comment that its main flaw was that the women did not stop to consider their decision to pack their bags and make off for two weeks 'on the game' in London. Where was the moral dilemma, he asked. How could ordinary, decent women opt for prostitution without a second thought? The sort of comment one might expect from a white,

middle-class, male theatre critic. First comes unemployment, poverty - and we're not talking about tightening our belts in cheaper restaurants or cancelling *The Economist*: we're talking about having the electric cut off, not knowing where the next meal is coming from, being beaten by a despairing husband. First comes poverty, then desperation - the moral dilemma comes later. The desperate have nothing to lose... (p. 10)

These women have nobody to turn to, and desperate to make a living, they have no choice but to sell their bodies for themselves and their families.

While Marje is travelling towards her future, her mind goes backwards to the past. Marje recollects her grandmother as a working-class women, who worked as a mill hand. When the cotton mill closed down, she worked at the shirt factory. During the war, she worked in the munitions factory, replacing men. When the war was over and men returned to work, she was put back to the shirt factory. Her grandmother had been pushed into different jobs by circumstances. Men had been given job priorities so that they got better-paid work, leaving women with less well-paid jobs. When work is not available to women, the situation becomes desperate for them. The oppression of working-class women has existed from the past, as seen in *The Gut Girls* in Victorian times to war times in the generation of Marje's grandmother, and to the present, when Marje is one of the oppressed women. Likewise, perhaps worse than her grandmother, she is about to be pushed into prostitution by her society.

Though the two women, Norah and Marje, leave their families behind in order to try their luck in London as amateur prostitutes, they know they are not cut out for this game. As Shorter pointed out in his review:

They lack the personalities, the looks and the daring which the novice needs. They also lack advice, a friendly pimp and almost everything except for the need to make money quickly. (*Daily Telegraph*)

Norah, though sexually fairly experienced, as demonstrated in her flirtation with Alan in the tin factory, discovers that she cannot face the thought of sex with just anybody.

NORAH: I've done a lot of thinking and quite frankly I'm not sure I could do it with someone I didn't fancy. I mean all right...I do fancy a lot of men. Well, variety's the spice and all that... (p. 28)

Even though she is desperate for money, she just cannot face sex without desire. Middle-aged, Norah is perhaps too conventional to engage in prostitution. Instead, she spends time at the buffet at King's Cross, talking to people there. It is here that she encounters a Scotsman, Stan, with whom she develops a platonic relationship. Now pessimistic about prostitution, Norah tries to persuades Marje that they had better go back home. However, Marje, though timid and introspective, does work as a prostitute on Wandsworth Common. There, in her first 'commercial' sexual encounter she meets Johnny, who teaches her how to secure money before sex and becomes one of her regular clients. Marje also experiences other men, most of whom are boring, jabbering or nagging to her. At one point, Marje encounters a man who incessantly talks to her in a threatening manner and then hits her, running away with her money. Despite her abhorrence at dealing with this kind of man, differently from Norah, Marje is tenacious and does this degrading job and becomes hardened by her experience.

Meanwhile, Lynda encounters difficulties at the beginning. For example, she is beaten up by a regular prostitute for intruding on her pitch. However, she becomes eventually the most successful of the three women and leaves Marje and Norah to pursue a professional and more lucrative aspect of her trade. The shrewdest of the three, Lynda blames the other two women for not making enough effort in their trade. Lynda, young and pretty, does businessmen in clubs and hotels and becomes a prosperous prostitute with a car who soon will move into a new flat. Lynda has achieved success in the business of prostitution and financial independence, but only by allowing herself to be abused in highly dangerous sex activities, sometimes being drugged and photographed as a fetishistic and a sexual object. Her body has been used

for men's sexual titillation and/or satisfaction. She has been selling her human dignity as well as her body in exchange for money. Lynda becomes the most successful among the women, yet she also has to accept the most violent acts being committed on her: she has to pay the cost for her success in prostitution. Financial independence would provide Lynda with better control over her life, but she is enslaved by the institution of prostitution since she is deprived of her right to control her own body during her trade. Towards the end of the play Lynda has become transformed. She has a new voice, looks more mature, and wears 'professional' makeup and a hairdo:

LYNDA: In years to come I'll register myself as a small business...a little office somewhere...find a catchy title...‘Escort Elite’...get a few names and addresses on my books, boys as well as girls...only the best types...you know, educated, and well spoken...(*Ecstatically*:) I'll pay tax.
Don't get me wrong. I've every sympathy with women like Norah and Marje, but I can't help thinking they bring a lot on themselves. I dragged myself up from the gutter - why can't they? (p. 45)

She considers becoming a business woman who owns a small-scale escort business.

The drama explores the actions of three different women who are pushed into prostitution because of poverty. However, as Trevor Griffiths points out, 'The play skilfully avoids voyeurism by placing sexual encounters offstage or under tables, or by showing only their aftermath...'¹⁰ When Lynda teams up with Caress, another prostitute, in a night-club, they give a business man a discreet 'hand job' under the table. As the stage direction indicates, '*It should not be immediately obvious*' (p. 34). The pornographic images of Lynda's sexual abuse, which also have been apparently photographed, are not shown on stage, but hinted only by their consequences:

LYNDA lies unconscious on the floor. Her clothes and possession in a jumble about her...LYNDA stares at the picture taken of her by the MAN an hour ago in appalled and horrified fascination. (p. 41)

Marje's sexual encounters in the common also take place offstage. As in *Ficky Stingers*, the play should not be 'pornographic and titillating,' since the drama

characterises part-time prostitution as the path to economic survival and self-sufficiency. *Thatcher's Women* focuses on the victimisation of women in the course of prostitution, which is shown as resulting from poverty and desperation. Thus, the play 'under-displays' the body rather than creating images of women for male consumption.

On the common Marje sees a fox and feels sympathetic towards it. She becomes eager to see the fox whenever she is there. She feeds it with offal, and develops a kind of empathetic attachment towards it. Marje's feeling for the fox have some connection with a rat about which Stan tells a story. He had been commissioned to kill rats (which, like foxes, are seen as vermin) and the person in charge 'blocked all the passages leading up to the warehouse except one and built a fire...' (p. 42). They then brutally killed the rats which were trying to escape from the fire and smoke by cornering them and beating them with truncheons. During the killing, they abused the rats, pouring boiling water over them, so that they screamed in panic, and poking them with lit matches. Indifferent to the rats' suffering, the men drank and later played cards, while the rats were dying. One rat was saved by Stan's sympathy and it was running away, but then it turned back as if to say thanks. Just like this rat, the fox Marje knows has survived being hunted. However, like the other rats, other foxes have been trapped, gunned down, and poisoned.

The screams of the foxes when they are killed are reminiscent to Marje of the howling of the wild animals in Belle Vue Zoo near her grandmother's house when she was a child. In Marje's speech on her journey to London, she recollects sitting one Sunday, in a room with her grandmother and hearing the caged animals, lions and tigers, roaring and bellowing behind the steel bars, pounding and threshing. They howled and pounded as if to protest against their confinement by 'the brick walls, the sharpened steel rods, and barbed wire' (p. 22). They looked at this barrier and yearned

for the freedom and power they once revelled in in the jungle. But they had no way out to go back to the place of their freedom. Like the men who were unsympathetic with the dying rats, however, people in the neighbourhood turned a deaf ear to their dispossession and suffering. In the play the fox and Marje also experience this dispossession and suffering.

Animal imagery in this drama specifically equates Marje with the fox she befriends. Like the fox, Wandsworth Common is her night habitat and like the fox, she is hounded by people she meets there. Just as people set traps to catch foxes as vermin, so the police raid the common to get rid of herself and other prostitutes as social vermin. During the raids, the police abuse the prostitutes, like the men abusing the rats in Stan's story. However, as Mary Remnant argues, though:

Thatcher's Women by Kay Adshead may, at first glance, seem...conventional: a naturalistic, deeply depressing comment on contemporary hardship and survival... this story of three northern women, forced to desperate lengths by the Thatcher Government's economic policies, is also strangely uplifting for, as the play progresses, naturalism slides off into surreal imagery, adding a poetic dimension to an ironic tale of 'free enterprise.' (p. 10)

Marje finds that the fox is fiercely independent and strikes back against its oppressors. It escapes the shooting and spits out the poison. Like the fox, Marje too stands up and fights back against humiliation and victimisation. Though she wished only to be an ordinary woman with ordinary things, Thatcherite politics took everything from her family: her husband's job, his dignity, his self-respect, her own job, and her children's future. Now she is left with nothing and considered worthless. Marje is ready to pay with her skin, pain, and humiliation for her family's survival. Like the fox, the ordinary woman, Marje, who turned to prostitution, sharpens her teeth and paws on her deprivation. Thus, when a policeman on Wansdworth Common harasses Marje, taking her money and trying to take advantage of her situation by attempting to have sex

without payment, Marje defies his threat that she will have to go to the police station if she refuses, and fends off his exploitative assault.

As the harassment and persecution of Marje demonstrate, the women need help and protection. Away from families and friends, these women are displaced and drifting. As in most of the plays so far discussed, however, there is a bond of understanding among women. Jess, who was previously a prostitute, helps Marje with lifts and tip-offs regarding the trade on Wandsworth Common. Norah is also concerned about Marje, especially when she comes home late. Caress, a professional prostitute, informs Lynda how to deal with varied situations in the early stage of her move into West End night-clubs. When Lynda is beaten by a regular prostitute, Marje, Norah, and Jess sympathise with her and take care of her. Though Lynda leaves the other two women, whom she is contemptuous of for their lack of daring, she still remembers them as her friends. They sympathise with each other, creating a form of solidarity, which may be able to sustain those women even during the degrading experience of prostitution.

The image of prostitutes is often seen as disease-linked, and prostitutes are frequently shunned and marginalised by their society. In *Thatcher's Women*, however, they are brought centre-stage and portrayed as 'ordinary' women who have been placed in prostitution by socio-economic realities. Norah and Marje are 'good' women to Stan and Johnny, respectively, even though they are encountered in the context of prostitution. They are also given voices to express themselves. Marje, the oldest and originally the most timid, was silenced in the beginning of her trade, as she felt ashamed and dirty.

NORAH: Well...How did it go? Did you..., did you go through with it?

MARJE *says nothing...*

MARJE: I'll talk to you tomorrow Norah, I promise, only I'm too tired now. I think I'll have a bath. (p. 27)

However, later she speaks at length about her situation and through her symbolic equation with the fox, about her defying of humiliation and abuse. Lynda is silent, particularly during the time when her body is used as a sex object, but she is given a voice to make her capitalist speech towards the end of the play, asserting her independence. Norah is articulate and honest. All the five women characters including Jess and Caress are 'normal' women, who are sympathetic about others' misery.

Marje and Norah return to Manchester to their families, having undergone a miserable and humiliating time but also, for Marje or Norah, an affirming one, while the young and sharp-witted Lynda stays behind as a professional prostitute. Like Agathe and the other characters in *The Taking of Liberty*, but nearly two hundred years later, Marje and Norah have transgressed their traditionally allotted space, this time, through prostitution when the traditional economic system broke down and the breadwinner husbands became jobless. Marje's speech on her departure for London compares the oppression of her grandmother and the dispossession of the caged animals with her own situation, against which she rebels. Marje's last speech, when she leaves King's Cross Station, is a celebration of her own life and that of the fox which survived persecution. She remembers seeing the little fox jumping up on the common and her realisation that it was dancing, throwing its body into the air, each time higher, twisting its body. The fox's dance up into the sky is also Marje's dance of the uplifting and exhilaration of her spirit. The fox's soaring also represents its confidence and control over its own life as well as its strength. It is a dance of joy and freedom from oppression.

Money To Live

I'm not trying to defend the sex industry. God knows it's an ugly, pathetic business, but that doesn't mean to say that those of us who work in it should be classified as trash. The work sometimes is, and so are the bosses; but we aren't. And so far the anti-porn campaigners have neglected to make a distinction between us workers and the work we do. Otherwise they would be more responsible in their actions. They are silent, too, on the issue of the sexist, misogynist laws that criminalize prostitute women.

Nickie Roberts *The Front Line: Women in the Sex Industry Speak*

The selling of the body by prostitutes in *Thatcher's Women* is linked to another type of selling women's bodies in *Money to Live*, this time by strippers. The play was written by Jacqueline Rudet, a twenty-two year old black woman with an East End and a Dominican background. It was first performed at the Royal Court Theatre Upstairs on 16 October 1984. This was the first play written by a woman to be produced by the Black Theatre Co-operative. Jacqueline Rudet, like Kay Adshead, also started her theatrical career with acting. She has written two other stage plays: *God's Second in Command* (Royal Court Theatre Upstairs: 1985) about the disintegration of a black family and the politics of homosexuality, and *Basin* (Royal Court Theatre Upstairs: 1985) about three black women and lesbianism. In 1983 she founded the company Imani-Faith to produce work by and for black women, but the company is now defunct.

Money to Live was written by a black woman about blacks, as, according to Remnant, 'it was the scarcity of good roles for black actors which encouraged her to write plays.'¹¹ However, as Ann McFerran commented in her review of the play in *Time Out*:

The Black Theatre Co-operative have entertained us with several plays about being young, black, British and, and more coincidentally, male. In their first play written by a woman the race issue is pushed aside to examine the plight of a young black woman.¹²

In the same context, the author also suggests:

What critics and theatre people seem to respond to in my work is that I'm not overly concerned with relations between black and white people. Of course, since the first black plays were written, life has remained as appallingly racist as ever, but I think it's time for 'black' people to be shown as more than just 'black'. Obviously the play has to be performed by a black cast, and the references to the West Indies are hard to translate into any other culture, but the play shouldn't be treated as a 'black' play. It's a story about hard times.¹³

This play can and should be seen as more than a black play. It has similarities to *Thatcher's Women*, when discussed from the viewpoint of the oppression of working-class women. Women engaged in this sex industry, stripping, in most cases, like the women in *Thatcher's Women*, have few choices, given that they have little education, no qualifications or people to depend upon.

However, unlike *Thatcher's Women*, which depicts prostitutes as victims of economic privation and sexual violence, the strippers in this play do not realise the oppressive nature of their job and only one character, Jennifer, raises this issue. In line with pornography, which will be discussed later in relation to Clare McIntyre's *Low Level Panic* and Sarah Daniels' *Masterpieces*, stripping is designed to create an image of the woman's body for the male gaze and consumption, subordinating women as sexual objects. *Money to Live* focuses on the debate of whether women have the right to do what they want with their own bodies even when the way women are presented in stripping has an adverse impact on other women. As Jennifer argues, the image of strippers titillates men and arouses men's sexual urges which may cause them to violate other women. In this respect, strippers working in the sex industry collude in men's violence against women.

The play opens in a flat where the protagonist, Charlene, is doing her ironing. When her brother, Julius, visits her to see if she is all right, she does not seem to be glad to see him and continues her ironing. Even though Julius tries hard to draw her

into a conversation with him, Charlene is evasive. She also breaks away from the dance to which Julius invites her. Tension is created between the two people: one who is anxious to draw responses from the other, who in turn tries to slip away from his initiatives. Charlene knows Julius has been sent to her by her mother to see if she is fine. Julius accuses Charlene of seldom going out lately, trying to avoid her family and the people she used to mingle with. Charlene retorts to this by reprimanding Julius's attitude towards women: he has had numerous short-lived relationships since his early age. She also criticises her mother being closely tied to her relatives that she does not want to see. Having left her West Indian parents, she stays in her flat, the centre of her life, dusting and polishing it, obsessed with cleanliness. The flat represents some fragment of her identity and independence. Charlene suffers from her low-paid job, though she is not as poor as the women in *Thatcher's Women* or her mother Olive, who worked as a part-time prostitute in order to feed and clothe her children. Her relationship with her boyfriend, Jeffrey, is also unsatisfactory: in fact he visits her infrequently, chiefly when he wants sex. For the rest of the time, he is, according to Julius and their sister, Jennifer, prowling with his male friends for other girls. Charlene is anxious about this and thus she has almost given up on him for a loving, mutual relationship. Depressed, angry, and isolated, she has become a home-proud hermit. Charlene is stuck in her flat as well as in her life, with no prospects. In a nutshell, therefore, she possesses only her immaculate flat, a poorly-paid job, an unhappy relationship, and her family that she has been estranging herself from. However, she has little possibility of changing the situation. Charlene's dilemma arises from the fact that she is, as Lyn Gardner in *City Limits* and Barney Bardsley in *Tribune* commented in their reviews, 'young, black, poor and female in Britain today' (in the 1980s).¹⁴

Like Lynda in *Thatcher's Women*, who suggests the trip to London, Judy encourages Charlene to earn some extra money as a go-go dancer. Judy earns good and easy money with fewer hours of work as a stripper than Charlene does in her job. Judy's proposal dumbfounds Charlene, then interests her, and she finally accepts Judy's offer. Charlene's decision to take to go-go dancing is a means to get out of her dilemma and to achieve, at least in part, a previously frustrated wish: with the money she is going to travel 'to all sorts of unusual places' and 'to be a citizen of the world' (p. 169). Her wish may be naive, but Charlene is reacting against her parents' attitudes, which are still the same as those of the people living in the Western Indies. Their relatives in Britain also have not broken away from the Western Indian mentality and do not understand their children, who belong to a place different from their origin and to a different generation of, as Charlene characterises, 'smartly-dressed, empty-headed girls who believe that applying make-up is a form of art' (p. 169). She wishes to stay away from family quarrels and jealousies. Charlene is disillusioned with her parents and relatives, who are stuck in a West Indian time and place. Charlene does not want to limit her future to homemaking, rearing children, and dependence on a man. Despite the possible naiveté of her desire, this may represent her independence of, and freedom from, the confinement of the situation she is in.

Money to Live explores a variety of, sometimes contradicting, opinions, concerning the sex industry. Upon her decision to join Judy, Charlene is faced with disapproval from her family. It was Charlene who earlier condemned Julius for bringing disrepute into her family because of his immoral attitude to women. For Charlene has witnessed Julius involved in numerous sexual relationships since his early age. In turn, her stripping is regarded as a disgrace to her family by her father, who finds it difficult to accept the fact that his daughter becomes a stripper. He himself

operates a double standard: he does not mind watching other women strip, only his own daughter. Yet he is not in a position to place restrictions on her, and therefore meets Charlene halfway, insisting that she should not work in pubs where his friends frequent, as this would cause him shame and embarrassment. It would also reveal his daughter as a sexual object. At the same time, however, he is proud of his daughter for trying to stand on her own feet. While Charlene has been trying to be independent to get out of her deadlocked situation, her father, Norbert, has behaved irresponsibly with regard to providing for his family. According to Olive, he's never given her enough money to run the house while he has spent generous sums of money for himself. But to Norbert, life has been hard in Britain: 'No matter how hard you work you never seem to have enough money' (p. 157). That may be why he lost interest in working. Just as he has been exploited by British society, so Norbert has exploited his wife. Not satisfied with life in Britain, he has become an escapist, always longing to return home to the West Indies, but his wife would not agree to this.

Charlene's mother, Olive, is more sympathetic towards Charlene because of her experience as a part-time prostitute as a way of life she adopted in order to earn enough money to raise her children. Olive breaks her silence by confiding in Charlene, on hearing about her new job. Olive understands what life is like with no money. However, Charlene's younger sister, Jennifer, takes up the strongest position against her sister's stripping. Like Charlene, Jennifer also wants to escape from the limitations of her black background. Refusing to be confined as simply black and therefore to become like her other black peers who get pregnant in their teens, Jennifer works hard at school in order to pursue her career later and mingles with white girls and talks like them. Like her father, Jennifer cannot accept that her sister does such job as taking off clothes for money. Asserting that she would do any jobs other than stripping, Jennifer

argues that strippers sell dignity for money and condemns Charlene for conspiring with men in the sexual degradation of women and for making money at the cost of victimisation of herself or other women. The image Charlene's body creates as a stripper on stage is pornographic and influences the men watching it. As Jennifer argues, Charlene arouses men's sexual lust, with the result that men may enact this on other women in the street if they do not have a wife or a girlfriend to let their sexual urge out on. Besides, the pornographic image Charlene creates leads men to see women as passive sexual objects for their gaze and to have the idea that all that women have got on their minds is sex.

JENNIFER: You are up there on stage, touching yourself up, acting enticingly, you give guys the impression you're badly in need of it. You want that? (p. 163)

Jennifer argues that the stripper's act on stage insinuates that women are ready to be fucked and encourages men to be sexually predatory. She also links stripping and prostitution in terms of selling women's bodies. Her argument is well demonstrated in the last scene of the play, where Jennifer is actually attacked (off-stage) by a man when she refuses to respond to his approach. On her way to Charlene's one evening, she is grabbed hold of and slapped by a man in his mid-twenties. When she strips, Charlene may be safe within the demarcation line separating her from the men surrounding her as the place is under control. However the situation is reversed when Jennifer, even with her clothes on, is vulnerable to men's sexual assault in the street where there is no such line. In this respect, Charlene's independence is built on women's fear of men's violence.

Charlene seeks independence through stripping: her body is her own - she can do as she wishes with her body. Thus she shows her body to men who want to be turned on by paying money. Charlene refutes Jennifer's opinions, claiming that even if all

kinds of pornography and strippers disappear from this world, ‘men would still find things to get excited about’ (p. 163). She argues that men also become sexually stimulated by attractive women, or by women wearing sexy clothes, in the street. Judy also regards her stripping as a means to her independence. She sees her work as being ordinary as the work of a secretary or a bus conductress. Judy, who is cynical about men, believes she exploits men by taking their money.

JUDY: I exploit every man that watches me. I am a confidence trickster. I give them...my body, and at the same time I reach into their back pocket and take a pound note...People pay good money just to see what I've got in between my legs...If they want to see it, fine, all they have to do is give me that big money. I don't feel exploited...It's me who's making them look fools, how could I feel exploited?...I'm wealthy and getting wealthier, and fairly soon I'll own something. I can own whatever I want: a factory, a printing press, a radio station. I'm really getting there... (p. 167)

This is similar to Lynda’s capitalist speech in *Thatcher’s Women*. By offering her body to the men, Judy wishes to achieve her financial independence and enjoy freedom. Already she has a car and plans to buy a flat in two years time from starting working as a striptease artist. Yet, according to Jennifer’s view, she also has to pay the price of humiliation as a sexual object, although her job is not so risky as Lynda’s. However, Judy’s attitude is linked to that of a girl involved in another type of selling of the female body – prostitution – in which some strippers are engaged. As Judy argues, having joyless sex with a boyfriend is a form of prostitution. A girl turns into a prostitute because ‘she might as well have bad sex and get paid for it, rather than have bad sex and pretend it’s good sex’ (p. 153). The politics of the sex industry revolve around who exploits who. While Judy believes she exploits men, the strippers may be also exploited by the industry. The choice Charlene and Judy make to use their bodies in the sex industry results from their wish to lead a more ‘decent’ life with fewer hours of work. For example, Charlene used to earn seventy-nine pounds a week, but she

makes fifteen pounds an hour as a stripper. They thus have more time for themselves so that they spend time and money to learn skills such as driving lessons for Charlene. The two women follow the principle of capitalism.

Women's use of their bodies for money in order to live more reasonably is the theme of the play. Women's bodies thus are one of the focal points of the play. The body in this play is displayed to a much greater degree than it is in *Ficky Stingers* and *Thatcher's Women*. As Elaine Aston comments in her book, *An Introduction to Feminism and Theatre*:

Through her analysis [Elin] Diamond is able to demonstrate the potential of a feminist/Brechtian *Gestus* for removing the sight/site of the female body out of its objectified position in the 'male gaze' to a site/sight of 'looking-at-being-looked-at-ness'...In the instance of over-display, 'lookingness' is effected by alienating the vestimentary sign-system of the 'feminine'. (Aston, p. 93-4)

The 'over-display' appears in a scene where Judy shows Charlene how to strip:

CHARLENE's room, one early evening. Pulsating, sexual dance music plays, while a strobe light flashes on and off. JUDY is teaching CHARLENE a few moves. Both wear typical costumes. JUDY is instructing the sexiest way to uncover breasts. JUDY demonstrates. CHARLENE attempts, JUDY motions that it's not right. CHARLENE puts her top piece back on and tries again. JUDY motions that she's got it right this time. (p. 165)

The scene shows how the female body is created as a sexual object for male consumption. Yet, the focus of this scene is that the women practice to use their bodies to get what they want. So their bodies are transformed from the 'sight /site' of 'being-looked-at-ness' into 'the sight /site' of 'looking-at-being-looked-at'. As the playwright comments on the stage production of this scene in her 'Afterword':

The production by the Black Theatre Co-operative - could have been better. I didn't agree to the director. He actually made it hard for me to explain the play to the cast, contradicting me behind my back. It was a mistake having a man direct the play.

In the production, he created a scene where Charlene and Judy perform at a club. Without my consent, he removed a scene where Charlene and Judy rehearse. This is an important scene. The girls take their clothes off, then they put them back on again. This scene shows how mechanical stripping becomes for a

stripper, the play is not about stripping but the scene should not have been omitted. A man can't deal with the truth. What women create in life, men destroy. (Rudet, p. 180)

Replacing the rehearsal scene with a club performance in the production of the drama shifts the focus of the play. What the play explores is the controversy of the display of the female body, for male gratification, by women who thereby aim to gain personal autonomy. In the rehearsal scene, it is Charlene and Judy who control their bodies, looking at their own bodies. The rehearsal scene is thus intended to dismantle or subvert the male gaze rather than be designed for it.

The 'over-display' of bodies also takes place in Judy's narratives of two strippers, Maxine and Sabrina. Maxine reacts to the crowd and if they provoke her, she becomes bolder when she is drunk. Maxine goes beyond the limit set by other strippers and performs various obscene actions with customers. Instead of showing her body, Maxine displayed a man's body during one show:

JUDY:..One night, she's touching this guy's dick and he just leans back and let's her do it, as if it's some normal occurrence. Anyway, the crowd laughed at his cool attitude and Maxine saw how cool this guy was trying to be. She undid his flies, reached in and pulled it out! By now, the guy's getting worried but he tries not to show it. Then, Maxine kneels and pops it in her mouth! That really shocked him! He pulled away and quickly put it back in...(pp. 166-7)

Through her action, Maxine becomes a doer, making the man a passive sexual object. The spectators in the club and the man are embarrassed at the display of his body and her action. By doing that, Maxine arguably subverted the man's provocation and humiliation of women. The other girl, Sabrina, was once so drunk that she could not do her job properly.

JUDY:...She's seductively pulling this leotard past her crutch, down her thighs, past her knees, but it's only when she gets to her ankles that she realises she's got her shoes on.

She was so drunk she couldn't see how she was going to get her shoes off, and the girl realises she's not going to be able to get this leotard off, so she just starts to laugh and, instead of trying to patch up her bad job and finish the strip with

some grace, the girl just waddles off with the leotard trapped around her ankles. (p. 167)

Sarbina made the crowd roar with laughter. Though both strippers made scenes, they were in control of the situation, making the crowds laugh. By boldly over-displaying the male and female bodies respectively, the strippers were able to save the situations of their embarrassment. This way, the strippers subverted the male gaze with the result that the women were ‘looking at being looked at’.

The play starts with a scene in Charlene’s flat, where most of the action also takes place. Her flat represents her independence, but also, in the early stage of the play, the disintegration of her family when she moved out of her parents’ home. Charlene’s work as a go-go dancer seems to fragment the family further. However, there is a strong bond between the two sisters. Though Charlene has escaped from home, Jennifer visits her often to have Charlene plait her hair. During the hairplaiting, they argue about Charlene’s stripping, yet they also try to help each other. Charlene invites Jennifer to go with her on holiday, which Jennifer declines, as she cannot bear the idea of spending money Charlene has earned from stripping. There is also an understanding between Charlene and her mother as they have both shared experiences in selling their bodies. Olive visits Charlene, who frankly tells her mother how she has felt about her family. Charlene has been taking driving lessons so that she can visit her parents more often. However, men are portrayed as irresponsible. Charlene’s boyfriend is not faithful and Charlene does not care about the relationship when she becomes a stripper. Her brother, Julius, still lives off his parents while having a good time with girls, even though he earns money. But when he finds out that his latest girlfriend is pregnant, he becomes more thoughtful. Charlene tries to help him. Nobert, the father, has not been good for his family, but he changes his attitude and tries to help Charlene,

doing work on her flat. Though Nobert does not like the job she does, he admires her because financial independence endows Charlene with confidence and a renewed energy to help her family. She has brought the fragmenting family together.

Charlene and Judy choose to work in the sex industry in order to build their emotional and financial independence. Their attitude is sharply contrasted with Jennifer's. The clash of different opinions reflects numerous discourses concerning the sex industry.

NOTES

¹ Weeks, *Sexuality*, p. 39.

² Kate Millet, 'Prostitution: A Quartet for Female Voice' in Gornick and Moran, p. 88.

³ Jennifer James 'The Prostitute as a Victim', in Roberts and Gates (eds.), p. 185.

⁴ Quoted in Sheila Jeffreys' 'Prostitution' in rhodes and McNeil (eds.), pp. 59-70 (p. 60).

⁵ Nickie Roberts, *The Front Line: Women in the Sex Industry Speak* (London: Grafton Books, 1986), p. 232.

⁶ J in Kate Millet, 'Prostitution', p. 72.

⁷ Kay Adshead, 'Thatcher's Women', in *Plays By Women: Volume Seven*, ed. by Mary Remnant (London: Methuen, 1988), pp. 49-50 (p. 49).

⁸ Eric Shorter, *Daily Telegraph* (18.3.97), 'Thatcher's Women', *London Theatre Record*, Vol VII, Issue 6 (1987), 315-7 (p. 315).

⁹ Walkowitz, *Prostitution and Victorian Society*, p. 195.

¹⁰ Griffiths and Llewellyn-Jones, p. 195.

¹¹ Mary Remnant, 'Introduction', *Plays by Women: Volume 5*, ed. by Mary Remnant (London: Methuen, 1986), p. 10.

¹² Ann McFerran, *Time Out* (25.10.84), 'Money to Live', *London Theatre Record*, Vol. IV, Issue 8 (1984), 938-940 (p. 938).

¹³ Jacqueline Rudet, 'Afterword' in *Plays by Women: Volume 5*, p. 180.

¹⁴ Berney Bardsley, *Tribune* (22.11.84), 'Fool for Love and Money to Live', *London Theartre Record*, p. 995.

Chapter 9. Pornography in *Low Level Panic*

Men look at women. Women watch themselves being looked at. This determines not only most relations between men and women but also the relation of women to themselves. The surveyor of woman in herself is male: the surveyed female. Thus she turns herself into an object - and most particularly an object of vision: a sight.

John Berger *Ways of Seeing*

Low Level Panic was first presented by the Women's Playhouse Trust at the Royal Court Theatre Upstairs on 15 January 1988 and later had revival performances by Future Theatre Company as part of the Wordsworth Arts Festival in October 1992. It was also made into a television film for BBC 2 and aired in August 1994 without Scene Six where Mary sees a poster in which a terrifying gorilla is holding a woman in its hands. The playwright, Clare McIntyre, has worked as an actress in theatre, film, and television like Kay Adshead, the author of *Thatcher's Women*. McIntyre has also written *I've been Running* (Old Red Lion, May 1986, presented by Theatre La Beet), a play which alternates between time past and present, exploring the insecurities a woman in her twenties suffers throughout her life, and *My Heart's a Suitcase*, the latter commissioned by the Royal Court Theatre and also performed by Theatre Per Se in February, 1992. The protagonist of the play, Chris, is unable to put down the depressive, emotional luggage she carries with her. This distress is largely caused by her disadvantaged state and the grubbiness of reality she is faced with. McIntyre presents her ideas in this play in ways which are at once moving and humorous.

The image of the female body constructed for the male gaze dramatised in *Money to Live* is linked to the theme in *Low Level Panic*. McIntyre's play focuses on women's sexual fantasies and depicts a female sexuality largely determined by society which, in turn, influences the way in which women see themselves. Thus 'women watch themselves being looked at' as John Berger argues:

To be born a woman has been to be born, within an allotted and confined space, into the keeping of men. The social presence of women has developed as a result of their ingenuity in living under such tutelage within such a limited space. But this has been at the cost of a woman's self being split into two. A woman must continually watch herself. She is almost continually accompanied by her own image of herself. Whilst she is walking across a room or whilst she is weeping at the death of her father, she can scarcely avoid envisaging herself walking or weeping. From earliest childhood she has been taught and persuaded to survey herself continually.¹

A woman, Berger argues, alienates her own body from herself and sees it as an object of her own scrutiny. She thus surveys herself at the same time that she is being surveyed. A woman has to survey everything about herself, according to John Berger, since 'how she appears to others, and ultimately how she appears to men, is of crucial importance for what is normally thought of as the success of her life' (*Ibid.*, p. 46). Consequently, a woman wishes to look desirable to men. What is deemed desirable has varied at different times in history. Today, fashion magazines, advertisements, films, and pornography contribute to a sense of what is desirable. Women frequently try to look desirable and sometimes fantasise ways of becoming more desirable. In *Low Level Panic*, pornography plays an important role in the characters' perceptions of desirability.

The drama demonstrates the fact that women's self-scrutiny in connection with the male gaze is closely affected by pornography. Particularly, it shows how pornography conditions concepts and behaviour in terms of the sexuality of women in their twenties - the age when sexuality is often regarded as becoming strongest. As Kate Harwood, the editor of *First Run*, comments in the Introduction to the play, 'The fact that the Theatre Upstairs was packed with a young female audience for most of the run showed clearly who was curious about the conclusions.'² Pornography has become so pervasive that it is seen in the play to affect the daily lives of three 'ordinary' young

women sharing a flat somewhere in London. As Helen Rose commented in her review in *Time Out*:

Low level panic is the constant fear that runs through women's lives like a cold underground stream, its source is male violence and it is fed by the tributaries of pornography. Clare McIntyre's play...looks at the repercussion this fear has on the lives of three women.³

The drama revolves around the fantasies, desires and terrors to which pornography gives rise in the women: Jo, Mary, and Celia. In the opening scene Jo and Mary are in the bathroom. Jo is taking a bath while Mary is reading a pornographic magazine she found in their dustbin. In the article Mary reads from the magazine about a woman who is depicted as enjoying being fucked incessantly, with the result that she has multiple orgasms. This article is designed to arouse men's sexual urges with the woman as their sex object. The pornographic story thus exposes women as vulnerable and passive objects upon which men actively perform their sexual activities and let out their sex drives. In this respect, pornography is shown as influencing both men and women in their concept of their sex roles and sexuality.

One of the three characters, Jo, is obsessed with her body: her figure, height, weight, and her spots. As Christopher Edwards comments, '...everything, in fact, that might make her feel erotically inadequate.'⁴ While she is bathing, Jo watches her body and compares it with that of a woman in the magazine: *JO stretches both her legs vertically out of the bath and looks at them* (p. 90). Through this kind of auto voyeurism Jo turns herself into a sexual object for men's gaze and pleasure, and her own pleasure. Since Jo longs for a rich man, she wishes to be erotically compatible with his wealth: 'If I could grow six inches tall and be as fat as I am now I'd be really tall and thin. I could stretch out all the fat on my legs till they are long and slender...' (p. 91). Thus Jo is tall and thin with long legs in her voluptuous fantasies, in which she

paints herself in a ‘porn girl’ image. While Jo covers her face with heavy make-up, she exposes her body, so that it is naked, apart from silky, lacy underwear, which presents her in a whorish, sexually vulnerable image. In this image in her fantasy Jo is in a bar, where the men are fully dressed, while she is almost naked. This presentation of an unequal, one-sided female nudity gives rise to a message that men have sexual dominance over Jo in her underwear and thus have easy access to her. Like the women in pornography Jo is a body to look at. The men, Jo claims, would see her approach the bar with her feet in their ‘fuck me’ stilettos’ (p. 91). Despite her vulnerability, Jo’s body also emanates strong female sexuality which in her fantasy overcomes men with desire for her. Thus, in this fantasy she does not have to do anything to attract men’s attention, except for her being there in the bar, fondling a glass with a long stem. Jo’s fantasy is graphic, presenting herself as an erotically desirable feminine figure, longing to be caressed by men in the way she fondles the glass.

In her fantasy Jo is silent in an expensive, exotic rendezvous with a man. She exhibits her body, but expresses no thoughts or emotions. Eventually she erases her identity, hiding her face in enormous, dark sunglasses, items drawing men’s attention more fully to her body, and especially to her legs: she reduces herself to ‘a pair of legs’ only. Her desire is to remain aloof from a crowd of men who fight to touch her and thus to be an object of male voyeurism. When Jo looks at herself in the mirror, she splits herself into two - the surveyor and the surveyed. The former is contented with, and loves, the latter in her wild fantasies, while the latter is conscious of the former and also of other spectators: ‘I’d be an astonishingly beautiful, mysterious, fascinating woman. The kind of woman men dream about but hardly ever see. I wouldn’t need to talk’ (p. 94). In this narcissistic and erotic daydream her body is itself sufficient to please men: ‘I could be dumb. I could be a mute. He might like that’ (p. 94). As

Susanne Kappeler comments in *The Pornography of Representation*, 'The whole drive of the cultural education of women is towards presenting silence as the highest female virtue and the necessary component of female beauty.'⁵ Jo's fantasy is thus influenced by her culture: women are not to be heard, but seen. This silent female body made available to the male gaze is the very image of women pornography presents.

Jo's life is full of fantasies - romantic, erotic, and materialistic - all mixed together. Her mind wanders in a blue sea, imagining herself swimming and then on a yacht with pink champagne. She objectifies herself in detail in colour and shape as a glamorous focus in her picture: 'I'd get really thin and I'd get tanned all over, even my armpits. That would be my sole occupation, getting tanned without any strap marks' (p. 95). However, the man she is with on the yacht is amorphous, only represented by his yacht, money, and power: 'Men don't have figures. They've got jobs and flash cars and important things to worry about' (p. 96). Her fantasy sometimes alternates with her seemingly lucid observation of her body, in which she finds herself neither repulsive nor perfect. Jo is thus frustrated by the fact that she cannot do anything drastic to alter her figure in order to look desirable. She wishes to do something to make her body perfect, including major changes in her shape if her body is repulsive. In the worst fantasy, she alienates herself from her body and hates it: 'I feel fat. I feel enormous. I feel ugly and a mess. I don't feel right' (p. 98). She even imagines herself as abhorrent: 'I've got bunions and an unattractive clitoris...Can you get genital herpes on your hand?' (p. 98). Jo therefore oscillates between her fantasies of herself as an object of male desire and self-hatred and frustration in reality.

Mary, who listens to Jo's orgiastic fantasies and complaints, is her opposite. On her way home recently she has been attacked by two men and is acutely anxious about behaving in any way that might invite a future assault. She feels guilty about what

happened, and the fact that she was wearing a skirt rather than trousers, thus presenting herself to the man as object of desire. When Jo recounts her fantasy of the men on the yacht. Mary's response is that he will almost certainly be rough and revolting. Jo believes desirable men have power while desirable women have good figures, but, in Mary's view: '[Men] worry about their looks, too' (p. 96). The impact of the assault on Mary is to make her acutely aware of sexual danger. The effects of pornography on these women are different: a pleasurable fantasy to Jo but a reminder of her nightmarish experience to Mary.

There is another girl, Celia. Like Jo, Celia is concerned a great deal with her appearance and apt to give the other girls beauty advice: 'Never, never, never wash your face' (p. 99), to which Jo responds, citing Celia's other maxim: 'cleanse and moisturise and make a habit of it' (p. 99). Celia believes a great deal in cosmetic help and her major interest is the correct eye-shadow for her green eyes.

CELIA: I think you should make the most of yourself. I've got green eyes so I have to be careful. I like to use a powder shadow. Greasy eye make-up just smudges in the creases and you have to repair it all the time. But if you get the right powder it can last all day... You're no good to anyone if you don't like yourself. We're none of us perfect. I don't look like anything at all without make-up. (p. 100)

If Jo is concerned about her figure, Celia's is more interested in her face. Celia, however, unlike Jo, is practical. She believes that women's faces are not perfect and that is why she needs make-up to look desirable to men. She is willing to be a sex object and wants to take advantage of her sexuality by trying to look her best. As Susan Griffin argues:

Ordinary women wear makeup. Ordinary women attempt to change their bodies to resemble a pornographic ideal. Ordinary women construct a false self and come to hate this self. And yet the film star who represents to culture the perfection of a false image of women can represent a danger and a threat to an ordinary women's life. For the image of the film star is held up to her both as what she must imitate and to show her how she has failed to live up to the pornographic ideal. (Griffin, p. 207)

Celia is chiefly influenced by the image of women in women's magazines, which are in turn influenced by pornography, and tries to imitate the image through the use of cosmetics, but like other women, she does not realise that they pursue the false image of women that her culture presents and forces upon women.

The three women are therefore all affected by pornography. Jo muses over the promiscuous group sex in the magazine. In her masturbatory fantasy, she undresses and looks at herself from the viewpoint of the male gaze. Indifferent to her surroundings, she only thinks of sex. She is seen lying in bed as the daylight creeps through the curtains. The chiaroscuro effect in the scene makes the audience voyeurs as if they peep at her through the curtains. Her body is detached from herself as an object which she alienates and displaces in time and space. She makes herself passive, almost lifeless, like a dead woman for a viewing: despite the hot weather, she says, '...my body is soft and cold. I'm not sweaty at all. I'm quite, quite cleaned and perfumed' (p. 108). Jo's body resembles Elisabeth Bronfen's analysis of 'one of the most popular folktale images - Snow White' in *Over Her Dead Body*. Bronfen describes Snow White in her glass coffin:

[A]n image of a beautiful dead woman exhibited for the gratification of her viewers...By implication, the act of seeing means possession and pleasure. By embalming a beautiful woman she is idealised in a way that obscures the possibility of decay. She becomes the prince's desired object only after she becomes a 'seemingly' dead body. His desire for an unknown beautiful feminine corpse exemplifies to perfection how the object of desire is never real but rather the symptom of the lover's fantasy. [A]s auto-icon, Snow White performs the apotheosis of one of the central positions ascribed to Woman in western culture; namely that the 'surveyed' feminine body is meant to confirm the power of the masculine gaze. In Lemoine -Luccioni's words, Woman does not look; she gives herself to be looked at. She is beauty and being beauty, she is also an object of love.⁶

Jo wishes to be looked at and loved by her voyeurs. Like Snow White lying in state, Jo's body is at other's disposal and beyond her autonomy. Objectification of herself

means deprivation of control over her own body, which constitutes violence against herself.

In another fantasy in which Jo is very thin and light in sexy attire, she imagines herself to be the most desirable thing possible - the type of woman that men are thought to most want to possess. Jo indulges in a rape fantasy in which she is picked up by lorry drivers and provokes them into having sex with her. This graphic fantasy is an evident influence of pornographic films in which women are shown enjoying being raped by very masculine men. As is argued in *Pornography and Sexual Violence*:

Any women who hitchhikes deserves to get raped, women unconsciously set up situations which force rape on them, women enjoy being raped, women who wear provocative clothing are putting themselves in a place to get raped; these are common myths held by rapists.⁷

Jo's rape fantasy is thus affected by myths surrounding rape of which the impact on the victim is far greater than the fantasy suggests. Jo places herself and one driver in a pornographic film as actors while leaving the other as an audience: 'I like to think of him watching us' (p. 108). As Susanne Kappeler observes in *The Pornography of Representation*:

Enjoyment, according to [the Marquis] de Sade, requires a sophisticated intellectual structure, beyond sheer gratification. It requires an audience. With an audience, torture becomes an art, the torturer an author, the onlooker an audience of connoisseurs. (Kappeler, p. 8)

Very often violence is disguised as fantasy. In reality, Jo is well aware of the danger of hitchhiking, and is terrified by the thought that she may get killed and thus she has hardly ever done it. However, Jo is unhappy because she cannot live up to her fantasy image. She always alternates between fantasy and reality, remaining well aware of reality and how futile her fantasy is.

Unlike Jo, Celia is disgusted by the story Jo has read about group sexual intercourse. Celia experienced reading pornography first when she was about twelve.

A pornographic magazine her friend and herself found was full of images of women in black underwear: 'They looked like they were pretending to tie each other up or something. There weren't any men in the pictures' (p. 103). Like the long-legged Jo in her fantasy, the women in the magazine were for the male gaze and consumption, and were humiliated as male sex objects. They were stripped almost naked and made vulnerable to male sexual aggression, the tying of their bodies representing their loss of physical and psychological freedom. This image of female enslavement, it can be argued, affects men's attitude towards actual women as the women in the pornographic images become all women: women are perceived as inferior to men, who thus can do whatever they want with women who are at their disposal. As Kappeler argues in *The Pornography of Representation*:

Any woman seeing this image may feel the urge to turn her head away in shame. For [the] picture of the body of one woman has become a metaphor, in its anonymity (and in the general anonymity which belongs to women), for all women's bodies. Each sale of the pornographic image is a sadistic act which accomplishes the humiliation of all women. (*Ibid.*, p. 112)

Presumably Celia, when looking at these images felt as if she was also naked and humiliated. Apparently, that was why she didn't want to show the magazine to others and buried it. Pornography humiliates both the women it depicts and women in general.

The effects of pornography on Mary are more negative than on Celia. Having been sexually interfered with by strangers, her focus has turned in upon herself. She considers pornography to be a form of infringement of privacy as she thinks it shows and says what is not supposed to be shown and said. Just as she is disturbed by people's 'gross, messy, ugly lives' (p. 101) which are characterised by rows and violence, she is disgusted by the abusive and filthy images and the graphic language

and sexual activities in pornography where women are described as trying to satisfy men in a sexual orgy. As Susan Griffin comments in *Pornography and Silence*:

A woman exists to serve and please: she has no right of whatsoever, for she does not belong to herself. A man must think of a woman as his possession, that a woman exists to feel that she belongs to man. For in pornography the woman who is an object, the pornographic hero is her rider, her driver, her master. He subordinates her through physical strength or through fear. He kidnaps her, rapes her, ties her up, gives her orders she must carry out, imprisons her. Even his sexual encounters with her are acts of dominance. (Griffin, p. 38)

Men's sexual domination depicted in pornography arguably influences men into committing sexual violence against women. Mary feels herself to have been debased into an object - 'a thing', especially because she has been violated. All women are sex objects: 'We're all just things to fuck' (p. 120). To be a thing is to become a being without a will and thus to lose part of the self, soul. Pornography determines the way in which women are treated by society and reduces women into sex objects. The mere presentation of a woman's body in pornography is a degradation.

Pornography confuses the three women as much as it affects them. As Nicholas de Jongh comments,

McIntyre suggests, at least by implication, that where males dominate and control most of our life systems, women will not be able to resist or be unaffected by those institutions that shape existence.⁸

Most women try to conform to what their societies expect them to look like, and behave just like Jo and Celia in this play. The three women are dissatisfied with themselves and have a desire for disguise. Their effort to look different, to be someone else, persists throughout the play, but culminates in the scene where Mary and Jo get ready for the party. They want to admire themselves - their transformation - in the mirror but Mary is apprehensive about her party gear. As she believes she was attacked because of the skirt she was wearing, she is more anxious about her outfit than the other two women. In her job, Mary was required to wear either a skirt or smart

trousers. She chose a skirt on the day the attack took place because of a management meeting in which she had to take part. Even though she did not feel comfortable doing so on the bike ('it just makes people look at your legs' (p. 103)), she rode to and from work in a skirt. After the assault she blames herself for what took place and speculates on how she could have prevented it - to no avail. Being a young woman on the edge of the road at midnight is sufficient to invite sexual assault.

Though both Mary and Jo are in party gear when they go out, Mary feels like a tart in her dress. It reminds her of her skirt she was wearing at the time of her assault and thus, instead of feeling attractive in it, she feels sick and hates it. She believes men despise women in tarty dresses while Jo prefers to look like a tart as she thinks men like tarts. Though Jo likes to fantasise about being someone else, Mary's desire to do this is thwarted by her assault: she would rather be herself. She feels like someone else in make-up and a sexy dress, alienated from herself. Mary is troubled by the idea that the tartiness of her dress may provoke further sexual abuse. She still remembers how she felt when she was sexually attacked: she was angry and terrified.

MARY lets go of her bicycle. It crushes to the floor. The man behind her puts his hands on her hips and pushes his fingers up her vagina. The other hand rides up her body onto her breasts. The actress should enact these things using her own arms and hands. The movements are forceful and deliberate. The actress should carry out these actions until it is crystal clear that she is not being felt in a tentative way but is being sexually assaulted. She then holds her arms away from herself, dissociating herself from what is happening to her and screams. She is screaming for everything to be helped: to release her anger and her fear. (pp. 106-7)

Since the assault is acted out by the victim herself, the scene directly and vividly expresses the agony of the victim. Like Evelyn in *Beside Herself*, who has been 'beside herself' since her abuse by her own father, Mary was 'beside herself' when she was assaulted: 'My body was there but I was somewhere else' (p. 115). She cannot believe that the assault actually happened to her. While Mary holds herself responsible for her

abuse, Jo thinks Mary was assaulted because she was born female. After the tormenting experience, to Mary, the effort to look nice and different is sometimes a torture. Her shoes for the party are too tight and painful and thus Mary sees no point in wearing them. Eventually, she takes off her dress, announcing: 'I'm going to sit in the bathroom for the rest of my life and go out occasionally for a sandwich' (p. 116). Later she dyes her dress as she cannot stand this association with her assault. Mary has a negative attitude towards looking nice and different, as a result of her experience of sexual assault.

The impact of Mary's assault is manifest throughout the play, especially in her reaction to Jo's fantasies, to pornography, her attire, and to men. Mary still broods over why she was sexually assaulted. Rather than the skirt she was wearing, she now thinks the way she looked overall may be the reason: she felt she looked sexy. The way she was dressed may have been decoded by the attackers as wanting to be sexually interfered with. This attitude presents different ways of interpreting female appearance by the male and the female, respectively. While Jo fantasises being raped, Mary, as a victim, is appalled by the thought of it. Whatever reasons Mary thinks of for her assault, she still feels guilty in connection with it. Her abuse haunts her in flashbacks of what happened and in her discussions with Jo, which are full of self-blame, as in *Ficky Stingers* where the memory of the protagonist's rape haunts her throughout the play. Influenced by the visual media, Jo wants to look sexy after the pornographic image of women, as she wants to look how men like women to look. However, in Mary's case, when she wore make-up and was dressed in a presumably sexy way, she thinks she was regarded as asking for trouble. The two women have different views on women in sexy make-up and apparel.

The pornographic image of women that Jo fantasises becoming is ubiquitous in the media and on commercial hoardings. It influences other women in how they wish to look. In Scene Six, Mary remembers seeing an image of a woman on a huge poster was also in the same image. She was ‘hairless and shiny and silky...tall and thin’ (p. 121) and pornographic.

He [a gorilla] had one hand through her legs and gripping on to a thigh and his other arm was right round her and clutching on to her ribs and he had one thumb which was sort of half pulling off her bikini top. (p. 120)

The picture emanates an image of violence that is akin to rape. The hairy gorilla was in control of the woman. The poster must be a re-enactment of a scene from a film, *King Kong*. This over-sized creature, compared with the size of the woman, signifies the perverted desire for men’s dominance and power over women. The woman was turned into a submissive object of men’s violence, as, with her arms thrown up in the air, she was just posing there with no resistance, emotion, or expression, to an extent that Mary wanted to ask her what she felt. Out of curiosity Mary climbed up into the picture, and found only emptiness: the woman had no substance. Her eyes were unfocused: she had no existence, but was simply an object of the male gaze (like women in pornography).

The woman in the poster also presents an image of a doll to be toyed with. Though Mary ran away from the picture, she felt relieved that the image of the woman was a two-dimensional combination of beauty and hollowness, and was not based on a real person. According to Griffin, however, ‘real women’s bodies are often cut, molded, and reshaped so that like the bodies of wooden or plastic dolls, they will please men’; women’s faces are also altered ‘to appear like the cultural image of women’ (Griffin, p. 45). The woman in the hoarding represents the image that dominant culture imposes on women. The two entities in the poster are opposite in

every sense: hairy/silky, big/thin, power/powerless, and natural/cultural. As Susan Griffin argues:

In both image and event, fact and fantasy, pornographic culture annihilates the female sex. Thus pornography begins by annihilating the real female self and replacing this self with a false self. But the false self is finally only a projection which belongs to the pornographic hero. Thus along with the feeling of emptiness, a woman inherits from culture a continual experience of fear. For the image of a woman's body must be replaced with an image of her absence. (Griffin, p. 217)

The silky, long, and thin woman is thus the false self of women and is about to be annihilated by the powerful gorilla. However, it is this false image that influences both men and women in their idea of desirable women. The woman is thus, 'emblematic of culture's expectation' of women (Griffin, p. 206). Mary is aware of this and discourages Jo from fantasising herself. However, this cultural image is infused into Jo and confuses her. Jo's fantasies where she is slender and silent are humiliating to her, as she is in reality overweight and over-talkative. She thus annihilates her real body by replacing it with her false self in her fantasies. Her false self and her real body give rise to conflict, which in turn causes Jo to despair when both of them are exposed and juxtaposed in the initial bathroom scene.

The bathroom in the opening scene is central to the play since the play is staged almost exclusively in this location, where Jo, Mary and Celia have romantic and sexual fantasies. Throughout the play, the female body is presented and discussed. The three women slip in and out of their shared bathroom, fighting over hot water and engage in the daily rituals of ablution and facial cleansing and moisturising in front of the mirror. It is also the place of self-scrutiny and self-improvement for them: spots are squeezed and bodies are surveyed. The bathroom is thus crucial to them for enhancing their sexuality. In the bathroom Jo and Mary, as already stated, compare their fantasies with those of a porn magazine. The reaction to pornography shows that Mary is introverted

and sensitive while Jo broods over her erotic fantasies and her self-revulsion. It is in the bathroom where they get dolled up for a party and later reminisce about it. The bathroom provides a symbolic setting where minds and bodies are exposed and naked, while make-up and party gear are put on for the characters' physical modification. Just as the body is entirely uncovered in the bathroom, so the women's sexual fantasies are thoroughly professed. As Helen Rose commented in her review in *Time Out*:

The bathroom, where the body is cleansed, weighed, studied and assessed is the appropriate setting for a series of discussions and personal meditations on the relationship between sex, body-image and personal identity.⁹

Jo's body is scrutinised by herself in the bathroom before it is surveyed by others at the party she is going to with Mary and Celia. Jo's contemplation about her body results from her wish to meet someone to fulfil her fantasies.

Among the three women, Jo tries to make her 'body' resemble a pornographic image, while Celia tries to use make-up to recreate on her face an image derived from women's magazines. Pornography and women's magazines turn women into objects which the two women are willing to become. They are influenced by a patriarchal society where men have power to choose women largely by their appearance and make them subservient - the ideology pornography propagates. As Una Stannard argues:

Glittering and smiling in the media, looked at by millions, envied and ogled, these ideal beauties teach women their role in society. They teach them that women are articles of conspicuous consumption in the male market; in other words that women are made to be looked at and that females achieve success in the world by being looked at...The ideal beauties teach women that their looks are a commodity to be bartered in exchange for a man, not only for food, clothing, and shelter, but for love. (Stannard, p. 194-5)

Though the two women's fantasies are different, they long for a man. Their fantasies are erotic and romantic and take little account of reality. Mary might be different in her response to pornography and in her fantasies if she had not been sexually assaulted. The play starts and ends with Jo's fantasies, which resemble pornographic films and

advertisements. The drama demonstrates how absurd and humiliating to women the sexual fantasies are. It also implies that women still live in society where men dominate and control most of human institutions, which thus affect women's lives in many ways.

NOTES

¹ John Berger, *Ways of Seeing* (London: the British Broadcasting Corporation, 1972), p. 46.

² Kate Harwood (ed.), 'Introduction' in *First Run* (London: Nick Hern Books, 1989), p. viii.

³ Helen Rose, *Time Out* (24.2.88), 'Low Level Panic', *London Theatre Record*, Vol VIII, Issue 15, (1988), 196-8, (p. 196).

⁴ Christopher Edwards, *Spectator* (17. 2. 88), *Ibid.*, p.196.

⁵ Susanne Kappeler, *The Pornography of Representation* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1986), p. 194.

⁶ Elisabeth Bronfen, *Over Her Dead Body* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1992), pp. 101-2.

⁷ Everywoman (ed.), *Pornography and Sexual Violence: Evidence of Links* (London: Everywoman, 1988), p. 15.

⁸ Nicholas de Jongh, *Guardian* (17.2.88), *London Theatre Record* (1988), p. 196.

⁹ Helen Rose, *Time Out* (24.2.88), *Ibid.*, p. 196.

Chapter 10. A Concluding Play: *MASTERPIECES*

The word *pornography*, derived from the ancient Greek *porne* and *graphos*, means “writing about whores.” *Porne* means “whore,” specifically and exclusively the lowest class of whore, which in ancient Greece was the brothel slut available to all male citizens. The *porne* was the cheapest (in the literal sense), least regarded, least protected of all women, including slaves. She was, simply and clearly absolutely, a sexual slave. *Graphos* means “writing, etching, or drawing.”

The play, *Masterpieces*, which will be discussed in this Chapter continues the theme of pornography considered in the previous play in Chapter 9 and explores pornography as a form of violence against women, but with a different focus. In this process, it also incorporates almost all forms of violence against women that have been deliberated so far: humiliation of women, rape, incarceration, mutilation, killing, interrogation of women, the way women are treated by psychiatry, some of which are also prevalent in the starting play, *The Love of the Nightingale*. The play is thus dealt with as a concluding play of this thesis.

Masterpieces by Sarah Daniels was first performed at the Royal Exchange Theatre, Manchester on 31 May 1983, and subsequently at the Royal Court Theatre on 7 October 1983. It received a revival production at Etcetera in August 1992, presented by the Hole in the Wall Gang. The theme of pornography and its effects on women in *Low Level Panic* are connected to the theme in this play. According to Daniels, *Masterpieces* is an ‘issue-based play’, as she shaped her ideas on pornography partly from a friend of hers who was doing a dissertation on women and male violence, partly from Andrea Dworkin’s book *Pornography - Men Possessing Women*, and partly from a meeting at the University of London, where members of ‘Women Against Violence Against Women’ (WAVAW) were speaking.¹ According to Tracy C. Davis, Daniels

was inspired to write *Masterpieces* by the long delayed appearance of *Snuff* in Britain in 1982. As Dusty Rhodes introduces *Snuff*:

Snuff is a film, which first appeared in the States in 1976, so called because the actresses were actually mutilated and murdered in front of the camera - 'snuffed out.' Many 'snuff' films have been made since then. Early in 1982 it was announced that the original *Snuff* film was being distributed in this country. Feminists protested immediately and the distributors withdrew the film (*Ibid.*, p. 161)

Daniels thus takes up a position of anti-pornography in the play. In the same context, as Mary Remnant comments:

Critics reviewing *Masterpieces* declared that there was no proven connection between pornography and violence against women, and implied that it was only a few nasty perverts who were being so beastly anyway. Amidst a growing awareness of the part played by anti-black, anti-Irish and anti-Semitic jokes in perpetuating racism, the critics dug in their heels and insisted that the very idea that misogynist jokes had anything to do with misogyny was patently ridiculous. Daniels' anger was merely a 'cascade of bile' (Shulman) and her 'scream of outrage' (Wardle) was drowned out by their own.²

Contrary to the critics' views, Daniels connects pornography and violence against women. *Masterpieces* portrays the way in which pornography contributes to sexual violence against women, to sex discrimination, and to sexual inequality. It argues that pornography is intrinsically connected with male power and a male hegemony. The play depicts, in particular, the traumatisation of women, discrimination against women in the judicial system, and women's protest against a power system dominated by men. On the personal level, it focuses on Rowena's psychological journey from a relative indifference to pornography to her awareness of its detrimental effects on women.

Masterpieces begins with a scene in a restaurant where the central couples are presented: Yvonne and Ron, Rowena and Trevor, and Rowena's mother and step-father, Jennifer and Clive. They are all dancing, except Yvonne who is sitting at the table. Their action freezes while a monologue in three parts is delivered by the Baron (a millionaire producer of pornography), the Peddler (a sex shop owner), and the

Consumer of pornography (all played by the actor who plays Clive). These three figures are the main elements indispensable to the maintenance of the pornography industry. The politics of the sex industry, as in *Money to Live*, is based around who exploits whom. The industry profits from women's subordination and exploits women sexually and economically. The capitalist speech delivered by the Baron is similar to the speeches made by Lynda in *Thatcher's Women* and by Judy in *Money to Live*. According to Catherine Itzin, pornography is a product of capitalism, a multi-million international industry with high profit margins.³ In a capitalist society, as the producer, the Baron, explains, making money by whatever means is a justified act as long as he pays tax. (Lynda also makes it clear that she will pay tax when she opens an escort business.) The producer defends his business as a legal undertaking. Another character, the Peddler, sees his shop as a more luxurious extension of a newsagent's, specialising in more erotic and violent magazines and videos. He insists that the function is to enrich people's romantic lives and to provide the practical side to sex therapy. A third character, the Consumer, finds those magazines and videos to be harmless since people need to be revitalised and stimulated in their sex lives. The pornography industry is naively vindicated by these three men as harmless despite the fact that women involved in the sex industry are exploited and degraded, and that 'ordinary women' are also affected by the humiliating image of women created in pornography. Thus their naive views are sharply contrasted with the central argument of the play which links pornography and specific instances of sexual assault against women. Like women stripping in *Money to Live* which, in Jennifer's view, can lead to aroused, but sexually unadjusted, men assaulting other women, pornography is also a source of men's violence against women since it has a deleterious influence on men in forming their attitude towards women.

After the three speeches, the main characters engage in a conversation, taking turns in telling jokes, the basic subject matter of which is sex, rape, and women complying with the latter. Their jokes are pornographic as well as misogynist and sexist, reflecting the men's attitude towards women. In the jokes, women - including even nuns who are traditionally considered to be asexual - are depicted as whores wanting to be raped. As Griffin argues:

The Marquis de Sade finds transgression more pleasurable than pleasure itself... He tells us that "there is a kind of pleasure which comes from the sacrilege or the profanation of the objects offered us for worship." And of his life, Simone de Beauvoir writes, "No aphrodisiac is so potent as the defiance of God." Throughout pornography the priest or the nun, therefore, is turned into a lecherous or a prostituted figure. (Griffin, p. 15)

The pornographic jokes can be seen as part of this transgression which sees no limit as far as pleasure is concerned. The jokes are thus the starting point of a presentation of a continuum of sexual violence against women which pornography causes in the play. Misogynist jokes in which women are verbally raped are followed by an exploration of pornographic misogenies, which lead to actual rape, and eventually to the culmination of sexual violence - a snuff film in which a woman is actually mutilated and murdered in great brutality in front of the camera.

The characters' response to the jokes varies:

The men laugh, TREVOR not as heartily as the other two. ROWENA rather hesitantly joins in. YVONNE doesn't even smile, while JENNIFER laughs uproariously and rather disconcertingly so. (p. 166)

Like the three men in the monologues who are unconcerned about women's degradation through pornography, Ron, Trevor, and Clive pay no heed to the suffering and humiliation of their jokes' victims. Women in the jokes are simply two-dimensional sexual objects as in pornography. The men expect the women also to laugh at the misogynist jokes, but the response from Rowena and Yvonne is similar to

that of Celia in *Low Level Panic*, who felt embarrassed when she saw naked women in the pornographic magazine. Griffin argues on sadism and pornography:

If [a woman] is shocked and turns away from the pornographic image in disgust, she becomes the pornographic victim. She cannot escape without humiliation. And we know humiliation to be the essence of sadism. It is thus that pornography as an act of sadism toward all women. (Griffin, p. 83)

The two women's humiliation links them to the victims in the jokes. The pornographic jokes thus constitute a type of violence against women.

Unlike Rowena and Yvonne, Jennifer laughs at the men's jokes, but as Elaine Aston argues, her laughter is excessive:

Jennifer, Rowena's mother, laughs excessively at men's jokes, much to the discomfort and embarrassment of the other dinner guests, but it is a laughter which de-familiarizes the common position of women who are forced into the position of laughing in spite of themselves. It is a laughter which speaks the 'but I am not that.' (Aston, p. 130)

Whether or not they laugh at the jokes, the women's responses reveal their discomfort with the idea that rape is funny. Jennifer's laughter in contrast to Yvonne's anger at the jokes can also be explained by Toril Moi's comments on Bakhtin's work:

[A]s the Russian theorist Mikhail Bakhtin has shown in his influential study of *Rabliais* (*Rabliais and His World*) anger is not the only revolutionary attitude available to us. The power of laughter can be just as subversive, as when carnival turns the old hierarchies upside-down, erasing old differences, producing new and unstable ones. (Moi, p. 40)

Jennifer's laughter thus subverts the male consumption of the pornographic jokes. Her laughter is also similar to Medusa's laughter (in Cixous and Clément's *The Newly Born Woman*) which transgresses constraints and to Magdalena's laughter in *Augustine (Big Hysteria)* which frees Augustine to become an 'upside-down' festival' (see p. 124). Jennifer's laughter is thus perceived as an opposition to the men's sadistic laugh. In this subversive context, Jennifer also tells jokes, one of which is about men's sexuality. In the joke, a vicar gave a talk about sex, while his wife thought it was about

sailing. In response to the headmistress's compliments on the talk, the wife said: 'I don't know how, he's only done it twice. The first time he was sick and the second time his hat came off' (p. 168). The joke has a two-fold meaning, one of which relates to men's sexual incompetence. The men laugh reluctantly, but Yvonne smiles. Jennifer's other jokes are about her using her diaphragm for her flower arrangement and somebody growing plants in an empty pill packet. The men are embarrassed at these jokes. Through these jokes, however, Jennifer claims women's right to talk about their bodies. Men enjoy seeing women humiliated, but they spurn being humiliated.

The immediate impact of pornography in the play is an actual rape. A boy at the school where Yvonne teaches rapes a girl from the same school, and later, a stack of 'girlie mags' is found by his mother in the rapist's room. His father also keeps a drawerful of pornography. As the characters explain, pornography is so widespread and easily accessible in daily life in the home, the workplace, and in shops that people take it for granted. Lacking a clear definition of the extent and effects of pornography, the characters put forward opinions that are similar to the justification of pornography made by the three men in the opening speeches. Rowena, for example, comments that it is a safety valve through which men release their sexual urges and that it 'saves them from attacking anyone on the street' (p. 173). Yvonne on the other hand insists that pornography includes anything such as advertisements which depict women as sex objects and regards it as 'violence against women' (p. 173). The attitudes of the characters at the dinner, with the exception of Yvonne, presumably mirror those of the general public.

However, the play shows a direct link between pornography and sexual assault. In fact, in pornography, women are trapped and positioned as dehumanised sex objects of men's sexual desire and at the same time as commodities infused with sexuality. It

is degrading to women because of its representation of them as sexually exposed and made powerless. Pornography also portrays women as wanting to be raped, thus objectifying and humiliating women as whores. As Catherine Itzin writes, pornography plays a part ‘in predisposing men to abuse, in reducing internal and external inhibitions to abuse, and in legitimising and initiating abuse’ (Itzin, p. 5). The boy who committed the rape has obviously been influenced by these messages pornography delivers. They have played a key role in forming his attitude towards women as his sexual objects. His headmaster and a lawyer share an opinion on the rape: ‘She’d only been raped but was unharmed’ (p. 180). Women are also affected by what pornography indoctrinates, as is shown by the attitude of the boy’s mother, who does not sympathise with the raped girl. Rather than blaming her son, she blames herself, questioning her way of bringing him up. The medical profession in the play, including psychiatrists, also ascribes guilt for the rape to the mother who they see as failing to take responsibility for her son. Pornography therefore incites male violence against women, but the blame for that violence is laid on women who are seen as failing in their responsibilities.

This abusive nature of pornography also restricts women’s freedom of movement, as portrayed in Scene Five. Rowena, a social worker, feels threatened when she returns home from her visits to clients late in the evening. Like Mary in *Low Level Panic*, who has to walk through the threatening night-time streets, Rowena is afraid of male assault. A man walks behind her and she feels afraid though ‘[t]his is ‘innocent’. There is no threat of attack’ (p. 187). She is also worried that she is wearing a skirt which she thinks may provoke the man. There is additionally the fear that he might mistake her for a prostitute because the ‘only women who work at night are prostitutes’ (pp. 188-9). Rowena is afraid of sexual attack because she is out at the wrong time in the wrong clothes. Pornography depicts women as whores, sometimes

showing them as wanting to be raped. The effect on Rowena is that she sees herself as vulnerable to, and also inviting, attack.

The messages pornography conveys in the context of this sexual inequality and in portraying women as whores are also evidenced in the case of Ron, Yvonne's husband. He thinks Hilary, his new secretary whom Rowena introduced to him, will willingly have sex with him because she used to be a prostitute. She quit school and had her son in her late teens. She does not get support from the boy's father with whom she has lost touch and she tries very hard single-handedly to take responsibility for her son. As a working-class single mother, Hilary represents the sexual victimisation of women who are not protected by class, education, employment, or marital status. Lack of such privileges makes her much more vulnerable to male sexual abuse. She is a victim of men's perception of her sexuality. Ron sexually harasses Hilary at work. He asks her out for a drink, and when she refuses, he offers her a lift home which she reluctantly accepts. He then rapes her. Ron interprets Hilary's acceptance of his offer of a lift also as an acceptance of his other initiatives towards her. If the boy's rape of the schoolgirl is a direct result of the reading of pornography, Ron's rape of Hilary is influenced by the messages pornography conveys. As Itzin argues:

Pornography leads sexual inequality to be institutionalised in the structure of society and internalised in the attitudes and behaviours of individuals; it is socially constructed and conditioned, not biologically determined. (Itzin, p. 63)

Thus female sexuality is controlled by men and men's sexual violence against women can be seen from this sexual inequality. Pornography is one of the elements which reinforce the patriarchal ideology.

Ron does not feel guilty because of his rape of Hilary. She is angry and hurt, and gives up the job, though she keeps silent about what happened until Rowena visits her

after the rape. Hilary is doubly oppressed when she is violated and loses her job, but does not protest at her victimisation. As Goodman observes in her criticism:

Yvonne and Hilary are played by the same actress so that the rape of the latter by the husband of the former takes on a double significance, revealed in the language which Ron uses to refer to all women: he sees them as interchangeable.⁴

Neither Rowena, her social worker, nor Yvonne, her rapist's wife, are able to help Hilary. The women, though belonging to the middle class, are as helpless as the working-class woman in a patriarchal society. This is partly demonstrated in Yvonne's monologue at the end of Scene One which is delivered directly to the audience.

YVONNE: ...But I was twenty-six before I learnt that the words 'I feel' and 'I think' were neither synonymous nor interchangeable...and there's no way I read that in any book...Actually it was when I went away to college that I met Ron at a party ...there was something I really liked about him. Looking back, I think it was his MSG sports car. (p. 176-7)

Yvonne's mind is now clear, and she realises that she was more drawn to a man's symbol of power rather than to the man himself. However, she is not able to do much to challenge men's power in her patriarchal society in either Hilary's case or the raped schoolgirl's.

Sexual violence earlier in the play paves the way towards the culmination of violence pornography causes: the actual killing of a woman. In the snuff film Rowena describes at the end of the play in Scene Seventeen, an actress is actually mutilated and murdered in front of the camera by a man with a knife and an electric saw - snuffed out for male sexual pleasure. The snuff film is one of the most brutal forms of pornography and the most extreme expression of sexual humiliation of women - the worst misogynist representation. As Rowena describes the snuff film:

ROWENA:...Then he plunges the saw into her stomach, and the pain and terror on her face. More shots of his face of power and pleasure. He puts his hands inside her and pulls out some of her insides. Finally, he reaches in again and pulls out her guts and holds them above his head. He is triumphant. (pp. 229-30)

The mutilation brings the man power, triumph, and pleasure while the woman suffers pain and terror from the slaughter. Men enjoy women in pornographic images being sexually humiliated. Pornography in *Masterpieces* is presented as promoting sadism. Men torture women in the form of rape, bondage, mutilation, and killing. It also encourages misogyny, at the bottom of which is men's fear of women's sexuality. Men exercise their power to make women powerless. The extreme representation of male sadism is expressed in the snuff film. For this pleasure, men actually kill women. Snuff films become a motive for the actual murder of women.

The Policewoman in Scene Seventeen confirms Rowena's depiction of the snuff film. It is not a cinematic thriller, as Rowena tries to convince herself that it is, but reality. In the course of her work the Policewoman has seen this reality - the badly mutilated bodies of women:

POLICEWOMAN:...It happens. I've seen photos, hundreds of photos of little girls, young women, middle-aged women, old women...with torn genitals, ripped vaginas, mutilated beyond recognition. I try not to think about it. (p. 230)

Though the Policewoman is a figure from the male-dominated authority, she sympathises with Rowena, voicing the reality of what she has seen. Misogyny portrayed in pornography is proved to be enacted in real life. Pornography itself is violence against women and is responsible for violence against women.

Rowena's immediate response to the snuff film is extreme anger. Once she becomes aware of the violent nature of pornography, she feels threatened and sexually assaulted by pornographic advertisements 'with women's breasts' (p. 207). She objects to the objectification of women. Like Celia in *Low Level Panic*, she is embarrassed as if it were her breast on show. Since seeing the snuff film, she has worn jeans in fear of the sexual assault which she feels a skirt would provoke. The consequence of the snuff film culminates in her violence against a man who approaches her in the Underground

and whom she pushes onto the track in front of a train. Already in Scene Five she is afraid of the man who walks behind her in the street, even though this is innocent. Her fear of men approaching her intensifies after she sees the snuff film. She is charged with the murder of a man on the Underground and the Psychiatrist's reports suggest that she is 'inadequate': 'You are removed, vague, uninvolved, and failed to maintain normal, acceptable patterns of communication. Prudish to the point of being sexually repressed - frigid' (p. 226). In addition to murdering a man, she is accused of being psychologically unfit for normal life. The Psychiatrist Rowena sees regards her obsession with pornography as a sign of madness. The Judge also argues:

I would suggest to you [Rowena] that the evidence you have put forward is nothing more than an irrelevant fabrication to further some fanatical belief that the laws concerning pornography in this country are inadequate. But that is of no concern here. (p. 228)

The fact that she has been badly affected by the snuff film is given no consideration. The filmmaker and the man in the snuff film go unpunished for the killing of the woman.

The indictment by the court is as prejudiced against Rowena as that of two actual cases that were contemporaneous with the writing of the play. As Rowena cites, one man received two years' probation for killing his wife 'because it was proved that she was neurotic and nagged' (p. 226). The wife was blamed for her own murder while the husband, the killer, was almost acquitted. Another man, Rowena argues, strangled his wife and got a six-month suspended sentence. Rowena insinuates that men receive lighter sentences or get away with the crimes they commit, while women are either accused of instigating crimes against themselves, or receive heavier sentences than men for the same kind of offences. Jennifer also mentioned this earlier in Scene Eleven:

If I kill him I'll rot in prison as an evil scheming bitch. If he kills me he'll get a suspended sentence because I was neurotic and nagged. We are always responsible for their crimes but we carry the can for our own. (p. 216)

The treatment of Rowena by the court reveals that women live in a misogynist society and have to pay the price for their rejection of patriarchy. As Daniels comments in the Introduction to *Daniels, Plays: One*: ‘Somehow harassing women is seen as rational behaviour. Being angry, or worse, fighting back, is seen as irrational behaviour’ (p. xi). The play depicts women’s response to male violence and discrimination against women in the judicial and medical institutions, especially against violence perpetrated by women.

In contrast to the scenes in which the serious subject of pornography is dealt with and which are short, fast-moving scenes, there is a serene and idyllic picnic scene (Scene Thirteen) in which Rowena, Yvonne and Jennifer talk about their pasts and plan a holiday in Greece. As the stage directions dictate: ‘*The atmosphere is warm and relaxed. The pace is slow*’ (p. 222). Jennifer is reconciled with her daughter after a mutual misunderstanding and a common ground for understanding between the three women is formed. The picnic is so peaceful that it resembles a utopia, without any of the fear or tension which recur throughout the play. The scene takes place after the rows between each of the three couples that arise from men’s attitude to women. Despite the differences between them, the men all defend pornography and this sets them apart from the women. Rowena makes the biggest mental journey of the three women from indifference about pornography to anger. Yvonne shows an awareness of pornography and its ideology from the beginning, though her awareness develops further, largely because of the cases of the boy at her school and Hilary. Jennifer also notes the violent nature of pornography, but her action is not as firm as that of the younger women. The candid conversations about their unhappy marriages between

Yvonne and Rowena in Scene Eight, and Rowena and Jennifer's discussion in Scene Eleven bring them together and foreground a communal understanding which is strengthened in the picnic scene and a resistance against patriarchal value. The picnic scene echoes the women's mental departure from the men in their lives towards freedom and female bonding, especially as it is preceded by the scene where the two younger couples have a row and Rowena asserts her independence.

The slow, calm movement of the scene suddenly erupts into a noisy, violent sequence in which Rowena pushes a man on the tracks of a tube station, presenting a sharp contrast to the previous scene and thus producing an intense shock. There are further contrasts and similarities among the last four scenes, which are also the recapitulation of the whole play. The shock from Rowena's killing a man in Scene Fourteen is counterbalanced by the shock from the killing of a woman in a snuff film in Scene Sixteen. Hilary's revelation of her rape is also relevant to the snuff film. These scenes present women as the victims of men's response to their sexuality and of male violence. Rowena kills a man, (threatened by his approach after the film), and is imprisoned for the murder. However, the rapist, the filmmakers, and the man in the film are not penalised. As Davis argues:

Both Rowena and the film director understand the masculine ideology of violence, though one is privileged by his sex to have a choice about being its executive and the other is doomed by her sex to have no choice but being its victim.⁵

The drama protests that the judicial system which is supposed to be impartial and democratic is not what it should be. Davis also argues: 'Any society that tries a woman for murdering her rapist in the process of a sexual assault upon her (as in the Queen vs. Clugstone, Q. B. 1987) cannot render justice to Rowena' (*Ibid.*, p. 101)⁶ The biased legal system shows how sexual politics work in a patriarchal society. The last four

scenes emphasise male hegemony and inequality between the sexes, which Rowena adamantly articulates. This ideology is the core of what pornography manifests through women.

In Rowena's final moment, she refutes any form of violence which humiliates or harms women:

I don't want anything to do with men who have knives or whips or men who look at photos of women tied and bound, or men who say relax and enjoy it. Or men who tell misogynistic jokes. (p. 230)

The pornographic jokes are the starting points of the continuum of violence against women in this play. In the course of the action, the intensity of violence escalates to rape, then to killing a woman, the apex of sexual violence. Rowena's last speech, however, starts with killing, then the intensity reduces to pornography and finally to jokes. Pornography, let alone violence itself, is pivotal in giving rise to all different degrees of violence against women.

Action moves forwards and backwards in time in *Masterpieces*. Almost each scene is disconnected from the previous one, thus making the scenes situational and disordered in sequence. But one scene complements or contrasts with another so that they reinforce each other and give powerful meanings to each scene. The trial of Rowena for the murder is already presented in Scene Two, but her interview with a psychiatrist takes place in Scene Nine. The murder is enacted in Scene Fourteen and the reason is revealed only in Scene Sixteen, keeping the audience in the dark until then. The audience is also given an opportunity to compare the nature of killing a man with that of killing a woman, though these take place in different situations. The fact that the way men see women is influenced by pornography is demonstrated through the rape in Scene Three, which is connected to Hilary's rape. Thus, later, rape is insinuated in Scene Ten and then discussed by others in Scene Twelve, but Hilary herself

discloses it in Scene Sixteen through a voiceover. The relationship between Ron and Yvonne starts to crack in Scene Six, the one between Rowena and Trevor in Scene Eight, and the one between Jennifer and Clive in Scene Eleven. Hilary's situation is presented in Scenes Four and Seven. While these scenes foreground the departure of women from men, Scenes Eight and Eleven draw women closer than before. All the scenes that have been mentioned converge into one peaceful scene within which the three women also converge. These disconnected scenes detach the audience from the action as the sudden changes of scenes disrupt the flow of the story. The multiple casting presents events from a number of different perspectives. By double-casting Yvonne with Hilary and presenting Rowena as Hilary's social worker, the class struggle between the middle class and the working class is presented. The working-class woman is presented as a victim of patriarchal society and is also oppressed by the middle-class representatives of her own gender (even though Yvonne is identified with Hilary in terms of the relative power of women in contrast to that of men). Also Hilary's long monologue in Scene Seven shows her as a victim of her sexuality. The double casting of Jennifer and the Policewoman is significant in that both characters are presented as mother figures. These distancing devices (including voiceovers) enhance the objectivity of the play and lead the audience to ponder on the subject after the performance and to discuss it.

The subject matter of this play is pornography, which depicts naked women as whores. However, on stage, contrary to *Low Level Panic*, no female body is exposed. As Aston points out: 'In terms of alienating the female body in systems of representation, Daniels uses techniques which fragment or take the body out of the frame' (Aston. p. 130). In Scene Eight Rowena looks at pornographic magazines Yvonne has confiscated from the boys in her school. As the stage directions indicate:

'ROWENA looks at the magazines in such a way that the audience is not exposed to their contents' (p. 203). The fact that the audience do not see representations of the naked female body encourages them to respond objectively to the subject of pornography. While she reads the magazines, three female monologues are delivered as voiceovers on tape. The women trapped and made silent in pornography are given voices to bear witness to the objectification of their bodies. The speeches relate the experiences of the women involved in pornography: the humiliation and threat they have gone through when their bodies were treated as commodities. Like Marje in *Thatcher's Women*, they are ordinary women who need money for their survival. One woman was sexually abused by a male relative when she was seven. She blamed herself and felt dirty so that later, she had less inhibition about entering the pornography industry. A third woman's sexuality was taken by her country when a film of her was sent to booster the morale of soldiers fighting in the Falklands. Just as their images are trapped in pornography, the three women voice the inevitability of their involvement in it.

The title *Masterpieces* has a significant meaning, as Tracy C. Davis comments:

Masterpieces depicts the hegemonic exertion of men's power over women, individually and generically. The hegemonic prerogative gives men superior control so that the victor in any contest is predetermined no matter how earnest the confrontation. The title is an ironic pun on the grim reality of a patriarchal culture as well as a reminder of men's centrality, women's customary marginality, and the wielders and genital weapons of power (the "master" and their "pieces"). ('*Extremities and Masterpieces*', p. 94-5)

Pornography tells us that men are masters and women slaves. In pornography men wield whips, and bind women like masters do their slaves. Sometimes it is the other way around but men force women to whip and bind them. The play puts forward the view that the gender roles are socially constructed, but cannot be reversed except by an alteration in the current social reality of male domination. However, as Barter

comments: 'Sensitive men in the audience have been known to leave performances of *Masterpieces* feeling guilty about being men so blistering is the attack on the sex as a whole.'⁷ In a similar manner, 'Leeds licensing committee and other councillors who were asked to see the film [*Snuff*] walked out unable to watch the mutilation and murder scene' (Rhodes in Daniels, p. 161). Daniels links pornography with sexual violence and further male hegemony. She questions the latter and demands change in power relationships between men and women.

NOTES

¹ Sarah Daniels, 'Introduction', *Daniels, Plays: One*, p. xi.

² Mary Remnant, 'Introduction,' *Plays by Women: Volume Six*, p. 8.

³ Catherine Itzin (ed.), *Pornography: Women, Violence and Civil Liberties* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), p. 76.

⁴ Lizbeth Goodman, 'Masterpieces', in *Contemporary Women Dramatists*, ed. by K. A. Berney (London: St. James Press, 1994), pp. 299-301 (p. 300).

⁵ Tracy C. Davis, 'Extremities and Masterpieces: a Feminist Paradigm of Arts and Politics', *Modern Drama*, V32 (1) (1989), 89-103 (p. 101).

⁶ In October 1987, Janet Clugstone was tried at the Old Bailey for murdering a drunken man, Steven Coppen, who had lured her into his home and raped her twice. The verdict was lawful self-defence, but although Judge Hazan remarked "he treated her like an animal, as an object for his perverted sexual lusts," he also qualified his ruling by saying that it was not to be regarded as a charter for victims of any crime to kill their attackers. Although Clugstone was acquitted, WAVAW criticised [the] police for ever bringing the case to trial: "We are outraged that a rape survivor who stabbed in self-defence had been made to go through the further ordeal of a murder charge. Self-defence is no offence." (Angela Johnson, "Woman who killed rapist is acquitted," *Manchester Guardian Weekly*, 11 October, 1987, p. 4.) in Davis, p. 103.

⁷ Katherine Worth, 'Images of Women in Modern English Theater' in *Feminine Focus: the New Women Playwrights*, ed. by Enoch Brater (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), p. 14.

CONCLUSION

It is now thirty years since the start of the second wave of the feminist movement and British society has changed a great deal. Women have more opportunities and legal developments have given them a greater degree of control over their lives. In the early 1990s in Britain, rape within marriage became illegal. A higher number of rapists are prosecuted today. (According to a recent programme on Channel Four, 95% of rapists are taken to court.) Movements against pornography continue. Arrests of wife batterers are more frequent as Dobash and Dobash argue in *Women, Violence and Social Change*:

Activists and legal advocates have had some success in shifting police orientations away from their ideas about the attributes of the victim and on to the violence itself, and the abuser and the criminality of the act.¹

There are also programmes today for male abusers ‘based on therapeutic orientations and some on a pro-feminist model’ (*Ibid.*, p. 298). All these changes have bettered social situations for women in Britain.

Along with changes in the legislation in the UK, some of the most significant achievements in the campaign against sexual violence are the social support systems surrounding shelters for female victims which started in the 1970s and are growing in number and quality of service. Dobash and Dobash emphasise the importance of the refuge as ‘an almost unique opportunity for creating a change for women’ (*Ibid.*, p. 61). In addition to providing women with a place away from abuse, the refuge offers an opportunity for them to share their experiences of violence with other women. The first refuge in the UK, Chiswick Women’s House, opened in London in 1972. In Scotland in 1974 the first refuges were opened by Women’s Aid, but concentrated in Glasgow and

Edinburgh. Refuges also opened in Wales, and later in Northern Ireland. Rape Crisis Centres also opened in London in 1984. However, most of the refuges are short of funding and overcrowded and there is room for the enhancement of professional service skills and a need for greater confidence in interventions in sexual violence.

Many researches focus on men as perpetrators with a view to altering their perceptions of sexual violence. One such example, Scully's *Understanding Sexual Violence* (a research into rapists serving jail sentences) comments:

The more cultural support in forms like violent and degrading pornography, that exists in a society for hostile and aggressive acts toward women, the more likely it is that such acts will occur in that society. (Scully, p. 58)

Scully designates sexual violence as men's problem rather than women's. Research has also been conducted into men's view of violence and has found that men's perception of sexual violence is narrower than that of women. The model of violence for men is physical violence where the violence is directly inflicted on women and damage is visible, lasting and often leads to arrest. The reason for this narrower understanding of violence has been analysed as 'a product of men's structurally dominant social position' and is 'partly a consequence of the form of the particularly social relationship with the woman in question.'²

Despite continuing examples of male violence, the efforts of feminists have changed attitudes towards sexual violence a great deal. For example, in 1990 Rich and Sampson surveyed rape attitudes in a representative sample of 450 Chicago residents.³ 75 percent of the respondents opposed the myth that rape is often caused by the way women dress and act. 89 percent recognised rape as a crime of violence and 51 percent agreed that husbands should be taken to court for marital rape. These attitudes are similar to

feminist perceptions of sexual violence which have become more widespread and familiar to the public.

Perceptions of sexual violence have changed largely through awareness-raising campaigns. For example, in 1992 the Zero Tolerance campaign was launched by the Women's Committee at Edinburgh District Council.⁴ The campaign involved the display of posters throughout the city and big placards in Princes Street, the latter containing statements about the nature and frequency of sexual violence. It made explicit the unacceptability of abuse and the necessity of bringing it under the public criminal system. The campaign attracted attention to the fact that most sexual violence is committed by men women know. The material distributed to people in Edinburgh placed the issue in the public terrain. The aim was to create wider debate on violence against women and children and the response was generally positive, as expressed by 79 percent of the interviewees. The campaign attracted attention on a global basis and was cited in a Parliamentary debate in the House of Commons in 1993 about domestic violence, even though some people labelled it 'ultra-feminist' and 'anti-male'.

Awareness-raising campaigns have led to an improved understanding of the problems faced by women. Within feminism itself there has been considerable development since the late-1960s. In the 1970s sexual politics produced a critique of the dominance of heterosexuality and of the power relations of heterosexuality. In this context feminists criticised misogyny, de-privatised sexually abusive relationships, and the institutional management of sexuality. Under this ideology women were described as victims. But the problem with this argument was that in reality, women played a significant role in creating, negotiating, and improving their own interests. From the start

of the 1990s, feminism has continued to shift its focus, as Mary Evans argues in her book, *Contemporary Feminist Thoughts*:

[T]he emergence of contemporary feminism has to be situated not just in terms of changing culture in the West, but in terms of a shift in our theoretical understanding of the world. Thus two major changes have to be noted if we are to situate feminism accurately.⁵

The first change Evans discusses is the globalisation of the late-twentieth-century world and the second is the shift from modernity to post-modernity. The first change involves rethinking existing perceptions of nationality and ethnicity so that the meaning of these entities become unstable and negotiable, because, as Evans argues 'global markets, and a global economy unite countries and cultures in ever closer ties' (*Ibid.*, p. 12). However, as Evans continues:

The nature of these ties is frequently exploitative, 'the North' (as prosperous industrialized countries are termed) takes unremittingly from 'the South' in a way that has changed little from the days of blatant nineteenth-century imperialism. Thus to think about women in terms of race now involves far more than thinking about racial divisions within societies; it involves thinking about racial divisions and distinctions between societies quite as much as within national boundaries. (*Ibid.*, p. 12)

Differences between women should be recognised between, and within, the South and the North. Chilla Bulbeck cites some distinctions which help us to understand women's differences within feminism in her book, *Re-Orienting Western Feminisms*:

To some extent this grand opposition [east and west] will be avoided by using other distinctions like religion (particularly Hinduism, Islam, Confucianism, Christianity, Buddhism), nationality (Chinese women, Indian women, Filipinas), class background and geographical location (professional women in the city, peasant women in the country).⁶

These divisions cut across and overlap each other, further exposing the fact that even a group categorised by these distinctions would not turn out to be homogeneous. Western

feminism should, and tries to, move out of eurocentrism towards the intersection of women from other cultures and races. At this juncture, women continue to organise in order to deal with certain issues (such as abortion) across class and racial lines.

The shifts within feminism since the 1970s have relevance to Julia Kristeva's notion of 'women's time'.⁷ According to Kristeva, there are two ways in which people think about time: a historical and linear approach, and a cyclical and mythic approach. The second way of thinking has been specifically associated with women. Kristeva's women's time also distinguishes three 'phases' or 'generations' in modern Western feminism. In the first phase, Kristeva writes, 'the women's movement... aspired to gain a place in linear time as the time of project and history' (Kristeva, p. 197). This is the traditional form of feminism which records the struggle of the suffragists and of existential feminists that made political demands of equal pay and equal political and social power. The second phase included women who joined the feminist movement from the late-1960s and who had 'aesthetic and psychoanalytic experience[s]' which were based on sexual difference. (*Ibid.*, p. 198). This phase situates feminism outside linear time and this feminism focused on 'the archaic (mythical) time memory' and 'the cyclical or monumental temporality of marginal movements' (*Ibid.*, p. 198), outside of male history and socio-political institutions. Kristeva recognises both directions but suggests that the first phase of feminism tended to perpetuate the very power hierarchies that refused human liberation, while the second phase was inclined to offer a utopian vision of a countersociety which, as Elin Diamond argues, 'would turn out to be a simulacrum of the society it opposes.'⁸ Kristeva thinks that the third generation of feminism will avoid the limitations of the first phase and the excesses of the second phase of feminism. As

Evans argues: 'In making clear the difference of woman, contemporary feminism has the opportunity to demonstrate the difference that women can make' (Evans, p. 138). The recognition of difference among women is an essential issue of the third phase which looks towards further changes in women's situations in the world of the new millennium.

Plays by British women dramatists have contributed to debates within contemporary feminism by providing, as Jeanie Forte argues, 'insights into the politics of writing and the possible basis for a feminist theory of reception.'⁹ Against the male-dominated conventional theatre, women's theatre has adopted a variety of structures to represent women and their issues. As Jeanie Forte notes:

The inquiry into what constitutes a feminist playwriting practice today necessarily involves the critic with the investigation of structures of realism and narrative, structures which are implicated in relation to patriarchal ideology...

Recent debate in feminist criticism regarding playwriting has focused on the question of whether a realist play could not also be a feminist play - for reasons having to do with the relationship between text and reader within a context of ideology. That is, realism supports the dominant ideology by constructing the reader as a subject (or more correctly, an 'individual') within that ideology.¹⁰

This debate has links with *écriture féminine*, and partly under influence of feminists of the French school such as Hélène Cixous, Julia Kristeva and Luce Irigaray, a number of feminist playwrights have explored a variety of approaches to dramatic form. An early exponent of innovative dramatic form has been Caryl Churchill, who has employed techniques of cross-gender and multiple casting and has disrupted chronological time in her plays. Among the playwrights discussed in this thesis, Sarah Daniels is notable for her use of distancing techniques in *Masterpieces*, which uses episodic structures, multiple casting and fracturing of time to deepen and complicate audience response. In *Beside Herself*, also by Sarah Daniels, the main action is preceded by a surrealistic prologue set

in a supermarket in which women from the Bible compare ‘herstories.’ Within the main body of the play, an alter ego figure is used to problematise the incest myth.

Thatcher's Women by Kay Adshead also moves away from realism in order to view the oppression of women reflected in that of an animal image. This animal, the fox, is identified with Marje, and contributes to a dismantling of stereotypical ideas about prostitutes and gives a different perspective to them as the oppressed. By moving away from realism, therefore, these plays explore the complexity and ambiguity of women's lives.

In the course of the last two decades, women dramatists have increasingly gained a voice on the British stage. Their voice has been used to articulate women's oppression and their resistance to this. It is certain that in the new millennium their voice will be used to express the diversity of women's experience.

NOTES

¹ R. Emerson Dobash and Russell P. Dobash, *Women, Violence and Social Change* (London: Routledge, 1992), p. 296.

² Jeff Hearn, '2. Men's Violence to Known Women: Historical, Everyday and Theoretical Construction by Men', in *Violence and Gender Relations*, p. 29.

³ R. F. Rich R. J. Sampson, 'Public perceptions of criminal justice policy: Does victimization make a difference?', *Violence and Victims* 5(1990), pp. 109-18.

⁴ Kate Hunt and Jenny Kitzinger, '3. Public place, private issue? The public's reaction to the Zero Tolerance campaign against violence against women', in *Defining Violence*, pp. 45-58.

⁵ Mary Evans, *Introducing Contemporary Feminist Thoughts* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1997), p. 12.

⁶ Chilla Bulbeck, *Re-Orienting Western Feminisms: Women's Diversity in a Post-Colonial World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 4.

⁷ Julia Kristeva, 'Women's Time', *Signs*, 7 (1981), pp. 13-35, trans. Alice Jardine and Harry Blake, extract in *The Feminist Reader: Essays in Gender and the Politics of Literary Criticism*, ed. by Catherine Belsey and Jane More (London: Macmillan, 1989), pp. 197-217.

⁸ Elin Diamond, 'Refusing the Romanticism of Identity: Narrative Intervention in Churchill, Benmussa, Duras', in *Performing Feminisms: Feminist Critical Theory and Theatre*, ed. by Sue-Ellen Case (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990), p. 105.

⁹ Jeanie Forte, 'Realism, Narrative, and the Feminist Playwright - A Problem of Reception', *Feminist Theatre and Theory*, ed. By Helen Keyssar (London: Macmillan Press, 1996), p. 19.

¹⁰ Ibid., pp. 19-20.

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