

A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF THE PLAYS OF SARAH DANIELS

Pamela Bakker

Submitted for the Ph.D

in English Literature,

University of Sheffield

June 1996

Supervisor: Professor Philip Roberts

ABSTRACT

A Critical Analysis of the Plays of Sarah Daniels by Pamela Bakker

As one of the forerunners of 'second wave' feminist playwriting, Sarah Daniels has for the past fifteen years been one of Britain's most prolific writers for the stage. This thesis is the first to offer a detailed critical analysis of all her published plays along with a developmental account of her career. My approach throughout is text-based and non-prescriptive, although I do at certain points indicate where Daniels reflects or voices differing feminist perspectives. I also consider, beginning in Chapter Three, the critical reception and 'gendered' reviewing the playwright has received over the years.

The thesis is organised into five chapters with an Afterword. Chapter One, the Introduction, offers an overview of Daniels' career as well as certain key characteristics of her work. In Chapter Two I analyse the early plays, *Ripen Our Darkness*, *The Devil's Gateway* and *Neaptide*, and consider in particular how they reflect, along with other women's playwriting at the time, certain ideals of the Women's Liberation Movement. Chapter Three is devoted entirely to *Masterpieces*, Daniels' most controversial and, on many levels, successful play to date. Chapter Four is an analysis of the 'history plays', *Byrthrite* and *The Gut Girls*. In addition to giving voice to women traditionally silenced in and by history, these plays (especially *Byrthrite*) also echo particular strands of modern feminist debate. Chapter Five examines Daniels' plays of the 1990s (*Beside Herself*, *Head-Rot Holiday* and *The Madness of Esme and Shaz*) with their central theme of 'women and madness'. This is also a fitting theme with which to conclude the thesis as it brings together and expands on the most significant motif running throughout the playwright's work. In the Afterword I consider the effect of *Esme and Shaz*'s critical reception on Daniels, as well as her current 'work in progress'. Finally, the two Appendices provide a chronological table of Daniels' productions and a list of subsequent professional productions as well as awards.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to Sarah Daniels for providing me not only with the inspiration for this thesis, but with numerous interviews, unpublished manuscripts and rare insight into the intricate processes involved in playwriting and production. I would also like to thank my supervisor, Professor Philip Roberts, for his informed criticism and encouragement throughout. Special thanks are also extended to the Association of Commonwealth Universities and the British Council without whose generous assistance I would not have had the opportunity to write this thesis. Thanks finally to my parents, my sister Gillian, Bernadette Cusack and Keith Head for their steadfast support.

SHORT TITLE LIST

The following is a list of the abbreviated titles of Sarah Daniels' plays used in this thesis:

Ma's Flesh is Grass: Ma's Flesh

Ripen Our Darkness: Ripen

The Devil's Gateway: Gateway

The Gut Girls: Gut Girls

Head-Rot Holiday: Head-Rot

The Madness of Esme and Shaz: Esme and Shaz

CONTENTS

Chapter One:	
INTRODUCTION	1
Chapter Two:	
BEGINNINGS: CONSCIOUSNESS-RAISINGS	11
<i>Ripen Our Darkness</i>	12
<i>The Devil's Gateway</i>	22
<i>Neptide</i>	33
Chapter Three:	
<i>MASTERPIECES</i>	51
Chapter Four:	
HISTORY PLAYS	84
<i>Byrthrite</i>	87
<i>The Gut Girls</i>	109
Chapter Five:	
WOMEN AND MADNESS: DANIELS IN THE 1990s	135
<i>Beside Herself</i>	143
<i>Head-Rot Holiday</i>	172
<i>The Madness of Esme and Shaz</i>	198
AFTERWORD	222
APPENDIX I: A CHRONOLOGY	225

APPENDIX II: PROFESSIONAL PRODUCTIONS AND AWARDS 228

BIBLIOGRAPHY 230

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

In the past fifteen years, Sarah Daniels has emerged as one of Britain's leading feminist playwrights. For one who never set out to be a 'Feminist Playwright', nor even a playwright at all,¹ her achievement is all the more remarkable. This thesis offers a critical analysis of all of Daniels' published work along with a developmental account of her career. In view of these objectives, I have chosen to proceed chronologically, organising my chapters according, as far as possible, to the order in which each play was written. One of my primary goals, thus, has been to examine developments in Daniels' writing through the years. Another goal has been to consider concurrently the critical reaction towards the writer and how this has affected the reception of her work. While there have been two studies of Daniels from the perspectives of feminist ideologies and performance theory,² there has been no attempt yet, to my current knowledge, to provide a straightforward exegesis of her published work. I have therefore undertaken a text-based approach to her plays, examining first and foremost what is happening on the page and on stage. This approach is also necessarily a non-prescriptive one, although I have tried, where possible, to locate Daniels within an ideological frame of reference specific to the time in which she was writing and to the theoretical ideas that have obviously filtered through to her work.

One shortcoming of writing a thesis on a living and (relatively) young writer is that the amount of published material about her work is scant. Apart from newspaper reviews, a handful of articles in periodicals and a few recent books on feminist theatre with sections on Daniels, I have had to rely primarily on 'primary source' material. This, however, has also proved a tremendous advantage of working on such a thesis. As part of my research over the past three years, I have been given the unique opportunity by the playwright to view unpublished and, in some cases, unperformed manuscripts, to interview her at length on a number of occasions, to meet and interview some of the directors and actors with whom she has worked, and to accompany her to Toronto for a special production of *Masterpieces* and

several talks given by her at universities there. This research, perhaps more than any 'secondary' reading, has informed my views and analysis of the playwright's work and is reflected throughout the thesis. I have not included, however, detailed critical analyses of any unpublished material. My reason for this is twofold: first, none of Daniels' unpublished manuscripts is available for dissemination or publication and a textual analysis of them, therefore, would not be fruitful for any researcher. Second, considerations of the length of this dissertation have ruled against an in-depth discussion. Later in this chapter, though, certain aspects of these plays shall be noted in so far as they illuminate important themes or stylistic features of the dramatist's more major work. Before introducing such themes and features generally, however, I will first provide a brief overview of Daniels' career.

On September 7th, 1981 *Ripen Our Darkness* opened at the Royal Court Theatre Upstairs. While it wasn't Daniels' first play to have been produced (*Penumbra* was staged at the Drama Studio, University of Sheffield in July of that year), it was the one from which, in Daniels' own words, "everything took off".³ Two months later *Ma's Flesh is Grass* was produced at the Crucible Studio Theatre, and in 1982 *Neptune*, commissioned by the Liverpool Playhouse, won the George Devine Award. Four years later, the play opened at the Cottesloe, Royal National Theatre -- the second play by a female playwright to be staged there. In May 1983 *Masterpieces* was produced at Manchester's Royal Exchange Theatre and was subsequently transferred to the Royal Court Theatre Upstairs in October, and to the main auditorium in January 1984. With this play Daniels won the 1983 *Plays and Players* Most Promising Playwright Award. Back in August 1983, the Theatre Upstairs also presented *The Devil's Gateway*.

Such a prolific and successful start for a playwright is all the more impressive when one considers Daniels' age at the time -- mid-twenties -- and self-professed inexperience in the theatre. Yet between 1981 and 1983, six plays had been written, produced and, with the exceptions of *Penumbra* and *Ma's Flesh*, eventually published. (Daniels' first play, *Just Like A Woman*, and a short black comedy, *Manfully Fight Under His Banner*, were also written during this period, although they were never produced.) After a brief hiatus

following the run of *Masterpieces*, Daniels returned to the Theatre Upstairs in 1986 with *Byrthrite* and was seen for the first time at Deptford's Albany Empire in 1988 with *The Gut Girls*, both pieces commissioned. Between 1990 - 93, three more plays, all commissioned as well, appeared: *Beside Herself* at the Royal Court (1990), *Head-Rot Holiday* at the Battersea Arts Centre and on tour (1992), and *The Madness of Esme and Shaz* at the Theatre Upstairs (1994). Most recently in March 1995, *Blow Your House Down*, commissioned by Newcastle's Live Theatre and based on the novel by Pat Barker, opened in Newcastle and then toured the North. With the exception of this last play, all these plays too have been published. Finally, in between writing for the stage Daniels has also written a number of radio plays, and has been a writer for three television series (*Grange Hill*, *Medics*, and *Eastenders*). She has also been Writer-in-Residence at the Royal Court (1984) and a visiting lecturer at various universities in Britain and abroad.

While these facts of a rapidly growing career would suggest an indisputable success in the theatre, the reality of Daniels' success through the years has been tinged by controversy and often extreme critical backlash. Apart from the storm created by certain reviewers following such plays as *Masterpieces* or *Beside Herself*, Carole Woddis' description of the playwright in the *Bloomsbury Theatre Guide* as "the only radical lesbian feminist to have made it into the mainstream",⁴ may go some way in explaining the source of Daniels' notoriety. Notwithstanding the 'lesbian' label (which, as it happens, does not adequately characterise her theatre as it does for certain lesbian playwrights), it is the term 'radical' which, in my opinion, has done the most harm. Far from Trevor R. Griffiths' view that Daniels' radical as opposed to socialist feminist stance has elevated her work to an "acceptable face of feminism",⁵ the playwright's 'radical' label has stuck out more like a sore thumb than an 'acceptable face' to more than a few critics over the years. Both Woddis and Griffiths, although no doubt attempting to endorse Daniels' work, nevertheless do her a serious disservice: by seeing (and perhaps looking for) only certain facets of feminism that inform her plays and not others, they, along with numerous other critics, have to a certain extent succeeded in marginalising her work and relegating it not only to what is now

considered an out-dated brand of feminism, but to one that insufficiently describes it. Today we speak not of feminism but of feminisms, and it is my contention that such plurality is also reflected in Daniels' work. While the radical position does surface more prominently in some of her plays than others, it is important to recognize that it is more a reflection of ideas floating around in society at the time of writing than a deliberate attempt by the playwright to disseminate feminist theory. As she states, "I don't read a book about some theory and then think, oh, put the theory in the play."⁶ More important, perhaps, is the need to consider the playwright's own views on feminism and feminist theatre when analysing her drama. In the Introduction to the first collected edition of her plays, Daniels herself tried to quash any process of labelling that might marginalise her work:

Feminism is now, like panty-girdle, a very embarrassing word. Once seen as liberating, it is now considered to be restrictive, passé, and undesirable to wear. I didn't set out to further the cause of Feminism. However, I am proud if some of my plays have added to its influence.⁷

These words, while to some have denoted a wholesale rejection of the term 'Feminism', convey more Daniels' uneasiness with the label and the expectations, theatrical or social, that it can carry. In an interview five years after this Introduction was written, the playwright reiterated her views on the subject:

To agree with any sort of assessment of being a feminist is to put yourself on the first step of the road where other people are able to write you off as writing propaganda, and they totally overlook anything else in the play, like humour, for example. And the hidden agenda with the word propaganda is that therefore it is untruthful. ...I think part of the problem is the age-old thing about 'what is feminism', who won't be identified with feminism, who will. Women across the board say they're feminist, but there doesn't seem to be a coherent definition of what feminism is.⁸

Lizbeth Goodman has identified this same sense of ambiguity with the term 'feminist theatre'. Where there was once some agreement on the definition in the seventies and even the eighties, there is, as she writes, "...no such agreement in the 1990s. The goal posts have moved. The landscape has changed: ...there is not one feminism, nor one feminist theatre."⁹

That the issues Daniels writes about in her plays are feminist is incontestable, but the kind of feminist theatre she is writing is still, and may always be, a grey area. She herself, however, has offered some idea of what she would include in her definition of feminist theatre: "A feminist play is something that isn't just about women, but challenges something to do with patriarchal society, or that actually pushes it one step further and challenges the status quo."¹⁰

Certainly the notion of 'challenge' has become one of the hallmarks of Daniels' theatre. Her plays consistently challenge society's systems or institutions of male violence, control or authority over women, and they in turn are challenging for audiences to behold. And this perhaps, more than any feminist theory, has earned Daniels the 'radical' label. With subjects that range from lesbian motherhood, pornography and incest, to mental illness, infanticide and self-harm, the radical nature of these plays lies in their ability to shock audiences by dramatising issues openly, graphically and unapologetically. The plays are able equally, however, to make us laugh, and this combination of the serious and the comic (or often the absurd) is perhaps Daniels' most distinguishing characteristic. Goodman has described her type of theatre as "polemical feminist comic theatre", and suggested, moreover, that her comedy, like that of other contemporary women playwrights (such as Joan Lipkin or Bryony Lavery), plays primarily a strategic role in presenting serious political issues.¹¹ While it is true, as we shall see, that many of Daniels' female characters use humour (or laughter) subversively as a political weapon, the humour in her work in fact plays many roles. In *Ripen*, for example, ridicule is deployed effectively throughout the drama in order to lampoon and thus undercut male representatives of oppressive patriarchal institutions; in *Gut Girls*, wordplay and laughter are used by the women as antidotes to the bleakness of their work, as well as a means of subverting language and thus meaning itself; in *Masterpieces*, Daniels draws our attention to misogynist forms of 'humorous' language and the implications they hold in the balance of power between the sexes; and in *Esme and Shaz*, much of the humour serves as conventional a purpose as promoting identification with otherwise unorthodox characters.¹² Most frequent, however, is the playwright's

tendency to place comedy or absurd situations in the face of tragedy, pain or death. 'Ortonesque' is an adjective often attributed to Daniels' style, and certainly the words 'black', 'surreal' or 'irreverent' best describe the type of humour at work in many of her plays, particularly the early ones. *Ma's Flesh*, for example, opens with Jenny jabbing a fork in the cheek of her father who lies in a coffin in the living-room of her and her mother's flat. Vera's only concern about her daughter's action is to make sure she doesn't mark his face, "just in case the undertaker wants to go over him again."¹³ Although we learn as the play unfolds that the father frequently used to beat and rape both his wife and daughter, Daniels consistently juxtaposes the shocking nature of such behaviour with an equally shocking humour. The father's sister, for example, tells her niece, "Your father, Jennifer dear, was a very moral man ... He'd never make love to a stranger."¹⁴ Unlike most of Daniels' plays, *Ma's Flesh*, along with *Bear Cat Files* and *Manfully Fight Under His Banner*, may be seen as adhering, more or less, to identifiable genres of comic writing: black comedy or farce. But even in later plays that do not fall into such genres, the playwright's grim humour is often in evidence. In the middle of *Beside Herself*, a play that returns to the issue of incest but in a more serious and compassionate manner, Daniels orchestrates an absurd situation involving a dead body sitting in a chair at a community group home and the protagonist's efforts, as she shows guests around, to pretend nothing is amiss.

While the humour in Daniels' work proves to be one of its greatest strengths, it has also provoked harsh criticism, particularly amongst male critics. Since much of the playwright's drama is concerned with indicting oppressive patriarchal institutions, the male representatives of such institutions come in for harsh attack, often through humour. Whether figures of ridicule in such plays as *Ripen* and *Byrthrite*, the butt of practical jokes in *Gut Girls*, or inadequate, vindictive fools in many of the plays, Daniels' male characters are not known for their sympathetic nature. Male critics, therefore, have often registered complaints at being 'excluded' from the drama. Female critics, on the other hand, have tended to respond to Daniels from a less subjective and more positive point of view, warming far more in particular to her brand of humour. In my discussions on the critical

reaction to Daniels' work, I shall be addressing this issue and assessing the partialities of both critics and playwright.

In addition to the sense of alienation felt by certain male critics when viewing Daniels' plays, it is likely that much of their discomfort stems also from the fact that her writing focuses exclusively on women; men, therefore, are peripheral or secondary to the central action. This does not imply, however, that men are incapable of appreciating the drama or the social concerns expressed in it -- concerns in which they, on numerous levels, are involved. Women, after all, throughout the history of theatre have been assigned to the same role as spectator in countless plays by men, about men, and very often acted only by men. (It has been noted recently that this phenomenon is currently enjoying a renaissance on British stages.)¹⁵ This double standard, however, has not occurred to many of Daniels' reviewers who, over the years, have spent more energy attacking the playwright as a person than critiquing the actual substance of her plays. While Daniels has acknowledged the power of critics to make or break a reputation in the theatre,¹⁶ she has shown at the same time remarkable resilience in continuing to write plays whose subjects are uncompromisingly 'woman-centred'. As well as following the playwright's development according to the chronology of her writing in this thesis, I have endeavoured to organise my chapters according to subject matter. The nine plays to be examined therefore have been divided into four units, each focusing on a play or group of plays that share distinct issues and themes. In Chapter Two Daniels' early core of published work (*Ripen*, *Gateway* and *Neaptide*) is brought under the spotlight, uncovering a range of feminist concerns stemming primarily from the Women's Liberation Movement. Each play, for example, is notable for its dramatisation of domestic and personal issues for women that have direct political relevance in society. As well, all three plays share distinct features of much women's playwriting at the time, such as an examination of fractured female identity and mother-daughter relationships, a valorisation of female friendships, and the development of strategies to achieve liberation from oppressive patriarchal regimes.¹⁷ Each play also follows a similar format involving the journey of a female protagonist towards feminist

enlightenment and self-realisation, as well as a general movement of all the plays' women towards forming alternative alliances of power or counter worlds. This chapter is important too not only for establishing many of the technical and thematic features of Daniels' style, but also as a base with which to assess future developments and directions in her work. Even within the chapter, however, significant developments from play to play can be seen, particularly in the case of *Neptide*.

Chapter Three I have devoted entirely to *Masterpieces*, Daniels' hard-hitting indictment of pornography and male violence against women, and, to many, her most significant and powerful work. The play also stands on its own for other reasons. First, *Masterpieces* is a departure for Daniels, both from her earlier writing and from the majority of her later writing. Not only is it her most technically innovative piece, but, apart from *Head-Rot* (a commissioned 'issue-based' play), it is her only intentional piece of 'issue-based' theatre, although many of her plays have been similarly identified since. Second, out of all Daniels' plays *Masterpieces* has attracted the greatest controversy. I have therefore chosen this chapter to begin my assessment of the critical reaction towards her work generally, and particularly towards this play. Finally, at the end of the chapter I include an account of *Masterpieces'* first appearance on a major Canadian stage ten years after its opening in Manchester, a production which I attended.

In the latter half of the 1980s, Daniels turned to history's silenced women as characters for her stage and wrote *Byrthrite* and *Gut Girls*, the focus of Chapter Four's 'History Plays'. Like the subjects of her early plays that reflected concerns of the Women's Movement at the time, these plays too are a reflection of a growing feminist preoccupation, both academically and culturally, with women in history. *Byrthrite*, however, also straddles the twentieth century, incorporating a cautionary look at modern reproductive technology into its dramatisation of women's rites/rights of birth in seventeenth-century England. *Gut Girls*, set in the turn-of-the-century Deptford slaughterhouses, attempts, like *Byrthrite*, to paint an historically accurate picture of the lives of ordinary women (from all classes) attempting to

break free from physical, social and economic restraints. At the end of my critical analysis of each play, I consider, as in Chapter Three, its critical reception.

Finally, Chapter Five examines Daniels' output in the 1990s (up to *Esmé and Shaz*) and the predominant theme running through it: women and madness. This theme, as I point out at the beginning of the chapter, has also featured in nearly every play previously discussed. Even in unpublished and very early material, however, the subject of women's mental health has figured prominently. For example, in her first effort for the stage, *Just Like A Woman*, one of the central characters suffers a nervous breakdown and ends up in a psychiatric hospital. Through her time spent there, Daniels explores the horrors and desolation of such institutions, the effects of drugs on patients, and the injustices of the British legal system which land many women there -- all issues which reappear more than a decade later in *Head-Rot* and *Esmé and Shaz*. *Penumbra* (1981) too bears striking similarities not only to *Esmé and Shaz*, but to Daniels' recent radio play, *Purple Side Coasters*, all of which feature women who manifest symptoms of severe mental distress through killing or wishing to harm infants. Before my analysis of the plays in this chapter (*Beside Herself*, *Head-Rot* and *Esmé and Shaz*), I shall discuss the evolution of each, considering both how and why it came to be written. This look at Daniels' writing process will hopefully shed light on the artist individually at work as well as on some of the collaborative methods with which much feminist theatre is (or has recently been) produced. Finally, at the end of each play, I will assess the critical reaction to it with specific attention to differences in reaction between male and female reviewers.

¹Sarah Daniels, *Plays: One* (London: Methuen Drama, 1991), p. ix.

²see Mary R. Klaver, 'The Play(s) of Sarah Daniels: Performing Feminisms' (Masters thesis, University of Calgary, 1993), and Julie Morrissy, 'Materialist-Feminist Criticism and Selected Plays of Sarah Daniels, Liz Lochhead, and Claire Dowie' (doctoral thesis, University of Sheffield, 1994).

³Talk given at the University of Sheffield, 25 February 1993.

⁴*Bloomsbury Theatre Guide* (London: Bloomsbury, 1988), p. 71.

⁵'Waving not Drowning', in *British and Irish Women Dramatists Since 1958: A Critical Handbook*, ed. by Trevor R. Griffiths and Margaret Llewellyn-Jones (Buckingham, Philadelphia: Open University Press, 1993), p. 63.

⁶Interview with Daniels at her home, 1 June 1995.

⁷*Op. cit.*, n. 1, p. xii.

⁸*Op. cit.*, n. 6.

⁹*Contemporary Feminist Theatres: To Each Her Own* (London: Routledge, 1993), p. 3.

¹⁰*Op. cit.*, n. 6.

¹¹'Theatres of Choice and the Case of "He's Having Her Baby"', *New Theatre Quarterly*, 9 (1993), pp. 364 - 366.

¹²Sarah Daniels, Interview with Gill Pyrah, BBC Radio 4 *Kaleidoscope* transcript, 15 February 1994.

¹³Unpublished manuscript of *Ma's Flesh is Grass*, p. 1.

¹⁴*Ibid.*, p. 15.

¹⁵see Claire Armitstead, 'Male Order Catalogue', *Guardian*, 22 November 1995.

¹⁶*Op. cit.*, n. 6.

¹⁷Examples of female-authored plays of the late 1970s and early '80s that share similar features are: Olwen Wymark's *Find Me* ('77), which charts the fracturing of identity of a young girl as she is institutionalised for 'madness'; Marsha Norman's *Night Mother* ('83), which tells of the buried and eventual annihilation of a woman's identity in the context of a troubled relationship with her mother; Rose Leiman Goldemberg's *Letters Home* ('79) highlights the relationship between Sylvia Plath and her mother through their correspondence; Catherine Hayes' *Skirmishes* ('81) explores both embittered mother-daughter relations and the fraught relationship between two sisters as they care for their dying mother; Debbie Horsfield's *Red Devils Trilogy* ('83) follows various friendships between adolescent girls through to young adulthood; Nell Dunn's *Steaming* ('81) highlights bonds of solidarity between adult women and the way in which such solidarity can empower women; and Caryl Churchill's *Top Girls* ('82) presents differing routes taken by a range of historical, mythological and present-day women that defy (in some measure) oppressions placed on their gender.

CHAPTER TWO

Beginnings: Consciousness-Raisings

Ripen Our Darkness, *The Devil's Gateway* and *Neaptide*, Daniels' most successful first offerings to the British stage, deserve special consideration not only for the formative clues they provide to her later work, but in their own right as plays that reflect and offer unique treatments of the 'personal is political' feminist equation so prevalent in women's writing of the early 1980s. With astute insight into the social, sexual and economic inequalities between women and men in society, Daniels deftly balances in all three plays a serious indictment of patriarchal ideology with a black and often absurd sense of humour. Her ability, moreover, to portray through arresting visual images the connection between seemingly trivial domestic detail and matters of grave political significance mark her as a playwright of notable and memorable talent. The oft quoted line of Mary to her husband in *Ripen*, "Dear David, your dinner and my head are in the oven",¹ for example, has achieved considerable status in feminist theatre folklore. Despite this, Daniels does not regard *Ripen*, nor any of her early plays, as "self-consciously feminist" as some of her later works, particularly *Masterpieces*.² With *Ripen*, for example, she admits her concern to lie far more with story than with issues³ -- a concern that resurfaces twelve years later, as we shall see in Chapter Five, in *Esme and Shaz*. It cannot be denied, though, that in all three of these early plays important issues are present. From domestic violence, female 'madness' and the Greenham Common protest to the right to 'care and control' for lesbian mothers, issues abound. Unlike *Masterpieces* and *Head-Rot*, however, these plays do not belong exclusively to the 'issue-based' genre of drama that flourished during the seventies and eighties, for despite their numerous issues, they also boast elements of fantasy, mythology, tragedy, black comedy and farce. One of the central problems that critics have come up against when reviewing Daniels (and indeed many women playwrights) over the years has been precisely this resistance of her work to be classified within any single traditional dramatic genre. In thus defying categorisation, Daniels' early plays in particular emerge as

pieces that simultaneously play with and reject theatrical convention, and ultimately invent as they go along their own unique form.

Ripen Our Darkness

Although *Ripen* is Daniels' second play to be staged (*Penumbra* having been performed earlier that year in Sheffield), it is the first that brought her to public attention and acclaim. It is also the first of her works to be published.⁴ Making its début at the Royal Court Theatre Upstairs on 7 September 1981, the play met on the whole with enthusiasm from audiences and praise from reviewers who applauded Daniels' confidence in tackling serious social problems as well as her "vivacity of raw dramatic invention".⁵ A fair number of male reviewers, however, were quick to retaliate against the playwright's "cascade of bile" against men with a particularly bilious invective of their own. But as we shall discover not just here but throughout her writing, Daniels proves to be unruffled by protestations from the historically 'unfair' sex.

Ripen is about the oppression the 'average' woman suffers daily under society's patriarchal institutions. The play's action hinges on the raising of one female character's consciousness about this oppression, as well as the various rebellions of all the play's women to subvert or cast it off. Two main objectives thus emerge on the part of the playwright: to critique (or lampoon) several key patriarchal institutions (marriage, the Church and psychiatry), and to offer female characters both strategies against and alternatives to such traditional bastions of male control. Most importantly, throughout the play Daniels emphasises the political nature of personal relationships and of women's placement within the family. This preoccupation with the 'personal' being 'political' directly reflects that of the Women's Movement, throughout the '70s especially. Sheila Rowbotham observes:

The women's movement has made the need to uncover every aspect of women's experience an immediate political issue and in doing so has started

to redefine what is personal and what is political, questioning the present scope of what is defined as politics.⁶

As well, Daniels' insistence in *Ripen* (and elsewhere) on the need for women to reclaim and develop alternative forms of power are central objectives of women's groups and writings at this time, as Rowbotham states,

The women's movement has ... been extremely preoccupied with an aspect of power which other grass-roots and radical movements *have* seen as their concern -- namely, the creation of alternative sources of power, both as a means of defensive resistance and as a means of developing the capacity for self-organisation among oppressed people.⁷

In one sense, thus, *Ripen* is very much a product of its time. The ways in which Daniels realises her objectives and story on stage, however, are what set her apart from some of the more polemical (women's) theatre groups and writers of the '70s. Works, for example, such as Red Ladder's *Strike While the Iron is Hot* ('74), The Women's Theatre Group's *My Mother Says I Never Should* ('75), or Michelene Wandor and Gay Sweatshop's *Care and Control* ('77) engaged with similar feminist (and in addition socialist) issues as Daniels, but in a more agitprop style wherein theatrical considerations were often subordinated to didactic aims. While a voice that seeks to 'enlighten' can always be heard throughout Daniels' early work, the playwright is equally interested in engaging our imagination and especially in making us laugh. *Ripen* is a good example of a play that has, thematically and structurally, both a deadly seriousness and comic exuberance at its heart.

Although *Ripen* at times conveys a sense of structural anarchy with its numerous subplots, diversity of characters, and mixture of genres, moods and styles, its structure is nevertheless carefully formulated. A look at the underlying premise of the play will demonstrate how Daniels builds her characters and their relationships around it. To restate, this premise revolves around the notion that most women, in some vital aspect of their lives, are oppressed or controlled by certain patriarchal institutions. In *Ripen*, we see a woman's body and work controlled (or dictated) by marriage, her mind or mental 'health' by psychiatry, and her spirituality and morality by the Church. These three institutions (along

with the areas of life they seek to control) become the main thematic pillars of the play. Each character is then intimately connected to one or more of these patriarchal institutions in order to dramatise their power and their weaknesses. To represent the institution of psychiatry, for example, we have the Freudian protégé, Marshall Hutchinson who, despite his contemptible "penis-mad" views, nevertheless has the power to commit perfectly sane women to psychiatric hospitals. As representatives of the Church we are presented with Roger, a vicar, and his warden, David, both of whom preach moral rectitude more in their homes than in the Church. As for the institution of marriage, Daniels establishes five couples: four heterosexual and one lesbian. Each relationship highlights different aspects of power and control. With Rene and Alf, for example, the focus is on physical abuse and rape within marriage; with Mary and David, the master-slave dynamic is foregrounded, while through the alternative lesbian alliance between Anna and Julie, we see the potential for certain patterns of control within the heterosexual model to be repeated. In addition to the oppression generated by marriage itself, Daniels' female characters suffer further oppression by having husbands allied with other patriarchal institutions as well. Thus, Tara is linked with a psychiatrist, while Mary and Daphne are not only saddled with men of the Church, but are forced to suffer the psychiatric probings of their husbands' friend, Marshall Hutchinson.

While each relationship in *Ripen* plays a part in Daniels' assault on patriarchy, the relationship between Mary and David carries the greatest force. This marriage, or more precisely, Mary's crisis and awakening within the marriage, provides the central action to the play. As the chief protagonist, Mary's centrality is reflected not only by her presence in the majority of scenes, but also visually by her appearance alone on stage at the play's opening and floating above her husband at its close. Structurally, then, Mary and her relationship with David stand at the centre of the play with every other relationship providing thematic support.

Within this structural framework, Daniels sets about attacking the patriarchal power-base of each relationship. Her chief method of attack is through ridicule -- a mode which not

only makes for great moments of visual and verbal humour, but also carries with it the opportunity for serious social critique. Highly adept in this mode, Daniels uses its bathetic potential more fully here than in any other of her plays. David, for example, is not just a domineering, moralistic Churchwarden-husband; rather, he is presented as one of the most autocratic, condescending, unreasonable and self-righteous husbands ever dramatised. Likewise, his wife is represented as not just a typically downtrodden and unhappy housewife, but as the most put-upon, overworked and domineered of domestic drudges. Marshall Hutchinson's character is exaggerated similarly to ridiculous extremes: through his wife's monologue and the interview between him and Mary, we discover a man excessively paranoid about sex, obsessively homophobic, and, as Mary so aptly observes, more in need of a doctor himself than any of his clients. One final example of bathos is found in Daniels' portrait of Alf, the drunken, violent husband of Rene. The abuse hurled by this loutish figure in Scene Two is of such horrific and shocking proportions that he appears more a monster than a man. He screams, for example, at Susan (whose handicapped baby has recently died):

You cow. You fuckin' wretched whore.
 Blasted fuckin' bitch, you reduced the whole
 fuckin' family to humiliation, you stupid ignorant
 slut. (p. 12)

Daniels' intention behind inflating these characters to such extremes seems to be not only a matter of poking vicious fun (although not with Mary), but, more importantly, to deflate their power and self-importance. To see David, for example, a man who has ruled Mary's every move for thirty years, also parading petulantly in his underpants, or throwing a tantrum when he can't find his Monopoly 'church-army' tank, is to realize how helpless and pathetic a figure he really is. A similar deflation occurs in Scene Nine when Rene coolly informs Susan that the man who has brutalised and engendered fear in them for years has just "choked to death on a scone". (p. 51) Likewise with Marshall Hutchinson, Daniels has Mary not only knock the wind out of his pseudo-psychoanalytic sails in Scene Eleven, but

reduce him to a state of near hysteria. Such farcical scenes underscore how absurd and ill-founded are these men's claims to mastery.

In addition to lampooning the actual figures of patriarchal authority in the play, Daniels extends her attack by ridiculing the methods through which they attempt to exert control. A prime example is the Church retreat that David coerces Mary to attend in order to "cure" what he views as increasing madness in her. This so-called retreat, designed for digressive wives of Churchmen (so they may "rededicate [their lives] to the Lord and His works", p. 34), is actually an ascetic regime of self-deprivation, forced meditation and silencing of women. In short, it is an attempt on the part of the Church to quash any symptoms of rebellion displayed by women against the patriarchal order.⁸ Daniels brilliantly spoofs this attempt. The first image we behold of the retreat (Scene Six) is that of a woman in the group discreetly topping up her tea with gin from a hip flask. Next we find that the entire aim of the regime backfires for Mary. Instead of repressing her further, it proves an occasion of liberation:

In all the time we've been married this is
the first time I've spent a week away from
David. I even had the last three children at
home. I wonder if time on my own is what
I need to find what is missing from my life.
(Pause.) I wonder why I have always said
'not very well' instead of 'period'? And why... (p. 38)

Although she quickly checks herself, Mary, ironically during a vow of silence, finds her voice. The retreat, moreover, encourages rather than quashes rebellion in her. In the following scene, for example, we find she has escaped its confines in order to visit her daughter.

While Daniels dramatises a variety of methods through which patriarchal control is exerted (such as the psychiatric assessment and sectioning of women, or the techniques of intimidation practised by Alf), her greater concern lies with the methods through which women defy, subvert or elude this control. Daniels presents an impressive range of techniques, equipping each woman in all of the five relationships with a different strategy.

Tara, for example, the wife of the paranoid psychiatrist, defies her husband's demands for a divorce and opts for the only satisfaction her marriage has afforded her: material comfort. As she says, "I like being posh. Don't listen to this live without men rot. The only way forward is to use them and have some fun." (p. 37) While Tara's solution does nothing to change the status quo, the methods of Anna and Julie have more far-reaching possibilities. Anna, a school teacher, challenges the education system by pioneering non-sexist literature in the classroom. Julie, on the other hand, takes on sexism in the system in a more radical manner. Her goal, the "sabotage" of all three hundred and ninety-two Open University degrees, is carried out with aggression and humour. One of her 'essays', written on a postcard, reads:

'Dear madam, and if there is not a woman on the premises don't bother to read any further. I am writing to inform you that I cannot respond to any essay title with the word 'mankind' in it. Because it has the kind of alienating effect which really fucks me off.' (p. 18)

And during a seminar on birth control, she suggests a new method to be used only by men: "A hand grenade held firmly between the knees." (p. 40) While much of the rebellion by female characters is humorously presented, one senses beneath the surface lies a potentially violent and lethal rage. Mary's smashing of David's 'church-army' Monopoly tank, for example, one of the play's most graphic and symbolic gestures of defiance, carries with it murderous undertones. As Mary later reveals to Daphne: "...sometimes, quite naturally, I have an idea that I want to kill someone." (p. 33) Daphne's anger reaches murderous proportions as well when, after Mary's funeral, she listens to Roger and David discussing nonchalantly the "rotten bad luck" of Mary dying ten years before David's retirement. When screaming at her husband produces no effect (other than prompting him to procure the services of Marshall Hutchinson), Daphne kicks the furniture and vows revenge in the presence of Anna and Julie:

DAPHNE. Bastards. Gits. I'm going to kill them, I am. I'm going to strangle them with a

cheese wire and I'll not be satisfied until I see their severed heads bobbing up and down in a washing-up bowl.

ANNA. (*gently*). Please...

DAPHNE. Why did she want to keep quiet, look where it got her. (*Louder.*) Look where it got her. She's dead. For Chrissakes! She's dead.

She pulls two knobs off the cooker and gives them one each.

There, I have metaphorically castrated your mother's murderer, pulled the knobs off the cooker, ha ha!

JULIE. Daphne? Please.

DAPHNE. I'm not mad. For Christ's sake. I'm angry. (*She smiles.*) Don't worry. I'll sabotage tonight's salad - rinse the lettuce in Dettol. (p. 70)

Bursts of rage, such as Daphne's 'castration' of the cooker and Mary's smashing of David's Monopoly tank, resound throughout the play marking symbolic points of emotional retribution for the women. Their expressions of anger, more importantly, engender in them an urgent call to action. Mary reveals to Anna in Scene Seven, for example, that the moment she started to "beat the tank" was the moment she woke up and realized something was definitely wrong in her life. Anger is thus presented as a starting point for the women: for Julie it leads to radical verbal assault, while for Daphne it results in passionate avowals of revenge ("I'll sabotage tonight's salad -- rinse the lettuce in Dettol", p. 70) Mary's plan of action progresses in stages, carrying the play forward and providing the central focus to its issues. Her strategies for liberation not only challenge all three patriarchal institutions that Daniels has thrown up for attack, but also call attention to the political implications that any act of personal rebellion, whether actual or symbolic, can hold.

As mentioned, Mary's release of anger in Scene Four signals an awakening in her that all is not right in her life -- a life which she compares to a "half-finished jigsaw". (p. 11) Her awakening is coupled first with a crisis in faith and she addresses several monologues to God in which she questions him and asks for guidance. When the guidance she chooses to receive (by sticking a pin randomly on a passage in the Bible) reads "And Judas went out

and hanged himself" (p. 36), Mary prays for another "more appropriate sign". She also challenges God's 'advice' by delivering an ultimatum: "But this is definitely the last chance you're getting. Otherwise there are going to be some drastic changes in this servant's life." (p. 38) Mary's next random biblical passage reads, however, "Go thou and do likewise." (p. 38) While it may at first appear that Mary's suicide is a direct following of this biblical order, we know that she originally had asked for a more "appropriate" solution. Her suicide, thus, may be interpreted as calling God's bluff: as the wife of a pontifical Churchman, Mary would be only too well aware of the 'sin' of suicide. Her suicide, therefore, not only poses a direct challenge to the dictates of the Church, but it is also a liberation from its prescribed servitude.

If Mary's suicide is in direct defiance to God, it is in even greater defiance to David and the 'divine rights' he has assumed within the similar patriarchal hierarchy of their marriage. Realizing her role to be the same within this social contract as within the Church (i.e. "servant"), Mary is well aware of how acute her loss (in terms of labour) would be to her three slovenly sons and domestically useless husband. Before achieving her final liberation, however, Mary sets about effecting the "drastic changes" she threatened. She tells Anna during her escape from the retreat:

You know, a lot of things you've said often
to me had a chance to sink in this week and
I've made up my mind that when I get home
things are going to be done on my terms. (p 45)

While the changes Mary proposes are not as grand as her more radical daughter had envisioned, they are nevertheless dramatic acts of self-assertion and liberation. She stands up to her son, for example, and tells David for the first time ever, "Do-it-yourself." (p. 55) She also carries out comic acts of revenge, such as giving David's trousers a "damp press" by laying them on the lawn with a garden roller on top of them. These acts of liberation, however, spell madness to David, who, in the hopes of having his wife sectioned, invites Marshall Hutchinson over to assess her. It is to this so-called doctor that Mary delivers her most lucid analysis of her situation:

Oh yes, by your values I'm nuts, but by my values I was -- but I am no longer. I've wasted my life in a bitter compromise. I've bitten my lip and said nothing when inside I've been screaming. And when I've practically wanted to wring his neck I've said, 'Yes, dear' or 'Whatever you think, dear'. Yes, you win. I was no longer alive, and now I am insane. It's great to feel things, it's just great to be mental. Take any prize you want. Now bum off. (p. 61)

Within the course of a few days, thus, Mary, in her new-found assertiveness and lucidity, knocks down the patriarchal tenets of the Church, marriage and psychiatry. Her suicide emerges as the final assault on these three institutions of oppression. No longer willing to waste herself in "bitter compromise", she wrenches control of her life from her oppressors and directs it to a conclusion of her choosing.

Metaphorically, Mary's suicide may be viewed as an act not of killing herself, but of giving birth to a new self -- a self which she eventually realizes could never survive in this "war-ridden shit heap men call earth". (p. 67) Certainly Daniels' title reinforces this birth metaphor. The unenlightened or oppressed woman must acquire the seeds of feminist consciousness to begin the 'ripening' process of growth and self-realization. The imperative mode of the title indicates, furthermore, that the 'ripening' process for women requires illumination or support from outside sources. *Ripen*, along with all of Daniels' subsequent plays, suggests that women must call upon friendship, guidance and nurturing from other women. Through the course of the play, Mary travels from her space of darkness and finds 'ripeness' in a place no less than paradise -- a feminist heaven.

Daniels' presentation of this surreal paradise serves not only to debunk the myths of patriarchal religion and the Bible ("That libellous load of crap!" p. 67), but to offer, on a more serious note, an alternative mode of existence for women -- a type of community that would promote self-realization and autonomy through female solidarity. The inhabitants of Daniels' surreal community, satiric versions of the Holy Trinity, encourage Mary to achieve these goals. In a scene of scathing humour, they demystify her remaining illusions about God and men, and even offer her the choice to return to her former life. Mary comes to the

realization, however, that nothing will change the men who have made her life "...at best monotonous, and at worst unbearably painful" (p. 67), she opts to stay: "I'm home." (p. 68)

Throughout *Ripen*, Daniels suggests that "home" for women -- a place of true freedom and self-knowledge -- can only be achieved, as mentioned, through the company of other women. By shifting the emphasis that her female characters place on their relations with men to more nurturing relations with women, Daniels offers her female spectators possibilities for reclaiming power. In a monologue directed at the audience, Rene vows (after her husband's death):

Like even if in the future I met a nice
respectable man and even if I was to
marry him -- he nor any man wouldn't
mean that much in comparison to what
my daughter means to me. (p. 65)

Mary, similarly, redirects the energy she has devoted to three ungrateful sons to establishing a closer and more understanding relationship with her daughter. Although still uneasy about Anna's lesbianism, Mary comes to accept and even joke about it: "It looks as though I've got to resign myself to being the only mother in Acacia Avenue with three sons and four daughters-in-law." (p. 43) *Anna's relationship with Julie*, although presented as far from ideal, nevertheless emerges as another alternative to the patriarchal heterosexual model. In this play, Daniels does not so much proclaim lesbianism as a strategy or political gesture against this model, but illustrates, rather, the possibility for women to find love, support and sexual fulfilment through other women. Indeed, the only glimpses we catch of true love and sexual eagerness on the part of women are in the relationship between Anna and Julie.

Despite all the various strategies against and alternatives to patriarchy that Daniels offers, at the end of the play she leaves us with the hopeless image of David and Roger carrying on literally and figuratively their game of Monopoly, oblivious emotionally to Mary's death. Moreover, we learn that Roger has had Daphne sectioned. Obviously it is not Daniels' intention to proclaim a general triumph for women at the end of the play. Rather, for all its

ludicrous exaggeration, the last scene is a realistic exposé of how patriarchal attitudes can live on unscathed by the most traumatic rebellions of women. With the recognition of patriarchal power still very much alive in society, Daniels' ending may be interpreted more hopefully as an implicit appeal for women to continue their struggle, and, unlike Mary, to find "a point". (p. 71) In the context of *Ripen*, and as we find also in *Gateway* and *Neaptide*, women's hope for true change and liberation lies ultimately through shifting power relations within the most hidden, but perhaps most indomitable of patriarchal strongholds, the family. This, Daniels urges, must be achieved first and foremost through women's alliances with other women.

The Devil's Gateway

Where the unification of women in *Ripen* carries political ramifications in the personal sphere of their lives, in *Gateway* such ramifications are demonstrated equally in the personal and public spheres. As we shall see, 'the personal is political' feminist epithet is never more apparent than in this play. Written after *Neaptide*, *Gateway* is nevertheless a suitable companion-piece to *Ripen*. In both plays, Daniels directs her attention generally to the indictment of patriarchy and specifically to the strategies women can develop to overcome oppression and reclaim power. *Gateway*, however, seems to offer a more practical denunciation of patriarchy by linking women's protests to direct political action in the public world. Asked originally by Annie Castledine (the play's director) to write a play about Greenham Common, Daniels admits she "...became very stuck and decided to write about women living in Bethnal Green instead."⁹ She nevertheless uses the women's protests at Greenham Common as a crucial backdrop to the play, transmitting its images and messages regularly to characters through various media sources. So while the play's action occurs primarily on the domestic front, Greenham Common constantly infiltrates this front and, in so doing, politicises the play as well as placing it in what has become now an historical

context.¹⁰ The protests of women in *Gateway*, thus, carry greater potential for change than do the smashing of a 'church-army' tank or 'castration' of a cooker in *Ripen*, symbolically powerful as those actions may be. In other areas as well Daniels shifts from the symbolic to the practical in *Gateway*. The surreal feminist 'heaven' to which Mary is delivered in *Ripen*, for example, is presented as an ideal female community as yet unrealized in society. In *Gateway*, on the other hand, the ideals of 'matriarchy' that Betty and Enid discover reach at least partial fruition by the end of the play, and the community of protesters at Greenham are perhaps as close as women have come in the past fifty years to a visibly powerful female counter-world. *Gateway* thus emerges as a logical extension of *Ripen*: a play in which Daniels carries many of *Ripen*'s issues and objectives into the realm of practical action.

In particular, *Gateway* offers further exploration of the issue of female solidarity as a strategy against and alternative to patriarchy. In essence, the play dramatises the coming together of women on all fronts -- domestic, political and spiritual -- as well as the difficulties inherent in this process. Daniels' emphasis on women's relationships with each other (not only in this play but, as mentioned, in all of her plays), places her within a larger movement carrying on in the field of women's writing and feminist criticism during the '80s. Sydney Janet Kaplan observes:

Currently, feminist critics are interested in studying relationships between women, including mothers and daughters, sisters, friends, lesbians and female communities. Such studies are extensions of Virginia Woolf's comment in *A Room of One's Own* that women are rarely portrayed in relation to each other in fiction written by men.¹¹

Kaplan's observations may be applied equally to feminist playwrights. Susan Carlson, for example, notes many similar trends in their writing, including the use of multiple female protagonists, or of a protagonist surrounded by several women, and "the exploration of women's relationships with one another".¹² Carlson observes, furthermore, the predominance of communities of women not only in the production of women's theatre itself, but textually within "almost any recent woman-authored play".¹³ Helene Keyssar, for

example, points to plays by Pam Gems, Michelene Wandor and Ntozake Shange as remarkable "...in their ability to move beyond autonomy and the melodies of single voices to the explosive sounds of women talking and singing with each other."¹⁴

In *Gateway*, communities of women are dramatised in varying relational units: mothers and daughters, friends, lovers and political groups. While all of these 'units' are interconnected in terms of plot (for example, Ivy is mother to Betty; Betty is mother to Carol and friend to Enid; Enid is mother to Linda; Linda is former friend to Carol and current lover of Fiona; Fiona is social worker to Betty and Ivy and conveyor of political information about the women at Greenham Common), many are nevertheless portrayed at the beginning of the play as ideologically and spiritually distanced from one another. Throughout the play, Daniels is as eager to explore the bonds that will unite these women as the forces that keep them apart, or present difficulties in their relationships. Carlson notes that in many earlier women's plays:

...woman-to-woman relationships were a panacea for personal and social dilemmas. Men were bad, women were good, and the more women the better. In many plays still... women finding other women leads to happiness, change, and/or progress. But a growing confidence has also freed playwrights to explore women's relationships with more range and complexity.¹⁵

Daniels' exploration of the problems inherent in women's relationships with other women in *Gateway* indeed marks a greater degree of complexity than that exhibited in *Ripen*. In that play, as we have seen, the great arch-villain blocking women's self-realization and unification with others is 'Patriarchy' (and the various male figures who dictate its tenets). In *Gateway*, while patriarchy is still held up for criticism and scorn, it is shown more as an ideological construct, much of whose power may be diffused once women recognize and oppose it as such. Patriarchal oppression, moreover, is shown to be only one of a number of factors impeding women's growth and unity. Very often, as we shall discover, women, through fear, ignorance or misunderstanding of others, present equal, if not sometimes

greater, impediments to their unification with others. This exploration of the difficulties between women, in addition to what Carlson has identified as a possible reflection of Daniels' growing confidence, also mirrors some of the early divisions within the Greenham community itself and the protesters' efforts to abolish them. In what started out as a predominantly white, middle-class movement, as Harford and Hopkins have attested, "the barriers of race, class and sexuality began to break down...[and] more working-class women and lesbian women became involved."¹⁶

The focus of Daniels' main concern, however, is the liberation and self-realization that can result from women uniting and overcoming division. She structures her play, thus, with this goal in mind. *Gateway's* first half, for example, depicts the various troubled relationships between female characters (as well as between female and male characters), and explores the reasons for their disunity. In the second half, she dramatises, more importantly, a gradual coming together of these women and a healing of rifts, until, in the final scene, a grand unification occurs between the characters which, in many respects, mirrors the process of unification happening concurrently in the Greenham community. While this is the general movement of the play, Daniels focuses its themes and events around a central figure. Like Mary in *Ripen*, Betty is portrayed initially as a downtrodden domestic servant ("a washing-up machine on legs", p. 75) tied to a condescending, autocratic husband. In desperate need to overcome her boredom and find new meaning in life, she embarks on a journey towards enlightenment and liberation. Unlike Mary's, however, Betty's quest is directly linked to a larger political quest: the women's peace initiative at Greenham Common. The interplay between this quest and Betty's own personal one forms the crux of the play's action and provides, additionally, a thematic base to which all other relationships are linked. Through an examination of these relationships and Betty's quest, Daniels' key objectives come to light: the exploration of both disparity and solidarity amongst women.

In twelve scenes of varying length taking place primarily in the space of Betty's flat over the course of a few months,¹⁷ Daniels dramatises relationships between women in three main areas: family, friendship and politics. (Although three heterosexual marriages are also

presented, the husbands, only one of whom appears on stage, are secondary characters whose chief function is to illustrate their oppression of their wives and, thus, the degree to which these women eventually liberate themselves.) Within the family arena, we are presented in the first scene with three generations of mothers and daughters: Ivy, Betty and Carol. All three women are at first emotionally distanced and ideologically at odds with one another. Betty, although caring and considerate of her mother, nevertheless harbours great resentment towards her for having years ago slept with (or so she presumes) her fiancé. While this information is brought to light gradually during the course of the play, it points to a major source of alienation between mothers and daughters: unreconciled past differences and misunderstanding. Carol, similarly, harbours a grudge towards her mother stemming from her past. Her grudge, however, may not be attributed to one particular incident, but to the working-class environment into which Betty had the nerve to bring up her daughter. Carol derides her mother for her "crude" language, her tacky household decor, and the fact that, in her opinion, Betty has nothing to show for her life. Carol's attempts to transcend her shameful origins through marriage to an upmarket solicitor and acquisition of material wealth are mocked by Daniels. Carol makes pointed remarks to her mother, for example, about her and Darrel's "gold-plated dolphin toilet-roll holders", their "prize roses", and the fact that Darrel had to toss a coin to decide between another baby or a new car. As we discover eventually, Carol's attempts at social climbing do not buy her the sense of self-worth and prestige she saw sadly lacking in her mother's marriage. Betty points out later to her daughter that as long as "Marriages are made uneven" (p. 117), they will never be conveyors of happiness to women no matter from which class they originate.

Daniels' treatment of class as a factor that can divide women is extended into the political sphere. As mentioned earlier, the group of women protesters at Greenham Common is a crucial presence in the play. While the image of this group's solidarity and power speaks volumes to Betty, other characters are more sceptical about the motives of the individual women in it. Enid believes, for example, that the women protesting against nuclear testing haven't had anything near the kind of "bombs" that she and her generation of mothers had to

endure. Rather, she sees the women in a cynical light as trying to protect their "nice lives". She says to Betty: "...well I ain't joining in because I ain't protesting next to some posh woman so she can make sure her cut glass and Capo da Monte flowerpots are still intact." (p. 97) While Enid eventually overcomes enough of her cynicism to help Betty at least practically in her quest for information and knowledge about the protest, her initial misinterpretation of the protesters' political and class motives is shown to be a common impediment to the general unification of women in society.

The greatest impediment to the unification of women in *Gateway*, however, is marriage or, specifically, marriage as prescribed by patriarchy. As in *Ripen*, Daniels dramatises several marriages in *Gateway*, although, as mentioned, only one husband appears on stage. With each couple, Daniels underscores the ways in which marriage can alienate women from one another. During the course of the play we witness its power to separate mothers from daughters, friends and women from their own true selves. Both Linda and Carol, for example, are alienated from their mothers. In Linda's case, Enid's blind loyalty to Bob and minimisation of his violence lead to a rift between her and her daughter. Linda feels not only unsafe when visiting her parents, but resentful of Enid's unthinking resignation to a man who has tyrannised both of them. Contact between mother and daughter, therefore, is minimal. Like Enid, Carol is tied to a tyrannical man whose violence she defends blindly and whose every opinion she adopts as her own. Behind Daniels' mockery of the Carol-Darrel cloning process, however, is a serious issue: the disintegration of female identity which often occurs in marriage. Not only does Carol lose herself in servicing her husband and emulating his lifestyle, but she also loses contact with her mother. Betty laments in Scene Five: "We don't even talk any more like we used to" (p. 117), and in Scene Twelve, she points out that the last thing she and Carol actually did together was buy material for Carol's wedding dress. As Daniels made apparent in *Ripen*, here too she points to the way in which women have been socialised to give more time and energy to the men in their lives than to their relationships with other women, or indeed to themselves. Such issues, forming also the focus of so-called 'consciousness-raising' sessions happening off-stage throughout

the country during the '70s, make this play now, apart from its dramaturgical interest, a useful social document of certain aspects of the Women's Movement.¹⁸

Specifically in terms of *Gateway's* plot, however, these issues figure most prominently in the marriage of Betty and Jim. For Betty, any deviation from her domestic role or tiny assertion of independence results in being admonished or labelled "mad" by Jim. Moreover, Betty's friendship with Enid -- a friendship based on the sharing of problems, secrets and laughter -- is deeply suspect to Jim. Not only does he constantly criticise Betty for "faffing about" with Enid, but he attempts to destroy their friendship as well. When he learns that somebody has "grassed" on him to the DHSS, for example, he immediately blames Enid and orders Betty to bar her from their flat. Enid's husband too suspects Betty for a similar offence and orders his wife to avoid her friend. Through this episode, Daniels dramatises not only the power which husbands often exert over their wives, but, more significantly, the motivation which prompts them to exert such power: fear of female solidarity. This same fear lies behind many of the derisive comments (for example, "Bunch of lunatics", p. 82) levelled against the women protesters at Greenham Common throughout the play. Apparently, as Daniels so clearly demonstrates, the sight of a group of women fighting publicly and powerfully over a political issue, traditionally the arena of male protest, is extremely threatening to men.

Having dramatised the various factors which impede female autonomy and drive women apart, the playwright then seeks to repair this division and promote alternative models to patriarchal power. As mentioned earlier, Daniels focuses the play's themes around the narrative of her central character, Betty. Betty's quest, however, has a rippling effect on the women around her, initiating not only similar quests in some for change, but a general unification of them all. Similar to Mary in *Ripen*, Betty is initially enveloped by 'darkness'. This darkness encompasses the oppression she suffers under the patriarchal confines of her marriage, as well as any knowledge of the roots of this oppression in society. At the beginning of the play, Betty is portrayed as politically naive and ignorant. She is the only person in her family, for example, who has no idea what the peace camp at Greenham

Common is about, despite its ubiquitous presence in the media. The image of this group of women on television, however, sparks her curiosity and arouses an immediate sense of affinity with them. She alone feels they "...should be grateful for what those women are doing." (p. 96) Her curiosity leads her to question not only family and friends about the event, but her social worker as well. Fiona, like Daphne and Anna in *Ripen*, becomes an agent of illumination for Betty (and others) and, in so doing, widens the horizons of her political inquiry. Through leaflets and magazines Fiona gives her, Betty discovers issues of deeper significance emanating from those dealing immediately with CND. She reads, for example:

Apart from everything else, authority,
which is male oriented, is confused,
bemused and deeply threatened by the
growth and the assertion of women working
together in a different way. The women's
peace camp is dealing with the tip of the
iceberg...Cruise missiles, and at the same
time, the base -- patriarchy. (p. 105)

Betty becomes increasingly involved in her quest for knowledge and we find her ferreting away newspaper clippings on the protest in an empty cereal box. She attempts not just to collect information, however, but to discover the exact meaning of what she is reading. She asks Jim, for example, the definition of "patriarchy", but then feels compelled to disguise from him the true motive for asking and tells him she is trying to follow a recipe for "patriarchy cake". Not satisfied with Jim's feeble explanation of the term ("Like a triangle with the boss at the top and all the workers along the bottom," p. 127), she manages to figure out the meaning herself by deconstructing the word: she remembers that "pater" means "father". Betty's determination to understand 'patriarchy', although comically subverted into a 'harmless' domestic pursuit, nevertheless reflects the more serious attempts by feminists at this time to analyse and dismantle patriarchy in society at large. Rowbotham writes:

There was felt to be a need ... for a wider
understanding of power relationships and
hierarchy than was offered by current Marxist

ideas. And with that came the realisation
that we needed to resist not only the outer
folds of power structures but their inner coils.¹⁹

In the Greenham peace camp as well, there was a marked emphasis from the beginning on breaking up and working without hierarchies.²⁰ The fact that Betty's 'patriarchy cake' can be eaten is a light touch by Daniels, showing one of the more unusual methods of dismantling an ideology!

Betty's sudden awakening to events and issues outside the sphere of Hoovering and washing-up has immediate ramifications in her personal world. Rejecting the common labelling of the protesters as mad ("Everybody thought the suffragettes were mad at the time", p. 132), Betty begins to realize the possible connections this group of women hold with her situation. An interaction between the personal and the political is thus established for Betty, setting the stage for protest at the inadequacies in her life. She reveals to Enid that she is bored: "...bored with my life, everything." (p. 109) She even vocalises her dissatisfaction to Jim (although prompted to do so by her daughter): "I just want something that matters to me...I want something to believe in." (p. 119) She laments to Carol the lack of opportunity she had for further education wherein she would have tried to discover where the "flaw" in the great scheme of things lay. Most importantly, the events at Greenham Common engender in Betty a sense of solidarity with other women and identification with their plight. She points out to Enid, for example, that one woman who was sent to jail for what she believed in was described as "...the sort of person who just made the tea for other people, before she got involved." When Enid asks, "Well?", Betty replies: "I could describe my life as making tea for others." (p. 131) She also begins to think more about the women in her own life and wonders, for example, if her mother was similarly "bored", or if she ever got "fed up". (p. 153)

The growing identification Betty experiences with the women at Greenham Common inspires a gradual movement towards solidarity with her own family and friends. At the beginning of the play, as previously noted, we are presented with three generations of mothers and daughters all in some degree distanced from one another. Betty's personal

quest for enlightenment and self-realization, however, touches the other women in her life: they too are encouraged to rethink their lives and become more supportive and open with one another. Both Ivy and Carol have frank exchanges with Betty where they try to explain past actions and sort out their differences. Ivy encourages Betty to stand up to Jim, and Betty encourages Carol to stand up to Darrel and be more honest about her marital unhappiness. Enid and Betty, as well, patch up the misunderstanding instigated by their husbands and vow from that point forward: "We make up our own minds." (p. 147) This coming together of the women fosters mutual understanding, confidence and strength among them. Betty's pursuit of education rubs off on the others as well, and they begin to enlighten one other about what they are learning. Enid, initially sceptical about the women at Greenham Common, becomes Betty's research assistant and collects newspapers for her daily. Towards the end of the play, it is clear that she has not only learnt a great deal, but is proud of this learning as well. When Carol asks what "patriarchy" is, for example, she replies: "We know all about it and we know what the opposite is an' all; matriarchy, and even though that's been extinct for a few thousand years, me and Betty is raising it from the dead." (p. 146)

Enid's growth, like that of all the women in the play, results in a radical step towards liberation in the final scene. In this scene, Ivy, Carol, Betty and Enid all decide either to make major changes in their lives, or to do something entirely for themselves which, we sense, will result in change. Betty, transforming her spiritual journey into a physical one, decides to travel independently to Newbury, despite tyrannical protestations from Jim. Enid takes one step further: she decides to leave her abusive husband for good. With suitcase in hand, she declares: "I'm going to do something that will change me. You do what you want but I want something more." (p. 157) Carol, as well, takes a step in a similar direction and decides to leave her miserable marriage, if only for a day, and accompany her mother to Newbury. The coming together of women in this scene (Ivy decides to accompany Betty and Carol too), thus signals a shift in emphasis and values in their lives. Rejecting the patriarchal structure that has oppressed and ignored them, they form a new model of female

unity: a 'matriarchal' alliance. This alliance, enhanced by the image of the women's impending unification with the protesters at Greenham Common, proves that the seeds for the feminist 'heaven' envisioned in *Ripen* can indeed take root on Earth.

Daniels' emphasis in *Gateway* (and in most of her other plays) on the need for women to turn to each other to achieve happiness and power has led critics to label her a "radical feminist": one who sees separatism as the only feasible feminist strategy.²¹ This, in my opinion, has encouraged reviewers over the years to cast Daniels in a constricting or one-dimensional light. While it is true that certain aspects of a separatist feminist politics inform her work, she is not, however, promoting a wholesale rejection of men and elevation of women. What she is rejecting, more significantly, are all male apparatuses of power which appropriate women's lives. In her examination of the factors which impede women's solidarity and liberation, moreover, Daniels points out that these factors, as we have just seen in *Gateway*, can stem also from women themselves as from men and patriarchal institutions. While many women are to a large degree oppressed by these institutions, there is no reason, as Ivy repeatedly tells Betty, why women should participate in their own oppression. Finally, the strategies that Daniels offers women in this play to achieve solidarity (such as the sharing of problems and laughter, the questioning of ideas, mutual understanding, encouragement, and political activism), have always had their counterpart in male culture. As she wittily points out in Scene Five as Enid and Betty drink, smoke and play cards, they are merely turning their place into "a real den of Equity". (p. 109) The playwright's dramatisation of the formation of separate communities of women -- alternative networks of power -- may be seen more appropriately as redressing a balance not only on the stage, but in society at large.

Neptune

In *Neptune* Daniels' preoccupation with matriarchal alternatives is explored with even greater depth and complexity than we have just seen. Just as *Gateway* offered a broader treatment of issues presented in *Ripen*, so *Neptune* offers a further step in the thematic direction laid out in *Gateway*. When placed consecutively, one may view each of these plays as stemming logically from its predecessor.²² In *Ripen*, for example, the playwright presents a heavenly version of a matriarchal alliance; in *Gateway*, she brings this heavenly paradigm to earth and we witness its actual genesis or "raising from the dead"; in *Neptune*, Daniels moves from looking at the need for and creation of such an alliance to testing its actual operation in society, and, of equal importance, its being tested by the society within which it seeks to exist. The matriarchal alliance under question in *Neptune*, the alternative or 'reconstructed' family, is thus well established at the outset of the play. Susan Carlson points to the "reconstruction of the family" as one of the hallmarks of community explored in plays by women at this time. She notes, in particular, the "untraditional combinations of adults and children and ... constellations of relatives and friends which posit new meanings for the word family."²³ In the few years prior to Daniels writing *Neptune* (1982), Michelene Wandor and Caryl Churchill, for example, were disrupting traditional ideas of the 'nuclear' family. Wandor's comedy, *AID Thy Neighbour* ('78), examines (and satirizes) this notion, as well as gender roles, through two couples -- one heterosexual and one lesbian -- and both their desires to have children through alternative methods. Churchill's *Cloud 9* ('79), a play for which Daniels has expressed great admiration,²⁴ also demonstrates in Act Two new arrangements and meanings for 'family'. The formerly sexually 'colonised' Betty, for example, discovers she can live on her own and enjoy her sexuality alone, and there are other unorthodox living arrangements between bi-sexuals, lesbians, a mother and children, all of which promise greater fulfilment in relationships. Where in *Ripen* and *Gateway* we saw Daniels examining primarily women's placement in the patriarchal family, in *Neptune* she presents a complete restructuring of the family where women control their own roles and lifestyles within it. Furthermore, she lays bare the heterosexism at the base of our

culture which is responsible for denying lesbian women in particular such control. This progression in Daniels' treatment of subject reflects both the newer concerns of feminism at this time,²⁵ as well as a broadening of the playwright's own dramatic scope.

Where the examination of women's oppression in *Ripen* and *Gateway* was limited to the domestic sphere of housewives, in *Neptune* Daniels widens her investigation to include both the domestic and public spheres of a successful career woman, one who also happens to be a lesbian. The range of settings alone in *Neptune* reflects this shift: from the kitchens and living-rooms of *Ripen* and *Gateway*, we move to a more diverse mixture of private and public spaces including a hospital, a school, a courtroom, a park and the homes of various characters. Within these spaces we are presented with a broader range of characters than in either of the previous plays. In the public spheres of medicine and the law, for example, we have the expected male agents of oppression: callous doctors and a ruthless solicitor; at the school where Claire teaches we meet five co-workers, two pupils, and the headmistress; finally, on the homefront we are presented with three sisters (one off-stage), four mothers, four daughters, four sons, three husbands and fathers, and two female friends. Daniels matches this ambitious cast with an equally ambitious thematic framework and plot structure which allow time and space for certain key characters to grow. An examination of *Neptune's* structural composition will shed light on Daniels' chief subject: the plight of the alternative family and, in particular, the lesbian mother in society.

To narrow this subject to a single statement is somewhat reductive. One of the criticisms consistently levelled against *Neptune* over the years is its very ambition. Trevor R. Griffiths comments:

...the sheer volume of plots is problematic and potentially implosive: Val goes mad as a kind of defensive reaction to patriarchy, the story of Demeter and Persephone acts as a mythical underpinning to the lesbian mother child custody case, the elderly mother has her consciousness raised, the lesbian pupils come out, so does the headteacher, and the school staff room contains enough minor plots for a series of *Grange Hill*.²⁶

Daniels herself admits that the play "would benefit from trimming".²⁷ While *Neaptide* does contain a multiplicity of minor plots, characters, themes and issues, it nevertheless does not deserve Wandor's accusation of possessing a structure that is "unformed" and "lazy".²⁸ Rather, Daniels is quick to impose a distinct thematic and structural framework from the very opening of Scene One. This framework is introduced formally to the audience by the choric figure, Val, whose opening address is delivered from the hospital where she is recovering from a breakdown:

The performers in this pit are as old as the
witchcraft trials. Centre stage. The powerful
male Doctor-Inquisitor. In the wings, a sub-
servient female Handmaiden-Nurse. Stranded
on a mud flat, myself, a Witch-Patient. (p. 235)

Val's theatrical analogy sheds light not only on her own personal predicament, but on the entire drama about to unfold. We the audience will witness a performance about an age-old drama taking place in the lives of modern-day characters. Daniels' device of framing the play through this double theatrical lens evokes a sense of ritual, thus enforcing the ritualistic nature of witch hunting itself. In short, *Neaptide* is about modern-day witch hunting: the trials, both literal and figurative, still faced by women whose behaviour and lifestyles run counter to patriarchal norms. In structuring her play, Daniels never strays from this critical focus: not only is the primary action geared towards an actual trial in court (a lesbian mother's custody case), but many scenes or secondary narratives take the form of witch hunts or court trials. Within this thematic and structural framework, the playwright addresses four main questions: who are today's 'witches'? What is the nature of their crimes? Who are the inquisitors? What is the nature of the trials they impose?

While Val introduces herself as a "Witch-Patient" at the play's opening, we soon discover that her status as 'witch' is secondary in comparison with that of Claire. Val's deviation from prescribed norms of female behaviour are more in line with those explored in *Ripen* and *Gateway*: errings of the 'failed' housewife. With Claire, Daniels introduces a more radical dimension to her deviation: lesbianism. In *Neaptide*, lesbians, and especially lesbians

who dare to be mothers, are the chief 'witches' in question. To broaden her examination, Daniels presents three generations of lesbians, all brought together under one school roof, and each one highlighting different aspects of the castigation, dilemmas and trials they face in daily life. The relationships between Bea, Claire and Diane -- relationships characterized generally by hostility and disunity at the beginning of the play -- grow over time until a model of solidarity is achieved by the end. This development in their relationships may be regarded as one of the play's key subplots, sparking off, as we shall see, crises and turning points in the primary plot.

Daniels' bringing of lesbianism to the forefront of her play is an important step not only in the direction of her own writing, but in that of women's theatre. Jill Davis has pointed out that Daniels' plays are among the first in print to represent lesbians.²⁹ Certainly, *Neaptide* is the first play by a woman to have been staged at the National Theatre in which the chief protagonist is a lesbian. Daniels, however, is not the first playwright to dramatise issues of lesbian motherhood and the law. Wandor's *Care and Control* ('77), the first play by the female group of Gay Sweatshop, dramatises the same subject. Wandor explains that the idea for this play grew from the company's desire to tackle the political issues arising from the number of recent custody cases in the news wherein lesbian mothers had been judged adversely. The interest in the play, she notes, stems primarily from "...the links it made between a lesbian 'issue' and a wider feminist critique, demonstrating the way that the official views about family and sexual morality intrude into ordinary life."³⁰ *Neaptide*, although written five years later, is nevertheless concerned with similar unresolved custody issues for lesbian mothers, and it too possesses 'a wider feminist critique'. Lizbeth Goodman, for example, sees Claire's lesbianism as "incidental" to her other roles, although it acts as a 'lens' through which her situation is focused. In her view, "Lesbianism is the example, but prejudice against women is the real issue of this issue play."³¹ Certainly this view is supported by the witch hunting framework in which *Neaptide* is placed. Daniels' foregrounding of lesbianism and lesbian issues in this play, thus, may be seen as an attempt to contextualise prejudice against women in society around this time, and set it against

certain ideals and demands that had come out of the Women's Liberation Movement, Gay Liberation Front or the first British National Lesbian Conference (1974). As well, her foregrounding of lesbian alliances intensifies the radical nature of female alternatives she offers in society. Where in *Ripen* and *Gateway* the lesbian relationships between Anna and Julie and Fiona and Linda are presented peripherally in each play, in *Neaptide* Claire's lesbianism and the implications it holds in her life are placed centre stage. What distinguishes *Neaptide* from other lesbian plays written around the same time,³² however, is the absence of any dramatisation of lesbian sexuality. Nina Rapi remarks:

Sexuality and the body are almost entirely absent from Sarah Daniels' *Neaptide*. The focus is clearly on the battle lesbians have to wage on institutions. Sexual relationships between women obviously exist in the plot, but there is never any display of sexual desire on stage.³³

Clearly, Daniels wishes to emphasize the political ramifications of lesbianism in society and not its personal intricacies. Moreover, her delineation of a lesbian who loses custody of a child despite her not even being in a relationship at the time of trial is a deliberate attempt to emphasize the extremity of prejudice which exists against lesbians.³⁴ In the context of modern-day witch hunting, then, lesbians emerge as one of society's prime targets. For what 'crimes' specifically are they targeted?

The chief crime for which lesbians (and women in general) are persecuted in *Neaptide* is their desire to live independently of men. To give critical definition to this issue, Daniels dramatises it within the context of family and, in particular, motherhood. As mentioned earlier, *Neaptide* may be viewed in one regard as a dramatic testing ground wherein the playwright investigates the operation and treatment of alternative female networks in patriarchal society. Claire's unorthodox family, the alternative under investigation here, proves to be deeply threatening to this society. Composed of two mothers (one lesbian and one heterosexual) and their combined offspring, this family, in overthrowing the primacy of the father, unravels the very fabric of one of patriarchy's key hierarchical structures. The threat posed by Claire in this 'new' family, however, is far greater than that posed by her

friend, Jean. Not only has Claire overthrown her husband as father and 'head of the household', but, unlike Jean, she has overthrown men entirely as sexual partners. It is for this last reason especially that Claire's fitness as a mother is contested by her former husband and the workings of a reactionary legal system. Much of *Neaptide* addresses the notion of 'fit' or 'normal' motherhood and, in particular, the need for new definitions of this concept.

While lesbian motherhood and custody rights are at the fore of the central plot in *Neaptide*, Daniels nevertheless extends her examination to include mothers of differing generations and sexual persuasions. Claire, along with her mother, sister and daughter, provide the perfect familial arena for such an examination. As in *Gateway*, one finds at the beginning of *Neaptide* both internal and external sources of conflict between mothers and daughters. Daniels introduces many of these conflicts in Scene Two during an ironic 'celebration' of Mother's Day. In this scene of bickering, mutual recrimination and bitterness, we discover that none of the three mothers has anything to celebrate. In Joyce's eyes, each of her three daughters has failed to live up to her expectations of respectability: Sybil, a journalist, has emigrated to New York's disreputable Soho district; Claire has left her husband and gone "the other way", while Val is in the process of "cracking up". Unable to stop criticising her daughters, Joyce bemoans: "My God, I wanted three daughters like the Brontës and I ended up with a family fit for a Channel Four documentary." (p. 247) With Val we discover a deeply unhappy, bitter woman -- one who years ago abandoned a university education for marriage and children and who now is clearly on the verge of a nervous breakdown. (In this scene Daniels shifts the play's time scheme in order to dramatise the previous two days leading up to Val's breakdown.) Finally with Claire, we learn by the end of the scene that her ex-husband, Lawrence, has filed a suit for custody of their only daughter, clearly on the basis of Claire's sexuality. As he menaces, "The sordid details are going to make you look unfit to have a goldfish bowl in your care." (p. 253)

While the factors responsible for Joyce's maternal unhappiness -- factors arising largely from generational differences -- may be painful and difficult for her to accept, they in no

way threaten her status or ability to be a mother. For Val and Claire, on the other hand, the factors responsible for their unhappiness are ones which place their very motherhood at stake. Although the individual circumstances of each sister differ entirely, Daniels' paralleling of their narratives indicates certain similarities in the nature of their predicaments. Both women, for example, fail to live up to society's received standards of 'normal' mothers. Val's feelings of "loss of control" and disillusionment with her traditional roles of wife and mother result in an internal crisis in which she abdicates from these roles. Before smashing her fist through a window, she says to her husband: "I don't want to take responsibility for this relationship any longer." (p. 280) Where Val ends up in the psychiatric ward of a hospital for her failure to be a 'normal' mother, Claire ends up in a courtroom desperately trying to prove her credentials as such. Claire, as we witness throughout the play, is probably one of the most idyllic mothers ever dramatised.³⁵ Owing to her alternative sexuality, however, she is labelled a "pervert" in society and viewed, therefore, as incapable of being a fit mother. Thus, the 'crimes' for which both sisters are tried are remarkably similar: the failure to behave 'normally' as mothers, or the desire to live independently of men. As Val remarks to Claire: "Maybe we're in the same boat." (p. 294) Whether at the mercy of society's patriarchal doctors or solicitors, both women experience the same degree of powerlessness. With reference to this feeling of powerlessness, Claire aptly observes: "We seem to be caught in a horrendous fairy-tale." (p. 294)

Against the backdrop of this "horrendous fairy-tale" entrapping Val and Claire, Daniels places the story of Demeter and Persephone in relief. This female-centred myth,³⁶ read aloud by Claire to Poppy, serves to underscore the ideals of motherhood, female power and the alternative family that Claire so ardently attempts to maintain. In addition to being a myth about alternatives, the Demeter-Persephone story is presented as an alternative myth itself. With its celebration of female power, it is used to counter not only the real-life "horrendous fairy-tale" of Val and Claire's situation, but also traditional male-centred fairy-tales or myths wherein female powerlessness is the norm. Claire tells Poppy, for example, "I certainly like it better than *Cinderella* or *Sleeping Beauty*" (p. 240), and later the story of

Jesus' crucifixion is set thematically against the background of the Demeter-Persephone story. Finally, certain parallels between the actual content of the myth and Claire's own situation serve to lift the play out of its naturalistic mode to a quasi-mythic realm. Lawrence, for example, easily becomes the Hades-figure who bursts in unannounced on a scene of domestic mother-daughter bliss to abduct Poppy to a male underworld characterized by prejudice and vindictiveness. The subject of Lawrence and this male 'underworld' brings us to our final area of investigation in *Neoptide*: a look at the 'inquisitors' in today's society and the nature of the trials they impose.

The chief inquisitors in *Neoptide* are represented at both individual and institutional levels. The most obvious example at the individual level is Lawrence, the spurned husband/father who, through his movements in the play, enacts dramatically the process of an actual inquisition. He is seen constantly forcing his way into his ex-wife's private home, interrogating her, bullying her, and threatening legal retribution if she refuses to submit to his authority. This authority, although cloaked in the official garments of social 'morality', is fundamentally a sexual authority. For example, during a conversation with Claire in which Lawrence reveals a more vulnerable side to his character, we discover the true motive behind his filing for custody of Poppy: not to recover the loss of his daughter on moral grounds, but to recover the loss of his sexual authority over Claire. Lawrence's vindictive motives are exposed at the end of this confrontation:

CLAIRE. You know Poppy means everything to me. You can keep anything, take anything, but not this, let me keep Poppy.

LAWRENCE. It's up to the courts to decide now.

CLAIRE (*with quiet dignity*). You can change your mind. Anything else, you can have anything else.

LAWRENCE. Can I have you back?

CLAIRE. Oh, Lawrence. That's impossible.

LAWRENCE. Well, then. Can't you see I have to go through with it? (p. 312)

Daniels' pinpointing of Lawrence's true motivation for filing suit throws the issue of sexuality in the play into a political light. Claire's lesbianism, the sole basis upon which her ability to parent will be tried in court, is not really a 'crime' of perversion or immorality as society pretends, but a crime of subversion -- subversion of the basic structural unit through which patriarchal power is maintained: the heterosexual family.³⁷ Lawrence's inability to enforce his own personal power over Claire causes him to resort to the courts, the public enforcers of patriarchal power.

In *Neaptide*, the courts, comprised of "the great white, washed normals" (p. 294), are society's chief institutional inquisitors by whose decrees 'witches', such as Claire, are tried and sentenced. Ironically, Claire's custody trial, the very event towards which the play's main action is geared, occurs offstage. Clearly, Daniels' objective is not to dramatise the actual proceedings of this trial, the outcome of which we know to be a "foregone conclusion", but to dramatise the ramifications that such a trial holds in the life of our chief protagonist. Specifically, Daniels focuses on the personal and social dilemmas created for Claire by her ex-husband's custody suit. To promote a fuller understanding of these dilemmas, Daniels provides a social environment wherein the prejudices against which lesbians must contend in society are typically represented. This environment, the school where Claire teaches, acts not only as a forum for the expression of these prejudices, but as a setting for the play's major subplot. In this subplot, Daniels dramatises a secondary witch hunt in which the "culprits" are similarly tried in a pseudo-court scene. By linking the events of this subplot both in theme and in action to the primary narrative, Daniels intensifies her portrait of a society where the freedom of lesbians, whether in private or in public, is constantly under attack.

In suppressing her lesbian identity at work, Claire initially views her school as a site of refuge, the only place through which she believes she may obtain social validation in the eyes of the court. As she says to Jean, "My job's the only thing I've got going for me." (p. 254) With the discoveries by colleagues of graffiti advertising a gay switchboard and later the same day of two girls "kissing on the lips", Claire is thrown into both personal and

professional crises. Caught between the desire to defend the lesbian "culprits" as they are denounced by colleagues and to shield her own lesbianism for the sake of her professional reputation in the impending custody trial, Claire hovers in a state of moral limbo. In the first scene of denunciation (Part One, Scene Four), Claire resorts to a course of action (or inaction) commonly adopted by lesbians: self-silencing. Hiding behind a newspaper in the staff room, she endures the prejudices unleashed by her co-workers, society's supposed intellectual role-models. Annette and Marion, for example, the most reactionary of the group, comment on the "perversity" of the age and later on the unnaturalness of "women kissing each other". (p. 264) Roger furthers the idea of lesbians as unnatural with a flippant reference to "bent genes in the family tree". (p. 265) Equating lesbianism with some sort of disease, he says to Marion: "I wouldn't worry...it only affects women who can't get men." (p. 266) In addition to being labelled as perverse, unnatural and diseased, lesbians are also deemed evil by these models of free thinking. Referring to a production of *Macbeth* she once saw, Annette relates: "...it brought a whole new perspective to the characters of the three witches, you know, a hint of, er, female intimacy...between them...which gave a real tinge of reality to their evilness." (p. 263) Through this implicit connection between lesbians and evil witches, Daniels not only furthers her dominant theme in the play, but sets the stage for an actual witch hunt and trial about to occur in the school.

The coincidence of this witch hunt with Claire's promotion to deputy headmistress exacerbates the protagonist's dilemma to a painful degree. Daniels heightens the tension arising from this dilemma by placing the two events in sequence. Immediately before Claire receives her promotion, we witness a scene which in structure resembles a trial in court. The two 'criminals' caught kissing, Diane and Terri, are brought before the judge, headmistress Bea Grimble, to confess their 'crime'. After a lengthy interrogation during which Terri denies her charges by pleading heterosexual and Diane affirms them by 'coming out', the freedom of the two defendants, or of Diane particularly, is granted only on the condition that she keep total silence around "the subject". Diane, however, courageously refuses to perpetuate the silencing and erasure of lesbians in society, and thus is faced with

transferral. Claire is apprised of this information by Diane directly before she enters Bea's office where she expects to be interrogated herself about her pupils' behaviour. Instead she is promoted immediately, news which both surprises her and further complicates her situation: were she to break her silence at this point not only would she be putting her promotion at risk, but possibly her job itself and its guarantee of financial stability. After a meek attempt at mediation on Diane's behalf, Claire leaves Bea's office feeling a traitor and self-betrayed. Later that evening when Jean asks her ironically if she "betrayed" herself to Bea, Claire replies, "Throughout the day I invalidated myself three times. If that's what you mean." (p. 276)

The self-betrayal, silencing and demoralisation of lesbians in society are issues that Daniels seeks not merely to illustrate but to redress in the subplot and, by extension, in the main plot. This concern of the playwright to offer women constructive strategies against seemingly overwhelming oppression is in keeping with her objectives in *Ripen* and *Gateway* where similar patterns of hope predominate in the latter part of each play. In the latter part of *Neaptide's* subplot, an increasingly complicated sequence of events sets the stage initially, however, for further confrontations between the school's three generations of lesbians. These confrontations are sparked off by the secret publication in the school magazine of certain passages pertaining to the silencing of lesbians by a hypocritical education system. A massive witch hunt is launched by Bea who instructs: "...every girl in the school who could possibly be a (*Slight pause.*) whatever, [must be] rounded up and be seen to be punished." (p. 291) Claire, whose quandary is yet again exacerbated by this turn of events, is ironically the first to catch the 'culprits'. Dispelling a "girls only" meeting, she confronts Diane, the chief instigator, in the corridor. During this confrontation, Claire assumes the role of liberal negotiator, countering Diane's radical proposal for change with the response, "The only way to change the system is from within." (p. 295) After accusing Claire of being a "cop out", Diane continues her harangue:

DIANE. Every day making another compromise
 until you become so demoralised you hate yourself.
 (*Long pause.*) What about all those thousands of

women who were burnt as witches? It was you who told us that it was because they were independent and men were frightened of them. (*Silence*. CLAIRE *still doesn't respond*). What are you thinking?

CLAIRE. Something stupid, like how nice to be seventeen when the only dirty word is 'compromise'.

DIANE. You're only a generation away. (p. 296)

While Diane is unaware at this point of her teacher's lesbianism, her pleas for change and solidarity between "independent" women generally, subjects upon which Claire herself has elaborated in the classroom, have a profound and immediate impact on Claire. Where for her generation silence was "the only common denominator" for lesbians, Claire sees in the courage and honesty of Diane's generation the opportunity for things to be "different". A figurative exchange of roles occurs, thus, between pupil and teacher. Claire, inspired by Diane's example and unwilling any longer to bear the guilt of "being a Judas", enters Bea's office and 'comes out'. A second confrontation ensues wherein the fact of Bea's own lesbianism is brought to light and used as political leverage by Claire. The immediate shock for the spectator of such a revelation with all its implications of outrageous hypocrisy is mitigated somewhat by Bea's explanations of her grief-filled history and unwillingness to sacrifice a hard-earned career and pension.

In the unfolding of Bea's story (Part One, Scene Twelve), Daniels points again to the generational factors for lesbians that circumscribe their choices in life. Bea, instead of allowing a knowledge of these factors to unite her with her colleague, refuses to relinquish the safety of her "act" of "bluffingly calm, occasionally desperate authority" (p. 299) in which she has hidden for twenty-seven years. She demands, therefore, Claire's resignation; Claire refuses to comply and suggests rather that she be sacked -- a course of action that Bea in turn refuses. The standstill that results creates new dilemmas for both women, placing their respective futures in question. Despite these dilemmas, however, one senses that the act of 'coming out' has been tremendously liberating for each woman. Claire, although still at risk of losing her job and her daughter, no longer has to bear the burden of a "traitor's guilt", nor, as she later tells Jean, lie her way "out of existence" through endless

compromise. (p. 314) Bea, although still unwilling to retreat from her place of safety, takes the opportunity nonetheless to break her silence and speak openly of a painful and secret past. Through this scene of confrontation, thus, an individual liberation for each woman ironically is achieved.

Daniels' treatment of liberation, however, does not end with the individual. Her greater interest, rather, lies with collective liberation and solidarity between women. Similar to *Gateway*, the final scenes of *Neaptide* are characterised by a gradual coming together of all the play's women. By merging the strands of both primary and secondary plots, Daniels sets this unification in motion. The discovery by Diane and Terri of Claire's custody trial, for example, prompts them to pay a visit to the home of their headmistress in the hopes of striking "a bargain" on Claire's behalf. During a temporary absence of Bea from the room, the pupils make a further discovery: "Miss Grimble's one." (p. 322) Bolstered in spirit by this knowledge, they ask Bea to testify for Claire in court if they promise "...to be flexible and apologise." (p. 323) As we learn in the following scene (Part Two, Scene Five), this meeting between the three women not only knocks down the generational barriers which have divided them, but paves the way for a more enlightened future for lesbians within the education system. As Bea informs Claire:

I'm still negotiating with them. Oh, absolutely
no question of expulsion. We are simply haggling
over the new section of the history syllabus. But
I'm very much hoping for a settlement on the word
'spinsters'. (p. 324)

In addition to supporting her pupils, Bea offers Claire full professional and, more importantly, moral support in court -- support which she would have offered earlier had she known of the trial. She says in sympathy to Claire, "Whatever else, I do understand about loss especially when it can go unrecognised or without a glimmer of sympathy from those around you." (p. 324)

Alongside the growing solidarity between lesbian women, Daniels dramatises a unification of mothers and daughters. In the third scene of Part Two, we find that Joyce, despite

continued ideological differences with Claire, has nevertheless made great efforts to "adapt" to the changes of her daughter's generation. Displaying active support for Claire, she informs her that she has sought the advice of a solicitor specialising in lesbian custody. Furthermore, she has secured the means for Claire to follow the solicitor's advice: money and tickets to "skip the country". Joyce's movement towards acceptance, reconciliation and support of her daughter not only marks a growth in her character, but, more crucially, it underscores the necessity of mother-daughter solidarity in a world hostile to women, an ideal exemplified in the Demeter-Persephone story. Claire's initial defiance towards her mother's support is seen not as a rejection of this solidarity but a refusal to "give in" to a prejudiced legal system which she idealistically believes she can enlighten.

Where the solidarity of women in *Neptune* initiates the enlightenment of the education system, it produces no such results with the legal system. Despite the fact that Claire has everything going for her ("...a good home and career and ...I'm a very good mother" p. 324), and despite her efforts in court to show the hypocrisy and irrationality behind Lawrence's report, she loses custody because a group of people are more concerned with the gender of not even a present but a prospective partner than with the quality of her parenting. Rather than suffer the punishment meted out by these inquisitors, Claire takes her mother's advice and flees to New York with Poppy to join her sister. News of her flight reaches Joyce as she picks up Val from hospital in the last scene. Daniels intercuts this scene with a brief light up on Lawrence as he tries to kick down Claire's front door.

This final image of a patriarchal persecutor left in a state of powerlessness and frustration while all the play's women have either flown to safety or found new strength in one another, has led one critic to comment on Daniels' use of "escapism" and a "fairy-tale ending".³⁸ Certainly in one respect, Claire and Poppy's flight to New York presages hope and greater freedom in this 'new world' than is possible at that time in Britain. Implicit in the words "escapism" and "fairy-tale ending", however, is the notion of wish-fulfilment and nowhere in the text of *Neptune* can such a notion be supported. Claire, upon hearing her mother's suggestion to flee, is clearly against it on both moral and practical grounds. Her subsequent

flight after losing custody may be viewed, therefore, as a drastic measure taken in desperate circumstances. Moreover, the legal, financial, and social repercussions of such a measure make it far from an idyllic fairy-tale ending: in keeping her daughter, Claire must sacrifice her job, her home, her friends and family for the insecurity of a new life in a foreign country. The fact that she is forced to make such sacrifices may hardly be regarded as the fulfilment of her wishes. Rather, it is Lawrence and a misogynistic society who have had their wishes fulfilled: the threatening 'evil witch' has been caught, tried and punished. Claire, indeed, is the victim of their "horrendous fairy-tale", not the author of her own.

In reviewing *Neaptide*, *Gateway* and *Ripen*, certain issues and objectives spring immediately to mind: the indictment of patriarchy, the liberation and empowerment of women through consciousness-raising and alternative female networks, the valorisation of mother-daughter relationships and female friendship, the linking of the 'personal' with the 'political', the politicisation of sexuality, and the witch hunting and labelling as 'mad' of nonconformist or independent women in society. In bringing these issues to the stage, Daniels may be said not only to be reflecting many trends of feminist thought of the 1970s and early '80s, but also helping to lay the foundations of what will surely one day be regarded as the 'tradition' of late twentieth-century feminist theatre. As a playwright at the vanguard of this tradition in-the-making, Daniels, in her early work and especially in *Neaptide*, paves the way for ever more radical issues and technical innovation in women's theatre.³⁹ In the following discussion of *Masterpieces*, we shall see how the playwright continues to extend her perimeters of theatrical experimentation, as well as providing her most controversial subject to date. *Masterpieces* emerges as not only Daniels' most serious play, but arguably one of the most important plays of the 1980s.

¹*Plays: One* (London: Methuen Drama, 1991), p. 12. All references to *Ripen* and to *Gateway* and *Neaptide* are taken from this edition and will be listed parenthetically in the text.

²Interview with the playwright at her home, 1 June 1995.

³*Ibid.*

⁴*Ripen* was first published as a Methuen New Theatrescript in 1986. *Gateway* and *Neptide* were also published in the same series of the same year.

⁵Michael Coveney, *Financial Times*, 8 September 1981.

⁶'Hidden from History', in *Dreams and Dilemmas* (London: Virago, 1983), p. 188.

⁷'Women, Power and Consciousness: Discussions in the Women's Liberation Movement in Britain 1969 - 1981', in *Dreams*, p. 137. In particular, radical feminists at this time set as one of their primary goals the dismantling of male systems of domination over women and the creation of alternative and separate female social networks and culture based on women's creativity and power as life-givers/healers. See, for example, Mary Daly's *Gyn Ecology: The Metaethics of Radical Feminism* (1978); or for an analytical account of radical feminist politics see Alison Jaggar's *Feminist Politics and Human Nature* (Sussex: Harvester, 1983), pp. 249 - 302.

⁸In this play Daniels parallels the role of the Church in repressing rebellious women with the role of the psychiatric institution. Catherine Belsey and Jane Moore point out that:

It was a common theme of feminists in the early seventies that the patriarchy they denounced was reinforced by psychoanalysis. Freud, they maintained, was an arch misogynist, and the role of the psychiatric institution was to reinstate within the patriarchal order women whose symptoms showed evidence of rebellion against it.

Introduction to *The Feminist Reader: Essays in Gender and the Politics of Literary Criticism* (London: Macmillan, 1989), p. 5. See also Phyllis Chesler's *Women and Madness* (1972) for an account (as well as case studies) of the ways in which the psychiatric institution has labelled as 'mad' women who have been either extremely unhappy, angry, economically powerless or sexually impotent. (pp. 24 - 5) Chesler also relates how female solidarity and the early 'consciousness-raising' groups within the Women's Movement gave women an opportunity to elude psychiatric persecution by providing much-needed outlets for the venting of anger and pain, and for understanding the roots of such feelings as stemming from a common oppression.

Also, Denise Russell's *Women, Madness and Medicine* (1995) and Jane Ussher's *Women's Madness: Misogyny or Mental Illness* (1991) give accounts of the history of the relationship between women and psychiatry/psychoanalysis; and Juliet Mitchell's *Psychoanalysis and Feminism* (1975) posits a general theory of patriarchy (using Freud's work and psychoanalytic theory), and argues that only through psychoanalytic transformation can patriarchy be overturned.

⁹*Op. cit.*, n. 1, p. x.

¹⁰In her Introduction to *Plays: One*, however, Daniels reveals regret at having incorporated so many references to television programmes at the time. The play, she said, "incorporating a flavour of the *Radio* and *T.V. Times* of the period, now, like a lot of contemporary plays, looks dated." p. x

¹¹'Varieties of Feminist Criticism', in *Making a Difference: Feminist Literary Criticism*, ed. by Gayle Green and Coppélia Kahn (London: Routledge, 1985), pp.37 - 58 (p. 52).

¹²'Process and Product: Contemporary British Theatre and its Communities of Women', *Theatre Research International*, 13 (1988), p. 255.

¹³*Ibid.*, p. 257.

¹⁴*Feminist Theatre* (London: Macmillan, 1984), p. 128. Beth Henley's *Crimes of the Heart* ('79), Sue Townsend's *Bazaar and Rummage* ('82), Pam Gems' *Dusa, Fish, Stas and Vi* ('75) and, earlier, Maureen Duffy's *Rites* ('69) are also good examples of plays that feature communities of women.

¹⁵*Op. cit.*, n. 12, p. 258.

¹⁶*Greenham Common: Women at the Wire* (London: The Women's Press, 1984), p. 2.

¹⁷Although Daniels doesn't specify the play's exact time span, we know that between scenes four and five one month elapses, while between scenes five and six, several weeks elapse. The fact that events take place over so many weeks suggests that the change Daniels envisions for her characters is a process that realistically occurs over time and not suddenly.

¹⁸In *Carry On, Understudies: Theatre and Sexual Politics* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1986), Michelene Wandor discusses the development of 'solidarity' and 'sisterhood' that was made possible through consciousness-raising sessions during the '70s and the impact this had on changing women's situation: "For

many women ... the discovery that friendship with women (sexual or not) can be fulfilling has also been important in developing both individual and political self-determination." (pp. 13 - 14)

For an account specifically of the ways in which marriage (or 'enforced' heterosexuality) impedes women's relationships with each other see Adrienne Rich's 'Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence', in *Blood, Bread and Poetry* (London: Virago, 1987), pp. 23 - 75. (See also n. 37 below for her argument with regard to *Neoptide*.)

¹⁹The Trouble with 'Patriarchy', in *Dreams*, p. 209.

²⁰*Op. cit.*, n. 16, p. 3.

²¹Trevor R. Griffiths, for example, in 'Waving not Drowning: the Mainstream, 1979-88', in *British and Irish Women Dramatists since 1958*, ed. by Trevor R. Griffiths and Margaret Llewellyn-Jones (Buckingham, Philadelphia: Open University Press, 1993), pp. 47 - 76 (p. 60).

²²Although the first draft of *Neoptide* was actually written in 1982 before *Gateway*, the final draft was written after in 1986. Daniels herself has confirmed my view of *Ripen*, *Gateway* and *Neoptide* as companion-pieces. (Interview with the playwright at the National Theatre, 9 November, 1993.)

²³*Op. cit.*, n. 12, p. 258.

²⁴Interview with the playwright at her home, 3 October 1994.

²⁵Sue O'Sullivan, 'Passionate Beginnings: Ideological Politics 1969 - 72', in *Sexuality: A Reader*, ed. by Feminist Review (London: Virago, 1987), p. 59.

²⁶*Op. cit.*, n. 21, p. 62. One may note with some irony that Daniels herself is a writer for *Grange Hill*!

²⁷*Op. cit.*, n. 1, p. xi.

²⁸Review in *Plays and Players* (September, 1986), p. 34.

²⁹*Lesbian Plays: Two*, ed. by Jill Davis (London: Methuen, 1989), pp. 8 - 9.

³⁰*Carry On, Understudies*, p. 56.

³¹*Contemporary Feminist Theatres: To Each Her Own* (London: Routledge, 1993), p. 130. For further discussions of the debate surrounding lesbian mothering around this time see, for example, Francie Wyland's *Motherhood, Lesbianism and Child Custody* (Toronto: Wages Due Lesbians Toronto and Falling Wall Press, 1977), in which Wyland cites examples from and contextualises the debate in North America; and Rose Basile's 'Lesbian Mothers', *Women's Rights Law Reporter*, 2 (December 1974), pp. 11 - 18.

³²Some examples of lesbian plays written around the same time as *Neoptide* are: *Pinball* ('81) by Alison Lyssa, *Double Vision* ('82) by the Women's Theatre Group, *Coming Soon* ('86) by Debbie Klein, *Chiaroscuro* ('86) by Jackie Kay, and *Cinderella: The Real True Story* ('86) by Cheryl Moch.

³³'Hide and Seek: the Search for a Lesbian Theatre Aesthetic', *New Theatre Quarterly*, 9 (1993), p. 154.

³⁴This is Daniels' own admission. (Interview with the playwright at the Royal National Theatre, 4 April 1994.)

³⁵Daniels admits, "I was so aware of the prejudice which exists against lesbians that I made Claire a bit too good and/or 'right on' to be true. I was determined not to provide anyone with an excuse for thinking 'Perhaps her ex-husband should have got custody anyway'." *Plays: One*, p. xi.

³⁶The Demeter and Persephone story presented in *Neoptide* is a revisionist version by Phyllis Chesler from her book *Women and Madness* (Avon Books, 1972). Daniels acknowledges Chesler's permission to quote from this book.

³⁷Adrienne Rich (in 'Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence') emphasises heterosexuality as a "political institution" that disempowers women. She speaks of "...the enforcement of heterosexuality for women as a means of assuring male rights of physical, economic and emotional access. ...One of the many means of enforcement is, of course, the rendering invisible of the lesbian possibility.", p.23 and p. 50.

³⁸*Op. cit.*, n. 21, p. 62.

³⁹Daniels, whose work has been compared to that of Joe Orton (Howard Brenton has called Daniels "a militant lesbian feminist Joe Orton", only better: "Her biting savagery is humanistic...he was cold, she's not." in 'The Red Theatre under the Bed', *New Theatre Quarterly* 3 (1987), p. 201), Aphra Behn (whom Carole Woddis has described as "a seventeenth-century feminist equivalent" in *Theatre Guide*, p. 71), and Bryony Lavery ("a similar adventurer using wit to attack the bastions of patriarchy", Woddis, p. 71), herself has claimed conscious influence only by Caryl Churchill. Admiring Churchill's treatments of sexual politics and humour in particular (see n. 24), Daniels seems to take such content and style to further extremes in her plays through her relentless attacks specifically on men and patriarchal institutions. In so doing, she has opened the floodgates to vitriolic attack by (mostly male) critics in a manner never experienced by Churchill (or by few other female dramatists). As a feminist playwright who has borne the

lion's share of such attack, Daniels may be said to have paved the way for perhaps a more accepted reception of similar feminist content by future playwrights.

CHAPTER THREE
Masterpieces

With the growth of Daniels' reputation in the early 1980s came a second major commission for the writer. Unlike the production delay *Neoptide* faced with the Liverpool Playhouse's commission in 1982, the Manchester Royal Exchange's commission was offered to Daniels in conjunction with the 1983 New Writing Festival and thus a specific date was set for the play's production in May of that year. In addition to the limited amount of time in which Daniels had to write *Masterpieces*, the Royal Exchange's brief specified that she must also confine her work to six actors. Despite these restrictions, Daniels nevertheless wrote not only one of the most successful and controversial plays of the decade, but one whose relevance and theatrical innovation have continued to incite actors and audiences well into the nineties.

Masterpieces is a departure for Daniels in many respects. Apart from *Head-Rot Holiday*, it is the only one of her plays which may unequivocally be labelled 'issue-based'. Daniels herself stresses that it is "unashamedly" an issue-based play and states, moreover,

I felt so strongly about the ideas in the play that, in an attempt to guard against being misunderstood, I censored myself from writing the detail and contradictions which give a character depth.¹

Daniels reveals that whereas her usual approach to writing a play begins with "thinking about it from character", with *Masterpieces* she begins with an idea and sets about "putting a story around that concept".² The concept in question, pornography as violence towards women, is thus the initiating idea for the play and the one from which all other dramatic considerations stem.

Daniels' elevation of a specific issue over characterization or plot, however, does in no way make for a dry play of ideas. *Masterpieces*, rather, is imbued with passion and anger -- emotions which are aroused early on in the play. Daniels' initial desire to write

about pornography was fuelled moreover by anger: anger about its ubiquitous presence in society, and anger about feminism's failure to convey its arguments against pornography to a wide enough audience.³ Daniels herself was actively involved in the Women's Movement during the seventies and early eighties -- a fact we have just seen reflected in her early plays. Describing the time as much more "radical and exciting" than today,⁴ she reveals that *Masterpieces*, too, has its roots in this era:

And it [*Masterpieces*] came out of the ideas that were around then. There were groups (in Canada and America too) called WAVAW [Women Against Violence Against Women] and there was a film called *Not A Love Story* which came out at the same time. There were marches in London through Soho; there were marches through the streets...where women had been raped and murdered. ...and it came out of a time...when it was very exciting -- you know things were happening, and being part of something, that was very important.⁵

The tendency for many of the ideas from this time to be disseminated mainly academically, however, was to Daniels' mind a serious shortcoming of the Women's Movement. According to her, important issues surrounding pornography and violence towards women were only being discussed within a very small sphere. As she points out, "Let's face it, a minority of people buy academic textbooks."⁶ Through the theatre Daniels hoped to make these issues "accessible in a totally different arena".⁷

Masterpieces is Daniels' most structurally experimental play to date. As mentioned, the playwright begins with an issue which all scenes and episodes are then designed to clarify from various angles. Viewed in retrospect, the play emerges as an argument: not only Daniels' own personal argument against pornography, but a broader social argument which seeks to illustrate and analyse the devastating effects of an industry which, according to the playwright, fuels a continuum of male violence against women.⁸ Daniels, of course, is by no means the only feminist writer who has put forth this argument. Rosalind Coward, for example, sees pornography as "...part of a spectrum of male behaviour which exhibits its most blatant form in literal physical violence against women", and the famous phrase she cites in the same essay,

"Pornography is the theory; rape is the practice", has become a powerful slogan in the feminist fight against pornography.⁹ *Masterpieces*, a reflection of this fight, also furthers it by arguing its messages uniquely in theatrical form to (hopefully) a wider cross-section of the public. The notion of an argument, then, dictates much of its form. Not only are arguments between characters heard throughout, but the underlying framework of the play is that of a trial. Like *Neaptide*, the main storyline in *Masterpieces* centres around a trial in court and the events that lead up to it. Similar to *Neaptide* as well, the play's overall trial framework is more figurative than literal: what is really on trial in *Masterpieces* is pornography itself. Each scene may be viewed thus as a witness for the prosecution placed before the audience as judge. Daniels does not attempt, however, to persuade her audience solely through verbal argument of the continuum of violence. Rather, by dramatising the continuum in motion episodically, she attempts to prove empirically through differing illustrations its destructive nature. Within this framework, Rowena's actual trial and conviction in court only further evidence of the devastation pornography can bring in people's lives. Equally important, her trial exposes two social institutions, the law and psychiatry, as complicit in the perpetuation of misogyny and violence towards women in society. As we saw in *Ripen* and *Neaptide*, here too Daniels stresses the interrelation between men's physical/sexual power over women and institutional power (i.e. of the courts, religion, psychiatry, etc.) -- power which, as Andrea Dworkin has argued, enshrines and protects male dominance in society.¹⁰ Throughout *Masterpieces*, Daniels' critique of pornography is very much in line with that of Dworkin, perhaps one of this century's most outspoken anti-pornography campaigners. Dworkin, for example, has written extensively about the relationship between pornography and male power, as well as about the feminist fight against violence against women being also "necessarily a fight against male law".¹¹ Unlike Daniels' earlier plays, however, there is neither bathos nor exuberance in her indictment of such institutions in *Masterpieces*. Sadly, the examples dramatised shock only too readily to need exaggeration.

By altering her starting point from character to argument in the construction of *Masterpieces*, Daniels' task is at once more confining and more liberating. With *Ripen*, for example, the playwright admits to an open-ended approach from the start: "I didn't decide on a subject, I just started writing."¹² With *Masterpieces*, on the other hand, Daniels confines herself to an issue that to her mind is fully developed from the beginning. Such difference in approach affords the playwright a new kind of freedom: the opportunity for technical experimentation. In seeking to convey the various aspects and effects of a continuum of violence in motion, Daniels employs a wide range of theatrical devices: character doubling, voice-overs, sound effects, music, direct address, position freezes, fragmented time scheme, multiple settings, variations in pacing, and unexpected shifts in atmosphere and action. Tracy C. Davis comments on the experimental and Brechtian nature of these devices that are designed, in her words, to "...promote objectivity, detachment, and [a] sort of stir and debate in spectators..."¹³ Elaine Aston, furthermore, sees Daniels' use of critical distancing techniques as a means to "...empower the spectator to refuse the objectification of women and to 'see' them differently."¹⁴ Certainly the promotion of objectivity is crucial to a play whose theoretical premise is predicated on a trial in court. From its opening, Daniels encourages an objective hearing of her subject by establishing a kind of forum in which various views on pornography are aired. The audience's first experience of the play, thus, is to be cast immediately in the role of judge before whom three witness-like figures appear:¹⁵ a rich producer of pornography, a sex shop proprietor, and a consumer of pornography. These 'pornographers', whose task it is to defend from both capitalistic and personal points of view the commodification of the human body, are given the distinct advantage of being the play's first speakers. With no previous stage action to bias the audience's opinion, Daniels creates the opportunity for an impartial hearing to be given to these men. The men themselves, although obviously middle-class capitalists, nevertheless put forth their arguments in seemingly class-neutral, 'reasonable' language. For example, the Baron states:

...I have always kept on the right side of the

law and when I was first called a purveyor or (sic) filth, it upset my mother a lot, but ours is a perfectly normal profession run by ordinary nice people, not gangsters or kinky dwarfs in soiled raincoats. That is a ludicrous myth perpetuated by the media. ... (p.163)¹⁶

The Peddler continues:

...Of course we'll always have criticism from the frustrated politicians and their pathetic fanaticism for censorship. Hopefully, though, the majority of the population is liberated enough to wake up to the fact that we sell marital aids which enrich people's -- men and women's -- romantic lives, that we provide the practical side to sex therapy. (p.164)

And finally Clive, the consumer, speaks in fine rhetorical form:

...Everyone has fantasies, don't they? And from time to time they need revising or stimulating, otherwise like everything else it gets boring. It's simply a question of whatever turns you on. Let's face it, alcohol and cigarettes can kill people, looking at pictures never hurt anyone. (p.164)

By presenting these figures in the fashion of 'giving evidence' at the opening of the play, Daniels creates in her spectators the expectation that we will also be called upon to judge another side to their 'cases'. The following seventeen scenes proceed dramatically to refute these cases; in short, they seek to prove through a detailed social analysis that "looking at pictures" can and does lead to violence.

Daniels' analysis of a continuum of male violence towards women does not proceed in a linear fashion. Indeed the very notion of a continuum gives the impression of circularity: one idea or action fuels another which in turn fuels another and so on. Interrelation between events and ideas is the key concept in *Masterpieces*, and one that provides justification for the play's most significant theatrical device: the fragmentation of time and action. Davis comments on the cyclical nature of *Masterpieces*:

Masterpieces does not reassure and resolve -- it provokes and revolves. The scenes go around and around motifs of dinners...guilt, pornography, and the courts...psychiatric assessment of sanity; the working class and the middle class; men's

solidarity in defending pornography and measuring women's sexual inadequacy; and women's 'crimes of disobedience'... .¹⁷

While Daniels' cyclical style is also reflective of the non-linear approach adopted by many women writers in various literary forms,¹⁸ it holds particular relevance to the subject of *Masterpieces*. By juxtaposing scenes in time and action, the playwright encourages her viewers to piece together themselves the connections in a continuum of violence. At the one end of it, for example, may be misogynist jokes, where at the other end, sexual harassment at work, or, ultimately, snuff films. Such connections, however, are not always apparent to the spectator's eye. Because scenes are presented both forwards and backwards in time, we are constantly required to question the relevance of not only one scene to the next, but of one scene to all previous scenes as well as all scenes that follow. In this way, Daniels asks the audience as 'judge' to make their own conclusions from the evidence enacted dramatically before them. Such conclusions, moreover, are encouraged by the playwright to be reached objectively. Owing to sudden shifts in time, mood, action and pacing, Daniels never allows our sympathies to be engaged with a character or situation for too long a period. A sense of detachment in the spectator thus results -- detachment which enables her or him to develop a more critical than emotional view of characters and issues. An examination of the first few scenes of the play will demonstrate the way in which Daniels promotes this detachment and, in so doing, creates a demanding theatrical experience.

In Scenes One and Two, Daniels presents a number of dramatic shifts in time, location, atmosphere and events. While the play's overall time span is indicated in the stage directions ("The events take place over twelve months in 1982 and 1983, and shift back and forth throughout the year." p.162), the specific time span between each scene is rarely mentioned. Between Scenes One and Two, however, we are led to presume a significant portion of the year has elapsed. We leave Rowena in Scene One, for example, speculating contentedly on the following year: "You're so pessimistic, Trevor, this time next year I reckon I'll have got promotion and you'll have your Bang & Olufsen." (p.176) Then, after a brief transitional monologue from Yvonne, Rowena is

placed in a court room where we learn by the end of the second sentence of Scene Two that she has been charged with the murder of a man. Within the space of two scenes, thus, we have moved from 1982 well into 1983, from the inside of a restaurant to the inside of a crown court, and from an occasion of social bantering to one of legal interrogation and criminal prosecution. The questions left for the audience are numerous: how, for example, did this optimistic, middle-class, 'liberal' social worker come to a moment of such fury against a man that it resulted in murder? By the opening of Scene Three, we discover that any answers will not be offered in a straightforward manner. As Aston points out, "The conventions of the court room drama which create tension around the outcome are undermined. It is not what happened but why it happened which is the concern."¹⁹ Instead of allowing us to follow Rowena into the next scene, thus, Daniels shifts the time and action again to a seemingly disconnected episode involving Yvonne and a mother of a pupil -- an episode occurring, we may deduce, before Scene One. Through the unfolding of Yvonne's actions in helping to convict her pupil for rape, however, certain questions arising from the restaurant scene become clarified. Yvonne's silent but seething anger at the series of rape jokes in that scene, for example, is more fully understood. Moreover, her statement concerning pornography as "violence against women" (p.173) is not only proved in Scene Three, but expanded upon in a more socially analytic context. Through the story of Irene Wade's son, for example, Daniels stresses the point that men are not born misogynists; rather, they are socialised or taught to hate women from a very early age. In the case of Irene's son, viewing women in a totally sexually objectified manner is something that has been passed on to him by his father and encouraged by his male peers. The fact that he felt he had the right to rape a fellow female student is proof that he had internalised pornography's messages only too well.

With such 'evidence' set before us in Scene Three, many of the comments made by various characters in Scene One begin to resound eerily in our ears. Clive's assertion, for example, that "looking at pictures never hurt anyone" and Ron's statement that pornography is "totally innocuous" (p.172) , resurface for a more socially informed

judgement. This process of critical backtracking initiated in Scene Three should provide a clue to the spectator that such backtracking will be vital for the discovery of answers or connections throughout the play. By Scene Four, just as we have come to understand Yvonne more fully, Daniels disengages our sympathies with her and leaves us to examine with renewed objectivity a social work visit between Rowena and a new client on the day following the restaurant outing. Just as Scene Three shed light on issues and characters in Scene One, we may now look to this next scene for similar illumination into what has preceded it and what will follow.

The devices with which Daniels thwarts the theatregoer's expectations in these first four scenes are employed throughout the play. Their power to elicit direct audience participation and to arouse a constant "stir and debate" makes *Masterpieces* a particularly challenging and powerful experience. Reviews of the play unanimously attest to its power. Michael Billington, for example, comments on its "pugnacious vitality"²⁰ and Carole Woddis describes it as "...an evening that cumulatively has the power of a seismic eruption".²¹ Michael Coveney writes, "Rowena's feminist awakening makes for a very powerful evening of theatre",²² while Irene McManus issues the following warning to prospective spectators: "Think twice before you take a husband or lover to see this play...it could crack a relationship wide open."²³

Such heightened reaction to *Masterpieces* may be accounted for not only by the demands the play continually places on the audience, but equally by its ability to arrest our attention and shock our sensibilities. *Masterpieces* is unique in its capacity to portray and produce shock about an issue now so widely accepted in society that it passes largely unchallenged. One of Daniels' aims, therefore, is to force in her audience a recognition that pornography (and the misogyny from which it stems) is an issue which to our detriment only can we afford to ignore. Through various stylistic techniques and dramatic 'shock tactics', she attempts to awaken viewers by exploding pornography's myths and demonstrating the danger of passive acceptance of its influence in our lives. In no uncertain terms we are shown that pornography is not an "innocuous" occupation limited to the pages of 'dirty' magazines, but a huge profit-

making industry which has become the basis for much of today's mass culture. As such, it affects everybody, most especially women. Sue-Ellen Case writes about the feminist critique of pornography that Daniels reflects in *Masterpieces*:

...pornography [is revealed] to be an active form of coercion -- not merely a mirror of the social situation, but active in creating it. How woman is represented co-creates her material conditions in the world. Since much of her oppression derives from the sex power dyad, pornography, which promulgates and proliferates that practice, is an agent in abusing her.²⁴

Throughout the play Daniels illustrates pornography's numerous abuses of women from jokes told in social gatherings, to advertising ("...advertises for everything from oranges to Opels, all sold with women's breasts" p.207), to sexual harassment at work and on the street, to videos and snuff films easily attainable at local shops. Furthermore, through each of her female characters, Daniels demonstrates the ways in which pornography and fears of male violence can affect every area of a woman's life from considerations of what to wear, where to walk, how to walk, economic survival, behaviour in social situations, and personal relationships. As well, Daniels' critique is extended to a class analysis by her inclusion of Hilary, a working-class, single mother, whose oppression is examined from both class and gender perspectives. Before examining the function of these characters and their relationships, however, I shall first establish the methods by which Daniels jolts her viewers into recognising (or seeing afresh) pornography's systems of coercion and abuse.

In *Masterpieces* language plays a powerful role. As we have seen in *Ripen* and *Gateway*, Daniels demonstrates considerable skill with words, often to great comedic effect. In *Masterpieces*, the power of language lies not in its potential for comedy (although much verbal humour is present), but in its capacity to shock and arouse outrage in characters and viewers alike. While the play abounds in obvious examples of powerful language (such as bitter or explosive arguments between characters), it is the episodes wherein language is put to more subtle or descriptive use which demonstrate,

often with greater effect, its power to shock. In Scene One, for example, Daniels takes a customary, seemingly harmless form of social intercourse, the telling of jokes, and exposes its insidiousness. Around a table in a restaurant she places six upwardly mobile adults (three couples) who, after eating and dancing, begin a casual after-dinner conversation covering topics from holidays to stereo systems. Despite the brooding presence of Yvonne, an atmosphere of calm and relaxation predominates. Into the midst of their conversation, a series of misogynist jokes is introduced by Ron. What is shocking about this episode is not only the subject matter of the jokes, but the sense of casual complacency with which the men tell them. That three educated adults can sit in the company of their partners and, as part of a normal evening's 'fun', tell jokes not just about rape but women's *compliance* in rape, is a telling comment on the degree to which hatred and violence towards women are accepted and even ridiculed in society.

Equally disturbing are the characters' responses to the jokes. Daniels carefully charts their reactions in her stage directions. After Ron's first joke, for example, we find:

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)

This pattern of response is repeated to more or less the same degree for all four jokes of the men. While it might be expected for men who tell such jokes to laugh at them as well, the "uproarious" laughter of Jennifer and "hesitant" laughter of Rowena are disconcerting to watch. Their laughter, moreover, is obviously unnatural: Rowena's is half-hearted while Jennifer's is so overdone that it seems forced or false. Through the whole scenario (and with retrospect from later scenes) it becomes apparent that the men feel free to react naturally to the jokes, whereas the women must face psychological ramifications no matter which way they respond. Yvonne, for example, the only one who doesn't laugh, is later upbraided by Ron for her lack of humour and audacity to voice her anti-pornography views. Yet when she exhibits a sense of humour at the restaurant by telling a joke at the expense of men, she is totally ignored by all. She, however, does not upbraid Ron for failing to laugh at her joke. Jennifer's attempt at

joke-telling, while not ignored, is severely impeded and ridiculed by Clive. Daniels' point is driven home here: women, although not meant to produce humour, are socialised nevertheless to laugh at and trivialise themselves. Jennifer and Rowena's laughter is thus not only a measure of their socialisation, but a reflection of the early lesson instilled in them always to approve men, especially in public.

Daniels' treatment of a highly contentious subject through the medium of jokes in this scene demonstrates the psychological and social complexities that language can hold. In one of her interviews in *Time Out*, the playwright expresses her views on the power of language:

It is important to change the way we see things and one of the ways of doing that is through language. But I do feel that the intention behind the wording is much more important than the words themselves.²⁵

Another way in which Daniels attempts to change the way we see things through language is found in Scene Eight. In this scene three female porn models -- women whose personalities are normally erased and views never heard in society -- are given the chance to speak. Although these women are not physically present on stage, their voices are given added prominence by virtue of being voiced over on tape as Rowena silently looks through porn magazines. In a stage direction immediately preceding the three monologues, Daniels stresses that, "*ROWENA looks at the magazines in such a way that the audience is not exposed to their contents.*" (p.203) Through this stage direction, Daniels emphasises the need for us to hear these women as human subjects rather than viewing them as sexual objects. This transformation from object to subject is furthered by the fact that the three women deliver their monologues consecutively in a manner reminiscent of the 'prologue' monologues of the three male pornographers. In this way, Daniels counterbalances their 'evidence' by giving equal time to the women working on the other side of the sex industry. Once again, the audience is called upon to judge three witnesses -- witnesses who give a very different version of the industry:

1. I suppose it would be stupid to say I did it because I wanted to be good at something

and yes, okay, it gave me money and status -- status, ha bloody ha. I wasn't dragged off to do it by the hair or anything but it was a different story when I wanted out. You don't get promoted in this lark. Your value is your body, when it starts to go, you get into the rough stuff and can be threatened within inches of your life -- to do the nasties with animals and that. I tell you, the animals get treated like they was the royal corgies, you get treated like dirt.

2. When I was a little girl, I was always being shown off to relatives, made to sit on uncle's knee. I learnt to flirt, was told that I was pretty and I liked the attention, I loved it. I still like my body being appreciated. When I was seven I was sexually interfered with by a male relative. I never told anyone. I'd learnt by then that I was dirty and it was my fault. I went into the business for money. I had no morals at that time, I was twenty and had a two-year-old daughter to support -- sure the blokes assumed they could sleep with you whenever they wanted. I went to a meeting once where these women were talking about the links between violence and pornography. Huh, I told them it was a load of puritan bullshit. Makes me laugh now. It never occurred to me to take into consideration the abuse I'd suffered personally. All I ask is that my mother or daughter never find out.
3. You're supposed to do these pathetic antics, which would cause you permanent damage in real life, with ecstasy radiating off of your mug. Once in this game it's harder than you would imagine to get out. And if I go for a proper job, what would I say at the interview? 'Well, the last thing I did was a split beaver shot of me strapped naked to the front of an XJ6'. I also 'starred' in a film specially made by a television company for the Falklands lads who watched the stuff to get their blood-lust up. What could I give them, poor as I am? If I were a wife or a mother I could give my man. But I have the commodity of my body, and so they took that. (pp.203-4)

These accounts of exploitation, degradation and often subhuman treatment suffered by women in the sex industry are shocking revelations both to Rowena and to the audience. The force of the monologues lies in their ability to convey at a deeply personal level the shattering of illusion and ugliness of reality that each woman has experienced. Again Daniels defuses many myths of pornography: the image of the woman in "ecstasy" on the page and the reality of her pain behind the camera, the promise of "status" as a model and the reality of permanent devaluation in society for such work.

Daniels' unwillingness to spare her viewers from the hard facts of pornography and the violence it promotes is carried through to the end of the play. The first model's description of being "threatened within inches of your life" becomes one of the many links in the chain or continuum of violence which culminates in the description of the snuff film in the final scene. Rowena's account of the film that devastated her life must be one of the most hard-hitting, powerful speeches to be uttered on stage. Part of its power derives from the fact that the film is a real and not an imagined example (--a fact verified in the programme notes and in the printed versions of the play):²⁶

Well, the first part was badly made and like a lot of films it contained a good deal of violence and shooting. I think it was loosely based on the Charles Manson story. Then it changes, it becomes real. It's a film studio during a break in the filming. The director is near a bed talking to a young woman. He gets turned on and wants to have sex with her. They lie on the bed and he kisses her. She then realises that they are being filmed. She doesn't like it and protests. There is a knife lying on the bed near her shoulder. He pins her down as she attempts to get up. He picks up the knife and moves it round her neck and throat. There is utter terror on her face as she realises that he is not acting. She tries to get up but cannot. The film shows shots of his face which registers power and pleasure. He starts to cut into her shoulder, and the pain in her face...It's real... Blood seeps through her blouse. Her arm is held down and he cuts off her fingers. It is terrible. I have watched a woman being cut

up and she is alive. He then picks up an electric saw. And I think no...no he can't use it. But he does. Her hand is sawn off...left twitching by her side. 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)

One reviewer describes her response to this description: "A stimulating evening but be warned: the final snuff movie speech o'er reached itself in dramatic effect, and had me heaving all the way home."²⁷ Our awareness that Rowena's description of the film is part of a drama being enacted in the theatre in no way diminishes the mental or physical revulsion that the speech produces. If viewers, like the judge, do not already know that such films do indeed exist, the policewoman verifies this fact:

...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)

By placing the description of the film at the conclusion of the play, Daniels ensures that audiences cannot help but think about it. The account of the film forms the final and therefore freshest images that they take home with them.

Many of the theatrical techniques Daniels uses to convey her argument throughout *Masterpieces* may be described as 'filmic' in nature. The visual power of such techniques, however, can overshadow at times the narrative fabric that weaves the play together. While Daniels has admitted that neither plot nor character was uppermost in her mind in the construction of *Masterpieces*, she nevertheless provides a central storyline which is linked in some measure with every character and idea in the play. Rowena's 'journey', like that of Betty's and Mary's in *Gateway* and *Ripen*, is a gradual process of feminist awakening: a series of epiphanies that leads not only to deeper understanding about herself and the society in which she lives, but, in her particular case, to a moment of tragic consequence. Her discoveries, similar to those of Betty's and Mary's as well, are encouraged both by her links with a female friend (and a client)

and the strengthening of her relationship with her mother. Unlike the journeys of protagonists in previous plays, however, Rowena's operates on a much broader level. Her journey may be viewed as a means for Daniels to further the 'evidence' against pornography within the play's trial framework. Thus, while Rowena's story is not the main focus of the play, it helps to strengthen the focus of a broader social argument.

As Rowena's journey progresses, she comes to discover the links between pornography and violence towards women through interaction with characters from a wide social spectrum: working-class, middle-class, the legal and psychiatric professions, the young and the old. It would be short-sighted, however, to view all such characters in the play as relevant only so far as their stories are brought to bear on Rowena's situation. While other characters and their relationships do not form subplots in themselves, they nevertheless form vital self-contained episodes illustrating a single point or piece of evidence in Daniels' argument. (The encounter between Yvonne and Irene Wade and Jennifer's marital disputes with Clive are two examples.) Daniels' inclusion of such a wide spectrum of characters illustrates, moreover, her concern to show the way in which pornography can infiltrate and affect people on every social level. Hilary's scene-length monologue, for example, which, as Aston observes, cuts across the middle-class marriage scenes of the other women, is a vital illustration of this.²⁸ My discussion of the play's secondary characters, however, will be limited primarily to their function in the context of Rowena's narrative.

As mentioned earlier, the transition from Rowena's presentation in Scene One as an affable, optimistic social worker to a defendant for murder in a criminal court in Scene Two leaves many unanswered questions for the spectator. Daniels' juxtaposition of these scenes and her temporal fragmentation of later scenes are effective means of reflecting the wayward and often unpredictable nature of any journey. Rowena does not consciously embark on a quest for enlightenment and feminist awakening. To her mind, she is already a liberal-thinking individual aware of many of society's social and economic inequalities. In Scene One, for example, when Ron requests that Rowena send him a "nice girl" for the job he is offering, she points out: "Even 'nice' people can't

get work these days, Ron." (p.174) And when Yvonne expresses strong anti-pornography views, Rowena counters: "You can't be so one-sided, Yvonne." (p.173) Rowena's attitude towards pornography might be considered by many to reflect that of any reasonable, well-adjusted woman: "I've never thought about it much. I suppose if women want to do it and men want to look at it, where's the harm?" (p.172) Daniels' point here is crucial: that such is the extent to which women are conditioned to accept pornography and, for fear of being seen as prudish, even condone it, that its dangers remain masked and its messages allowed to persist. Rowena's depiction as an average, well-educated woman who, despite daily dealings with social injustice, sees no need to challenge perhaps one of the greatest forces perpetuating that injustice, only reinforces the insidious nature of pornography's myths.

Throughout Rowena's journey these myths are gradually defused by a series of awakenings sparked by the protagonist's friend, Yvonne, her client, Hilary, and her mother, Jennifer. Both the discoveries Rowena makes and their repercussions on those around her are vital in establishing the connections between Scenes One and Two. Although these connections are asequentially presented, by the end of the play a sense of chronology nevertheless persists in Rowena's narrative. In retrospect, we come to understand the climactic and fatal action of the protagonist with, at the very least, an awareness of the emotional logic that led her to such a moment. In Scene One, Yvonne's challenge of her friend's complacent acceptance of pornography is the first step in Rowena's journey to this moment. Rowena's attempt to defend pornography from a sociological point of view, for example, is countered vehemently by Yvonne who tries to prove such false logic:

ROWENA. Maybe it does have a positive side.
To enable inadequate men to act out their
fantasies, save them from attacking anyone
on the street.

YVONNE. Does social work for the child-batterer
consist of showing them pictures of parents
torturing their children, with the children
appearing to enjoy it -- as a preventative measure?

ROWENA. (*unsure*). No. (pp. 172 - 73.)

Yvonne's challenge as well as her air of passionate conviction about the subject plant seeds of doubt in Rowena which, by Scene Five, have evidently taken root. From an issue she admits to never having "thought about...much" (p.172), pornography comes to occupy a greater portion of her thoughts. In this scene, for example, she moves beyond simply commenting on the "change" in Yvonne and tries to come up with possible reasons for this change. She points out to Trevor that it couldn't be easy for her friend to be "married to a man who pretends to be a reincarnation of Jack the Lad", and refers contemptuously to Ron's "banal jokes". (p.190) When Trevor criticises Yvonne for 'finding her tongue' and ruining the atmosphere of the evening, Rowena retorts, "Maybe she had a point, she's unhappy." (p.191) Although Rowena still doesn't make connections between Yvonne's actual "points" (for example, "It [pornography] is violence, violence against women" p.173) and her own recent fears of attack while walking home in the dark, she nevertheless expresses a desire to know more about pornography -- a subject which she admits she has "never looked at...before". (p.191)²⁹ She asks Trevor to bring home some of the porn magazines from his workplace and jokes, "Never know, it might improve my night life." (p.191) From this point forward, the tragic irony of this statement resounds repeatedly in our ears. Rowena's introduction to the realities of pornography will not only initiate the demise of her relationship with Trevor, but bring about the eventual late night disaster on the tube and consequent debarrment from any "night life" in prison.

Rowena's awakening to the actual graphics of pornography and the messages they transmit is brought about not by Trevor, but by her friend Yvonne. This scene (Eight) in which Yvonne shows Rowena (at her own request) porn magazines confiscated at school proves a crucial turning point in the protagonist's journey. From a state of disbelief and incomprehension at Yvonne's analysis of her own unhappiness ("Men, it's all to do with the way men are taught to view women" p.202), Rowena moves to a state of shocked recognition. Finally she sees and begins to understand the reasons for Yvonne's anger. Her initial reaction to the magazines (viewed in conjunction with the

previously discussed voice-over monologues) is a moving moment in the play as true recognition hits the once sceptical and naive social worker with full force: "How they must hate us." (p.204) Trevor's chance intrusion into the garden scene allows us to observe the immediate effects of Rowena's discovery. From a subject about which the couple used to discuss with humour, pornography now becomes the focus of bitter argument. Rowena tries initially, however, to make Trevor see the material in the same way that she has just seen it:

ROWENA (*picks up a magazine*). Read that bit.

TREVOR. Yes, yes...atrocious, very badly written.
(*Slight pause.*) Rubbish.

ROWENA. Badly written? Trevor? These things
go into millions of homes.

TREVOR. So does *Crossroads*, no need to get
hysterical.

ROWENA. Next you'll be telling me to keep a stiff
upper lip.

TREVOR (*calmly*). Rowena, love...

ROWENA. Don't you 'Rowena love' me.

TREVOR (*lightly*). I've started so I'll finish. I might
be able to understand if I were a real pig but don't
forget I was the one who introduced you to the
Female Eunuch -- the book as opposed to Yvonne.

ROWENA (*unbelieving*). Trevor!

TREVOR. Don't I do my share of the housework, the
shopping, cooking...? ...
...I've never raped anyone. I've never so much as
attacked a single woman.

ROWENA. So that makes it okay.

TREVOR. In my book I should think so...

...

ROWENA. I want you to understand.

TREVOR. To understand? To understand what? That
you want total hostility between people in the street?

ROWENA. Trev...

TREVOR. Well, that's what you've got in your own back garden. (pp.204-6)

Trevor's unmitigated position of self-defence and his failure to understand the true sources of Rowena's anger prove a decisive moment in the play. As if to signal Rowena's turning point and the likely death of her and Trevor's relationship, the lights fade on stage as Trevor exits and there is an interval.

The scene following the interval brings to light the full repercussions of Scene Eight. Daniels moves us forward several months here to Rowena's psychiatric interrogation following the death of Charles Williams. Although the immediate precedent for Rowena's violent action is still not revealed at this point, the scene nevertheless uncovers many of the changes in her life following her 'awakening' in the previous scene. Through a series of leading and often sexist questions put by the psychiatrist, we learn of Rowena's conscious effort to gain further knowledge about the sex industry, her extreme and escalating anger at "the way women are viewed by men" (p.206), her change in dress habits, the end to her sexual relationship with Trevor and her subsequent leave-taking of him. More striking than these factual changes in Rowena's life, however, is the transformation that has taken place in her character. From her "hesitant" approbation of sexist jokes or her 'liberal' criticism of Yvonne's "one-sided" stance against pornography in Scene One, Rowena now shows no hesitation in condemning both the sexism she sees rampant in society as well as that displayed by the psychiatrist. Her answers to his probing questions are uttered with fearlessness, logic and wit:

PSYCHIATRIST. ...You lost all sense of reality at this time.

ROWENA. Quite the opposite. I gained all sense of reality.

PSYCHIATRIST. You also lost your sense of humour. That's true, is it not?

ROWENA. How can it be? You've made me laugh twice.

PSYCHIATRIST. As you are quite well aware, on neither occasion was I making a joke.

ROWENA. Then maybe you're in the wrong profession.

PSYCHIATRIST. What I meant was, I am given to understand, that during the last few months you wore jeans constantly.

ROWENA. If you believe that's a symptom of madness, I'd keep quiet if I were you.

PSYCHIATRIST. And in the last six months before you left your husband, your sexual life was unsatisfactory.

ROWENA. No. We didn't do it, which was very satisfactory as far as I'm concerned. (p.208)

In addition to highlighting significant changes in Rowena, this scene serves on a larger scale as a vehicle of indictment against the institution of psychiatry. Like the attacks upon it dramatised in *Ripen* and *Neoptide*, Daniels here ridicules the absurd prejudices based entirely on gender articulated by males in the profession. In the particular context of *Masterpieces*, however, Daniels goes one step further by showing how the "psychiatric battering" (p.208) suffered by Rowena (and Irene Wade) may be linked ideologically to the continuum of male violence against women in society. Both women are 'analysed' solely in terms of their femininity or 'crimes' of disobedience (especially sexual) against received standards of female or, in Irene's case, motherly behaviour. The psychiatric report on Rowena read aloud in court states that she is: "...removed, vague, uninvolved, and failed to maintain normal, acceptable patterns of communication. Prudish to the point of being sexually repressed -- frigid." (p.226) The psychiatrists' failure to attach any importance to, or indeed to mention, the severely traumatising effect of the snuff film on Rowena is a telling omission. Nowhere in the play, in fact, is the killer in the film (or its makers) penalised or even condemned by either of the psychiatric or legal institutions. Davis comments:

The irony that Daniels concentrates on is that the only 'true' victim society accepts is the Underground fatality; incest, threats, rape,

sexual harassment, domestic violence, and sexual assault go unnoticed and unacknowledged, yet a fatal shove into the path of an oncoming train could not fail to be reported and successfully prosecuted. In the filmic product of this system, the director of *Smuff* is not prosecuted and the cinematic evidence is unsuppressed.³⁰

Rowena's active resistance against this "system" during her trial in Scene Sixteen is depicted as the final stage in her process of feminist awakening. Before examining this scene, however, several more steps crucial to her arrival at this stage should be considered. As mentioned, Rowena is guided along her journey to a certain extent by other women in her life. By now a feature of Daniels' early work (and that of numerous women writing at this time), strengthening of the mother-daughter bond is seen as intrinsic to feminist awareness and self-growth. In Scene Eleven, Rowena pays a solo visit to her mother -- a rare occurrence as we gather from Jennifer's genuine surprise. Even rarer is Rowena's purpose for the visit: "to talk". (p.214) That relations between mother and daughter have not been close in the past is made clear in Scene One where Rowena is often embarrassed by and quick to criticise Jennifer's "batty" behaviour. At the start of their visit in Scene Eleven, tension and a mutual resistance to closeness is still present:

ROWENA. Mother, do you have to act batty all the time?

JENNIFER. Do you want me to act bitter?

ROWENA. It was a stupid idea me coming to see you.

JENNIFER (*sits down*). Rowena, I am far too inhibited to proceed into an embarrassing mother-daughter baring of soul, but I am only half as obnoxious as I appear. What brings you here?

ROWENA. Nothing, I only wanted a chat. (p.215)

Jennifer's humour soon cracks the ice, however, and a kind of "baring of soul" takes place despite her initial resistance. Rowena's desire to question her mother's marital happiness would suggest that this scene takes place at some point during her own

unhappy six months with Trevor following the garden episode. Daniels points again to the force of Rowena's awakening in this episode by displaying the extent to which her ways of thinking and viewing matters have been transformed. Heightened awareness of women's objectified representation in society allows Rowena to respond to her mother's disclosures with a corresponding level of social critique:

ROWENA. Does he [Clive] still have affairs?

JENNIFER. He tries but he can't fulfil the false image in his head of how a woman should behave.

ROWENA. Because women's sexual identity has been manufactured. (p.216)

Jennifer's revelations of sexual slavery to Clive are in themselves telling comments on the way in which the degradation and objectification of women seen in pornographic material can be transferred to the dynamics of intimate, private relationships, regardless of the age of individuals. Once Jennifer stops "bending over backwards, literally" (p.216) for Clive, their relationship falters drastically and Clive retreats to nightly viewings from his sex video library for consolation. When Rowena learns of Jennifer's previous attempt to rebel against this library ("I did once dump the lot in a bucket of water" p.217), she joins forces with her mother to repeat the action. Like Yvonne's action in convicting the student rapist, Rowena now takes steps to break the chain of violence and injustice towards women.

The joining of forces, or coming together of women in *Masterpieces* (an aspect common to Daniels' previous plays as well) is featured most prominently in Scene Thirteen where Jennifer, Rowena and Yvonne gather for a picnic in spring. Daniels devotes the entire scene to this pastoral episode, the only occasion in the play where the atmosphere is "*warm and relaxed*" and "*the pace is slow*". (p.222) Certain features of the radical feminist dynamic may be noted here. For example, the three women, together in a natural, conflict-free zone, seem to recover strength as they recall past innocence and happier, freer times. Unlike their unnatural laughter in Scene One, there is healthy laughter between them here and the promise of future happiness as Jennifer

proposes a trip to Greece for the three. The scene is notable not only for its being the only haven of peace in the play but for its distinct absence of even the mention of men. Jennifer's campaign of self-regeneration is all the more remarkable for its total independence from the man to whom all her previous efforts at self-improvement were directed. Yvonne and Rowena, in the absence of partners highly critical of each friend, seem to renew their old schoolday friendship. We recall the strengthening of their alliance in the previous scene as well when the two joined forces against their partners during an explosive argument.

The dinner party episode in Scene Twelve dramatises another turning point not just for Rowena, but for Trevor, Yvonne and Ron as well: by the end of the scene, two marriages are effectively dissolved. In terms of Rowena's journey, the scene depicts another occasion of brutal awakening. Despite her awareness of the difficulties and prejudices faced by former 'working girls' trying to re-enter the 'proper' job market, the social worker nevertheless is truly shocked at the discovery of Ron's sexual harassment and rape of Hilary. Rowena's anger at Ron is exacerbated not only by Trevor's inability to understand the implications of his friend's action, but by Ron's own blasé attitude towards and distortion of events. The argument sparked by Rowena's confrontation of Ron escalates into a furious row involving both couples. Alliances between each pair (or whatever remain of them) immediately shift and a situation of gender warfare ensues. Although the argument descends into a bout of name calling and mudslinging towards the end, what Daniels underscores from the start is the irreconcilability of the issues at hand. What she suggests is that so long as we live in a society which can produce men like Ron who feel it their right to exploit women sexually, or men like Trevor who refuse to bear any responsibility towards this kind of society (because they themselves feel not personally to blame), then the continuum of violence will be perpetuated and true understanding and equality between the sexes cannot be achieved. Viewed in this light, the breakdown of the couples' marriages stems as much from social inadequacies as it does from personal incompatibility. The level of anger and misunderstanding between the sexes dramatised in this episode is thus a measure of the

distance both men and women must travel before more equal and harmonious relations can exist.

While Daniels' male characters do not cover any of this distance during the course of the play, her female characters set out in various directions. We have seen, for example, how the sharing of experiences between women -- women on different economic and generational levels -- can promote solidarity, greater social understanding, and a degree of self-empowerment. As in her previous plays, Daniels stresses in *Masterpieces* that self-empowerment must also be achieved through acts of resistance to oppression and injustice. These acts, more often than not, are fuelled by anger and outrage. Jennifer's empowerment, for example, results not only from her experiences with her menopausal women's group (which Daniels spoofs on some level), but, more seriously, from her ability to unleash the "acrimonious recriminations" against Clive which she had kept "bottled up" for years. (p.216) Both Yvonne and Rowena's examples of resistance and direct confrontation of violence against women are similarly accompanied by unleashing of outrage. Although the anger of these women is depicted positively as a starting point for countering social injustice, Daniels also allows us to see the traumatic effects and personal costs that such anger can hold. Through Rowena's story, of course, this is most vividly dramatised.

The tube incident of Scene Fourteen -- a scene disarmingly juxtaposed with the previous picnic episode -- finally uncovers visually the circumstances of Rowena's fatal action. The fact that we are not apprised even at this point of the immediate precedent for Rowena's state of mind indicates an unwillingness on the part of the playwright to attribute the snuff film as the sole reason for her violent response to harassment. While the traumatising effect of the film is made clear in Scenes Sixteen and Seventeen, we are encouraged, nevertheless, to view Rowena's action as a 'last straw' response to a whole series of awakenings to and experiences of violence against women in society. In Daniels' words:

She'd [Rowena] just had enough and she pushed him. She in my mind didn't intend to kill him; it was an absolute act of

adrenalin and fury. She wasn't going to take anymore.³¹

Daniels stresses the cumulative nature of Rowena's anger in Scene Fourteen by reminding us immediately afterwards of the profound impact on her as well of Hilary's disclosure of Ron's rape. Presented as a pre-recorded episode while Rowena stands in the shadow of a policewoman before trial,³² Hilary's revelation lingers in our mind during the trial as we hear Rowena's revelation of the snuff film. Daniels' placement of Hilary's disclosure so close to this revelation of sexual crime reinforces, moreover, the interrelation between the two events: both are direct links in a cycle of violence towards women. That Rowena's journey has led her to a full and painful awareness of the workings of this cycle is made clear in her presentation of self-defence. Having previously pleaded "not guilty" in Scene Two, Rowena, instead of defending her action, turns the tables and proceeds to prosecute a criminal justice system which perpetuates violence against women by sanctioning it legally. Echoes of Jennifer's comments to her daughter 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." p.216) may be heard in Rowena's citation of examples:

Douglas Coles pleaded guilty to the manslaughter of his wife and got two years' probation because it was proved she was neurotic and nagged. Gordon Asher strangled his wife and got a six-month suspended sentence. (p.226)

Daniels' indictment of the criminal justice system in this scene is double-pronged: not only are Rowena's examples of 'real-life' cases used to condemn the court's extreme sexual prejudice, but the judge's patronising dismissal of these examples as "irrelevant material" (p.227) illustrates the continuation of this prejudice. The court's further dismissal of Rowena's explanations ("it was a coincidence") as well as the 'evidence' of the snuff film ("an irrelevant fabrication" p.228), reveal disturbingly its sole determination in the trial: the vilification of Rowena. The judge not only condemns her act as "calculated", but implies a degree of madness in her by his use of the term "fanatical" to describe her beliefs. (p.228) Incredibly, the only true calculating murderer

in the play is never sentenced but left free to kill more women for pleasure and profit. Through the play's trial framework, however, Daniels ensures that the snuff film killer is condemned. Rowena's harrowing account of his crime in the final scene lays before a far greater number of judges indisputable evidence of Daniels' argument. The theatre thus becomes a more appropriate and, hopefully, effective forum wherein the calls for social justice demanded by the play may continue to be fought for both on- and off-stage.

Masterpieces, winner of the 1983 *Plays and Players* Most Promising Playwright Award, is Daniels' only play to have received not just one, but two transfers. To this day it is not only her most frequently revived play (nationally and internationally³³), but is regarded generally as a classic of feminist theatre. The resounding success of *Masterpieces* may be attributed to a number of factors: the quality of the play's writing and innovative form, the highly charged reaction its subject provokes, and, disturbingly, its continued relevance through the years.

From its opening at Manchester's Royal Exchange Theatre (May 1983) to its transfers at the Royal Court Theatre Upstairs (October 1983) and the main auditorium (January 1984), *Masterpieces* managed to arouse debate, outrage and ridicule to a degree surpassing any of the playwright's other works. Daniels' 'notoriety' amongst a predominantly male critical establishment had its beginnings, we may recall, as far back as *Ripen* and *Ma's Flesh* -- plays which elicited what would become, from certain critics, a steady stream of vitriol against the playwright. Tim Brown, for example, heralded *Ma's Flesh*, "Sarah Daniels' little black comedy", as "a welcome breath of halitosis."³⁴ In addition to 'pitying' the play's "lack of form", he scattered his review with random stabs at Daniels' "aimlessness" and the "embarrassing inadequacy" of certain scenes. Irving Wardle, reviewing *Ripen*, displayed not only condescension, but cavalier dismissiveness: "At the age of 24 Sarah Daniels must count as a second generation feminist, and if this first play is a portent of what the sisterhood is now

brewing up then male chauvinism can breathe again."³⁵ Just as easily as Wardle dismissed Daniels' feminism, Milton Shulman obliterated any possibility of the connection between this feminism and political protest in *Gateway*: "*The Devil's Gateway* ...will confirm suspicions that the Greenham women are motivated more by a spirit of revenge than dedication to mankind's survival."³⁶ Although some critics were more magnanimous ("I concede the writing sometimes has a surreal vitality", said Michael Billington about *Ripen*³⁷), the majority of reviewers, including some women, felt it more important to prove to this 'savagely' feminist, misguided young writer that all men were not "brutes" rather than to review the actual content and form of her plays. Mary Remnant, in a well documented assessment of the critical reaction to Daniels' early work, summarises what she terms critics' "gut" rather than "aesthetic" responses to this work:

At best patronising ('Much may be forgiven a first play by a girl of twenty-four...there is a good deal that does have to be forgiven' -- John Barber, reviewing *Ripen Our Darkness* in the *Telegraph*) many reviews degenerated into strings of breathless adjectives: 'man-hating', 'fanatical', 'raging', 'wrathful', 'vitriolic', 'embittered', 'furious', 'savage', 'bilious', 'rancorous', 'blasphemous', 'outrageous', 'incensed', 'aggressive', 'obsessive', 'strident' and 'shrill' were all used to describe Daniels' writing.³⁸

Clearly, even by the toughest theatrical standards for any new writer, Daniels is a playwright more sinned against than sinning. Remnant attributes part of the reason for this to the fact that Daniels, one of the few women playwrights in Britain to reach mainstream audiences, is addressing a section of the public not yet ready to accept a woman writing so politically for the stage.³⁹ I would go one step further and add that mainstream audiences were (and, still to a large extent, are) not ready to accept a woman writing politically *and* unapologetically so. Daniels, one critic observes, "makes no pretence at presenting both sides of an argument".⁴⁰ Much of the force of Daniels' plays, however, lies precisely in their unwillingness to skirt around difficult, contentious, or painful issues -- issues which the majority of the time involve male

collusion, be it deliberate or unwitting, in the oppression and denigration of women today and throughout history. As mentioned with respect to *Gateway*, however, what many male reviewers failed to see in these plays was that Daniels was not attacking men so much as individuals, but as appendages of male institutions of power which seek to subjugate women. We have seen in *Ripen* how the playwright carefully connected each male character to some patriarchal institution of male control. In *Gateway* the institution of marriage was shown up as an oppressive force for women, and in *Neaptide*, male representatives (and, in the case of Claire's school, female representatives) of the institutions of psychiatry, education, the law and marriage were brought under similar critical scrutiny.

If the vitriol against these early plays is a measure of Daniels' ability to hit sensitive nerves in her viewers, then the force of attack against *Masterpieces* suggests that she ripped open a public wound. Initially riled by what they saw as the playwright's 'one-sided' portrayal of male physical and psychological violence against women in the early plays, critics such as Wardle, Shulman and Francis King saw in Daniels' more extreme condemnation of this violence in *Masterpieces* practically an open declaration of gender warfare. Wardle spends much of his review making clear whose 'side' he is on by sympathising with the 'poor' male actors who had to play such "beasts". He comments, for example, on the "selfless William Hoyland" who managed to offer a "generous display of unspeakable male stereotypes".⁴¹ Shulman and King fight back by issuing threats of a resurgence of misogynistic behaviour from men if Daniels insists on writing such 'wrathful' plays:

Unfortunately Miss Daniels has coupled her resentment against the sadistic exploitation of women with her obvious loathing of men in such a way that she comes close to inciting the very behaviour she deplors.⁴²

Unlike 'misogyny', the word 'misandry' does not appear in the OED. But if we continue to have plays like Sarah Daniels's *Masterpieces* ...then clearly a place will have to be found for it in the next supplement.⁴³

While some male reviewers did have positive things to say about the play, few could resist the impulse to wallow in defensive self-pity. Michael Coveney, for example, started out by admiring Daniels' cinematic treatment of Rowena's awakening and Hilary's "marvellous monologue", but added immediately, "As a man, of course, there is nothing to feel throughout the play except shame or superiority. None of us, surely, is as loathsome".⁴⁴

Female reviewers, on the other hand, with some exceptions, displayed what Remnant summarises as "warmth and shocked recognition" towards the play.⁴⁵ An element of empathy is evident in many of their responses, such as Carole Woddis': "Daniels confronts with a good deal of courage the central dilemma of what women do with anger and resentment in their most immediate domestic situations when their awareness has been aroused".⁴⁶ Ann McFerran, while expressing reservations about the credibility of Daniels' argument, describes *Masterpieces* as "heartfelt" and "pungent".⁴⁷

Interestingly, the only common characteristic shared by female and male reviewers was their tendency to respond primarily to the play's issues or argument rather than to its theatrical or technical aspects. In this sense, the very strength of Daniels' argument may be perceived in dramatic terms as the play's central weakness. Although Daniels writes more tautly here than perhaps in any other play, the deliberation of her every word or gesture to elucidate issues eclipses at times the innovation of her technique and draws our attention from the stage into the realm of debate. One may argue, however, that a play's ability to arouse debate is the ultimate measure of its success. In this regard, the success of *Masterpieces* is indisputable. Not only reviewers' reactions but those of the general viewer attest to its power. Daniels describes a typical audience after a performance: "...people used to leave the theatre in a terrible rage, arguing and shouting at each other."⁴⁸ For a playwright whose goal was to bring some of the traditionally academic-based feminist arguments against pornography to a wider audience, Daniels ironically expresses surprise at such reaction:

...I was very shocked at how the play was received. Because that was my world, I had no idea that people would be shocked

at what the play was saying. Half of me thought...'everybody knows these arguments; maybe it's not saying anything new.' So it was a big shock to me when people would come out of the theatre very angry or arguing, or saying it was a load of rubbish.⁴⁹

The strength of reaction *Masterpieces* provokes reflects not only the playwright's success at conveying her argument with theatrical force and clarity, but the divisive nature of the argument itself. The issue of pornography and its function in society has long been a subject for heated debate -- debate between pornography's producers and legislators, between men and women, between pro- and anti-censorship feminists.⁵⁰ *Masterpieces* is clearly a major contribution to the pro-censorship side of this debate, aligning itself, as mentioned earlier in the chapter, with the more vociferous of other contributors, such as Dworkin, Coward, or voices from WAVAW.⁵¹ While the play, thus, attempts to disprove many of the anti-censorship arguments, Daniels' inclusion of these voices gives it greater social resonance.⁵² The fact that *Masterpieces* continues to be debated off-stage and revived on new stages a decade after its first appearance points to an ever present need in society for the play's issues to be addressed. In the trial scene where Rowena reads aloud examples of legally sanctioned violence against women, Daniels includes the following stage direction: "*In future productions more up-to-date examples can be substituted for these.*" (p.226) In November 1993 in Toronto, director Elizabeth Shepherd had no trouble in substituting recent Canadian examples in this scene. Shepherd's premiere of *Masterpieces* at Toronto's Alumnae Theatre was more than just a theatrical event, it was an occasion to raise public awareness about pornography and its perpetuation of violence against women -- issues as deeply relevant in Canadian as in British society. Shepherd, along with other women from the Alumnae Theatre Company, decided to stage *Masterpieces* in conjunction with the December 6 anniversary of the mass murder of women engineering students at Montreal's Ecole Polytechnique. Considerable effort was made, furthermore, to connect the issues of *Masterpieces* to even more recent events in Canada. Not only were examples of gross legal injustice towards women incorporated into the text of the play (in Scene Sixteen),

but news stories about rape and murder as well as quotations from famous women writers literally papered both inside and outside theatre walls. At the time of this production as well, the most highly publicised trial in Canadian history involving the rape, mutilation and killing of teenage girls for the alleged purpose of making snuff videos was taking place.⁵³ Reference to this case and its horrifying relevance to *Masterpieces* was made by Shepherd during an open forum she hosted in the theatre following the performance on December 5. Amongst the guest speakers at the forum (entitled "Pornography, Violence and Men's Images of Women") was Daniels herself who concluded her informal talk with the following statement: "I wrote it [*Masterpieces*] ten years ago -- the tragedy is is that it is still being performed." Shepherd, on the other hand, sees hope in the play's ability to speak still so freshly to actors and audiences and, most importantly, to challenge public opinion.⁵⁴ Her highly politicised production of *Masterpieces* was not only an event of timely social significance, but a tribute to the playwright.

¹*Plays: One* (London: Methuen Drama, 1991), p. xi.

²Taped lecture given by Daniels to graduate students at the University of Toronto, 8 December 1993.

³Taped lecture given by Daniels to students at York University, Toronto, 6 December 1993.

⁴*Op. cit.*, n. 2.

⁵*Ibid.*

⁶*Op. cit.*, n. 3.

⁷*Op. cit.*, n. 2.

⁸*Ibid.*

⁹'Sexual Violence and Sexuality' in *Sexuality*, p. 307. Coward reveals that this slogan is closely associated with Women Against Violence Against Women in Britain.

¹⁰'I Want a Twenty-Four-Hour Truce During Which There Is No Rape', in *Letters From a War Zone* (New York: Lawrence Hill, 1993; London: Secker & Warburg, 1988), p. 164.

¹¹'Violence Against Women: It Breaks the Heart, Also the Bones', in *Letters*, p. 177. See also *Pornography: Men Possessing Women* (London: The Women's Press, 1981).

¹²Talk given at the University of Sheffield, 25 February 1993.

¹³'*Extremities and Masterpieces: A Feminist Paradigm of Art and Politics*', *Modern Drama*, 32 (1989), p. 96.

¹⁴*An Introduction to Feminism and Theatre* (London: Routledge, 1995), p. 129.

¹⁵In the original production these figures were all played by the actor who plays Clive.

¹⁶*Op. cit.*, n. 1. All references to *Masterpieces* are taken from this edition and will be listed parenthetically in the text.

¹⁷*Op. cit.*, n. 13, p. 96.

¹⁸*Ibid.*

¹⁹*Op. cit.*, n. 14, p. 130.

²⁰*Guardian*, 12 October 1983.

²¹*City Limits*, 21-27 October 1983.

²²*The Times*, 12 October 1983.

²³*Guardian*, 2 June 1983.

²⁴'The Power of Sex: English Plays by Women, 1958-1988', *New Theatre Quarterly*, 7 (1991), p. 241.

²⁵Interview with Jane Edwardes, *Time Out*, 9-16 February 1994.

²⁶Daniels acknowledges Dusty Rhodes for seeing the film and letting her use her description of it as published in *Revolutionary and Radical Feminist Newsletter*, Autumn 1982, Common Ground Community Print Shop, Sheffield.

²⁷Ann McFerran, *Time Out*, [n.d.] October 1983.

²⁸*Op. cit.*, n. 14, p. 131.

²⁹Trevor R. Griffiths writes: "...Rowena is a problem on a naturalistic level because it seems incredible that a social worker of her age has never come across pornography before." 'Waving not drowning: The mainstream, 1979-88' in *British and Irish Women Dramatists Since 1958*, p.61.

Daniels never makes any claims to confining *Masterpieces* to a "naturalistic level". Her numerous experimental devices should provide ample evidence of this.

³⁰*Op. cit.*, n. 13, p. 101.

³¹*Op. cit.*, n. 3.

³²In the original Royal Court Writers Series version of *Masterpieces* (London: Methuen, 1984), this pre-recorded encounter between Hilary and Rowena is played, at the suggestion of director Jules Wright, with Rowena sitting on a childhood swing. In subsequent publications, Daniels reverted to her original idea mentioned here.

³³In addition to frequent amateur revivals in the U.K., *Masterpieces* has been staged abroad in Japan, New Zealand, Australia, Germany, Austria, the United States and Canada. (See Appendix II.)

³⁴*Morning Telegraph*, 27 November 1981.

³⁵*The Times*, 8 September 1981.

³⁶*Evening Standard*, 30 August 1983.

³⁷*Guardian*, 8 September 1981.

³⁸*Plays by Women*, Vol. 6 (London: Methuen, 1987), p. 8.

³⁹*Ibid.*, p. 7.

⁴⁰*Op. cit.*, n. 29, p. 59.

⁴¹*Op. cit.*, n. 22.

⁴²Milton Shulman, *Evening Standard*, 12 October 1983.

⁴³Francis King, *Sunday Telegraph*, 16 October 1983.

⁴⁴*Financial Times*, 12 October 1983.

⁴⁵*Op. cit.*, n. 38.

⁴⁶*City Limits*, 21-27 October 1983.

⁴⁷*Op. cit.*, n. 27.

⁴⁸*Op. cit.*, n. 3.

⁴⁹*Op. cit.*, n. 2.

⁵⁰For an account of the debate between feminists over representations of pornography in performance see Jill Dolan's 'The Dynamics of Desire: Sexuality and Gender in Pornography and Performance', *Theatre Journal*, 39 (1987), 156-74.

⁵¹See, for example, the collection of papers from conferences held in Leeds, Manchester and London in the early 1980s in *Women Against Violence Against Women*, ed. by Dusty Rhodes and Sandra McNeill (London: Onlywomen Press, 1985).

⁵²Although many of the anti-censorship campaigns or organisations in Britain were formed after *Masterpieces* had been written (for example, Feminists Against Censorship in 1989, or the Feminist Anti-Censorship Task Force -- FACT -- in 1984), their engagement with the debate may be seen as having been fuelled by the rising tide of anti-pornography campaigns, government legislation against obscene material, civil liberties cases in the courts and media, and, owing to Daniels, anti-porn arguments in the theatre too. For an account of the Feminists Against Censorship's origins and position see Gillian Rodgeron and Linda Semple's 'Who Watches the Watchwomen?: Feminists Against Censorship', in *Imagining Women: Cultural Representations and Gender*, ed. by Frances Bonner and others (Oxford: Polity Press, 1992); see also, for example, Ellen Willis' arguments against censorship in 'Feminism, Moralism and Pornography', in *Powers of Desire: The Politics of Sexuality*, ed. by A. Snitow, C. Stansell and S. Thompson (New York: Monthly Review Press, The New Feminist Library, 1983).

⁵³The case against Paul Bernardo was finally concluded in August 1995, with two life sentences for first-degree murder, rape and assault handed down in the Ontario Courts. Although videos were made of the torture and mutilation of teenage girls by Bernardo and his wife (Karla Homolka, also tried and convicted earlier), they were found to be for 'personal' rather than commercial use.

⁵⁴Interview with the director at Metro Hall, Toronto, 9 December 1993.

CHAPTER FOUR

History Plays

If Daniels' goal in the early to mid-eighties was to bring the voices of contemporary women to the stage, in the latter part of the decade she turned to history's forgotten female voices. Two plays emerge in this period: *Byrthrite* (1986), a Royal Court commission, and *The Gut Girls* (1988), a commission from Teddy Kiendl who also directed it at Deptford's Albany Empire. Both plays I have termed 'history' plays in that they not only share a similar concern to dramatise aspects of women's lives in particular historical eras, but both re-examine 'history' itself and challenge traditional male representations of it. Since Sheila Rowbotham's seminal study in the 1970s, feminism's attempts to redress women's 'hidden from history' status have blossomed into one of the liveliest areas of current feminist scholarship and writing.¹ Not surprisingly, thus, Daniels is not the first female playwright to turn to women from the past as viable theatrical subjects. As Helene Keyssar has pointed out, many feminist playwrights in the 1970s (e.g. Pam Gems, Caryl Churchill, Megan Terry) were re-examining history through theatre as a means to "...challeng[e] perceptions of rigid distinctions between men and women."² Daniels, too, takes up this challenge. Her plays suggest, moreover, that the foremost of 'rigid distinctions' to be tackled is the very notion of women writing, or re-writing, history. In Part Two, Scene Two of *Byrthrite*, Helen asks her husband, the village parson, if she may help him in his recording of history into his diary. The Parson's reply is both condescending and emphatic: "Don't be foolish, women don't make history."³ Daniels' choice of the word "make" instead of "write" is important. In one sense the Parson is right: throughout the centuries women have not 'made' the wars, revolutions, or societal laws and institutions that we now deem 'history'. Nor, until relatively recently, have their voices, struggles and lives 'made it' into the annals, treatises or documents of traditional recorded history. In another sense, however, the Parson is grossly mistaken: both *Byrthrite* and *Gut Girls* demonstrate that women were not only as crucial in 'making' history as men, but their urge to record, understand and even perform it was

equally ambitious. These plays may be viewed thus as active refutations of the Parson's reply.

Daniels' very act of writing about history not only dispels any myths about its being the domain of men, but it redresses a major historical imbalance by placing women's lives as the primary subjects in two important epochs. In the case of *Byrthrite*, moreover, a major theatrical imbalance is redressed in Daniels' creation of a play that explores the roots of a female tradition in theatre. *Byrthrite's* emphasis on women who write for and produce theatre at a time when they were forbidden on the stage points also to the subversive nature still characterising much women's theatre today. Although today, of course, women's work is no longer denied access to the stage, the reception that many of these productions receive (as we see, for example, with respect to *Byrthrite* later) indicates that this work is still subversive, in varying degrees, to a fair percentage of the (male) critical establishment. Plays written in the last two decades by writers or theatre groups such as Daniels, Pam Gems, Caryl Churchill, Deborah Levy, the Women's Theatre Group, or Monstrous Regiment, for example, are seen to fly in the face of conventional notions of 'well made' drama in either their re-workings of 'linear' narrative, traditional comedy, historical and mythological subject matter, or in their uses of humour, language, performance art or alienation techniques that focus our attention directly on bodily or ideological oppression of women by men. Most subversive of all, perhaps, is quite simply these women's creation of female subjectivity on stage where men, for the first time, are very often either peripheral characters or entirely absent from the stage.

While *Byrthrite* and *Gut Girls* are set in entirely different periods (the English Civil War and turn-of-the-century Victorian England) and focus on a variety of distinct subjects, they nevertheless share a remarkable number of features. Both plays, for example, show evidence of much historical research having gone into their making. Daniels confirms the "enormous amount of reading and research" she did for *Byrthrite*⁴ and reveals also extensive research done in local libraries for Kiendl's prescribed commission.⁵ Each play

boasts an abundance of historical detail that delineates the social and economic conditions in which women lived in each era. Moreover, certain characters, especially in *Gut Girls*, are based on actual historical figures -- a fact that emphasises the playwright's concern to dramatise equally women *in* history as well as women *making* history.⁶ In terms of the plays' structural composition, each is divided into two parts, follows a chronological time sequence (with the exception of *Byrthrite's* interpolated songs that carry it into the twentieth century) and is restricted to a small cast with frequent character doubling and even trebling. Neither play focuses on a single protagonist, but rather divides its attention equally amongst a group of women. The action, episodic in nature, shifts continually in both plays between the individual and collective plights and actions of the women. As with *Masterpieces*, *Byrthrite* and *Gut Girls* also share an experimental energy manifested in the plays' form and technical devices. *Byrthrite's* songs, for example, lift the play out of the seventeenth century and draw significant parallels with society's scientific and technological attitudes towards women's bodies today. In *Gut Girls*, Daniels develops a 'snapshot' approach in structuring the play with individual or group portraits of characters being highlighted and then "fading to" subsequent portraits.⁷ Finally, both plays share many thematic concerns: the reclamation and celebration of the lost voices and forgotten deeds of ordinary women from the past, the economic circumscription of their lives, women and class conflict, women and education, women's solidarity and strength, and the power of language and humour. In addressing these themes, moreover, Daniels reveals similar goals in both plays: to depict and critique, first of all, the living conditions and oppression of women in a distinct historical epoch; to look at the ways in which women cope with, combat or seek liberation from their oppression; and, throughout each play, to dramatise women's unique contributions to and shaping of the movements, events and ideas of their time.

Byrthrite

In her introduction to *Plays: One*, Daniels gives a brief indication of what *Byrthrite* is about: "the implications and dangers of reproductive technology for women."⁸ In an interview with Marina Warner, Daniels explains her desire to write on this subject. "I just felt terrified...at the things that were happening, that no one knows about really, and the media represents as kind doctors helping the infertile woman, and making perfect babies for perfect couples..."⁹ Originally intending to write a variation on Mary Shelley's theme of 'man as birthgiver' in *Frankenstein*, Daniels reveals that she "...wanted to write an original piece about man's fantasy to create. The songs were integral to it, to lift it into the twentieth century."¹⁰ Certainly Jalna Hanmer's foreword to the play confirms these ideas to be the primary focus of *Byrthrite*. Not only does she give a precise definition of "reproductive technology", but she lists in some detail recent developments in biotechnology and critiques the lack of reference to women in Governmental reports and discussions of them. She concludes her foreword with the following:

The use of medicine and science controlled by men to challenge the independence and subjectivity of women continues as does the challenge to it by women. The prize is total control over women's reproductive processes and the reproduction of future generations. Women may at last become the vessel, the carrier, if used at all, for the male creation. In *Byrthrite* we return to the origins of this struggle.¹¹

While it is true that much of *Byrthrite* does concern itself with such issues, both Daniels' and Hanmer's emphasis on the implications of reproductive technology for women as the central thrust of the play is somewhat misleading. Despite its opening celebration of midwifery and proclamation of a new baby girl's 'birth right' in "The Birthing Song", the play then winds through myriad issues from play making, poverty and witch hunting to cross-dressing, lesbianism and literacy. Carole Hayman, the play's director, comments that *Byrthrite* is about much more than its programme notes suggested:

The programme notes do set up an expectation that the play is going to address the scientific side of things, which it doesn't. But it exists on lots of levels intellectually and

that's why it has been so interesting to work on, it's probably the most complicated thing I've ever turned my hand to.¹²

Byrthrite's complexity is one of its chief assets and, as certain reviewers have suggested, one of its downfalls. Daniels herself has commented: "With hindsight it might be accused of being too ambitious 'to be quite workable'."¹³ Daniels' ambition is manifested in numerous areas: in the play's straddling of two centuries, in the technical devices used to achieve this effect, in the incorporation of numerous characters and plots, in the use of a seventeenth-century dialect, in the addressing of a plethora of issues and themes, and in the effort to contextualize historically village life for women in the 1640s with special regard to witch hunting, religion, medicine, class conflict, the Civil War and social mood. In addition, Daniels uses many of the issues and situations in the play as sites for modern feminist debate, thus establishing further links intellectually between the two centuries. The result of such ambition is on the one hand a stimulating, fascinating play of almost epic proportions, and, on the other hand, one that fails to convey with any consistency what it is trying to achieve. Notwithstanding the technical difficulty Hayman points to in mounting a play with so many different scenes and locations,¹⁴ one of the chief objections amongst critics may be summed up by Michael Billington who states: "What troubles me about *Byrthrite* is that the story is hard to follow and the arguments never come clearly into focus."¹⁵ Some critics, however, had no trouble in identifying what they took to be the play's central message:

From the first to the last in this new play by Sarah Daniels the message is hammered home: women are the rightful owners of the means of reproduction; technology -- from the knives of the 17th century doctors to the test-tubes of our own -- is the tool with which the male establishment seeks to cut the womb from the gentler sex.¹⁶

Despite the problems and divergent opinions arising from Daniels having "taken on too much" in *Byrthrite*,¹⁷ there can be no doubt that the play deserves serious critical attention. Not only is it innovative and powerful theatrically, but from the point of view of readability, it stands on its own as a provocative, informative and unusual text. Not in any of the playwright's previous or subsequent works can there be found as much intellectual

discussion, debate or feminist polemic amongst characters. Daniels' choice of setting provides ample opportunity for the airing and development of a host of ideas from theories of men, women and power, to considerations of retributive justice, language, and the social construction of gender. Initially, however, the playwright's aim in choosing the seventeenth century seems restricted to drawing modern-day parallels in terms of science, medicine and male control:

I thought that setting it in the seventeenth century -- the time when the role of healer was taken out of the hands of women and established in the (male) profession of doctor -- would give poignancy to the ideas expressed in the play.¹⁸

As the play develops, however, Daniels' seventeenth-century setting proves a useful starting point for making numerous other present-day analogies. The persecution and demonizing of single, deviant or powerful women, for example, are not restricted simply to the era of witch trials in England or France. Although women are not killed in the same manner today for their 'crimes' of deviation, they are still often hunted as witches in society, an example of which we have seen already in *Neaptide* (first performed, coincidentally, in 1986). The cross-dressing of Jane, Rose and Bridget as soldiers in the Civil War is presented in the play not only as a means of escaping persecution at the hands of the Pricker, but, as Daniels elaborates especially in Part Two, as a means of exploring gender as a social construct -- a topic much discussed in current feminist research.¹⁹ As mentioned, *Byrthrite* provides many scenarios where strong echoes of modern feminist debate may be heard. Specifically, Daniels dramatises certain arguments of so-called liberal and radical (or cultural) feminism which, as we shall see, may be equally relevant in the lives of women in previous centuries.²⁰ One final example of a present-day analogy to be made in *Byrthrite* is the subject of playwriting and women's theatre. Rose's burying of her play in the final scene, for example, points not only to the impending Restoration and Queen Anne period in which female voices for the first time were unearthed and heard on the stage in both men's and women's plays,²¹ but it represents also an important branch of current feminist theatre

history research where female-authored dramatic texts and contexts are being recovered.²² As well, Grace and Rose's arguments over playwriting in the eighth scene of Part Two allow Daniels the opportunity to let loose some of her own preoccupations with present-day women's theatre and what is deemed a 'good' play. Such shifting of temporal perspective throughout *Byrthrite* encourages spectators not only to reassess their view of women in history, but to consider what these women can still teach us today. A closer analysis of the play will bring some of these lessons more sharply into focus.

In terms of action, *Byrthrite* follows a relatively straightforward course. In Part One we are presented with a group of diverse women who, trying to escape the persecutions of the Pricker, or 'Womanfinder General',²³ take refuge amongst each other in the clandestine meetings of Grace's theatre group or in the more socially sanctioned attendance of 'lyings-in'. During the course of Part One, Daniels introduces us to characters collectively in the first few scenes and then individually, or in pairs, in subsequent scenes. The play's action reflects this dispersion of focus alternating between the collective efforts of the women to fend off the Pricker and develop alternatives to male oppression, and individual efforts to elude this oppression and achieve autonomy. Owing to a fortuitous financial boost at the end of Part One, each woman decides to put her new-found money towards the advancement of her independence and dreams. The group disperses, each one going her separate way, but not before pledging "...to meet two years from hence and find what has becam of our dreams." (p. 372) In Part Two, two years later, Daniels charts the developments in the village and in each woman's fortunes before reuniting the group (or who remains of them) in the final scene -- a scene both of endings and sorrow (the burial of Grace), as well as new beginnings and fresh hope (the completion of Rose's play and pursuit of further dreams). Contained within this overall general plot are many minor plots formed primarily by the individual narratives of each character. In addition to elucidating different aspects of the play's central issues, these minor plots help paint an intricate portrait of female experience at a time when this experience was in constant peril of being erased.

The tendency of *Byrthrite* to meander through myriad themes and issues has been remarked on briefly. One reviewer likens the play's form to that of a "jigsaw puzzle", and Carole Hayman remarks: "It is a bit of a mystery at first, intentionally. A lot of strands are set up which are gradually unravelled during the course of the play."²⁴ A look at Daniels' methods of weaving together her thematic 'strands' will help clarify what may seem the muddled but nevertheless related goals of the play. As we have seen in her earlier works, one of Daniels' chief preoccupations lies in the depiction and indictment of what she sees as the most formidable sources of oppression in women's lives. This preoccupation is also present in *Byrthrite* although it is filtered historically through a lens of more than three hundred years. In detailing the forms of oppression for women in seventeenth-century England, Daniels, like in her early plays too, targets several key areas of patriarchal control: economic, religious, military and medical or physical. According to Susan Carlson, the latter two areas occupy the greatest share of the play's anti-patriarchal energy, since they are, "...the two main sources of the men's deathpower."²⁵ While the playwright devotes some attention to the military, such as parodying the macho behaviour of soldiers and reflecting upon the war with all its "blood and death and gore" (p. 385), the area of medicine or men's control over women's bodies is unquestionably the one she addresses most seriously. Throughout the play we witness instances of women being either physically eradicated, imprisoned or tampered with medically. Stark images punctuate the drama such as the hanging or 'swimming' of accused witches, Grace's description of the method of preparation for the latter ("Left thumb tied to right toe and right thumb tied to left toe." p. 414), the baby of Lady H's sister "torn limb from limb in the name of their science" with two "evil-looking hooks" (p. 402), or the knife-wielding doctor about to bleed the 'badness' out of Grace. Many of the play's subplots and songs, moreover, are devoted to the subject of women's rites/rights specifically in the area of reproduction, and, generally, in the field of medicine. Daniels' choice of a seventeenth-century setting is significant for it being a time not only when the role of healer was taken out of women's hands (as cited previously), but also when the role of the midwife was usurped by technological 'advances', namely, the

introduction of forceps by the male profession. Hayman notes that Daniels sees the time as "... a metaphor for what is happening in our time, pointing out how much in one sense, scientifically, things have changed but how things have changed very little in the sense of women's rights over their own bodies."²⁶

Daniels' metaphor, applicable as much today as in 1986, is brought home overtly in three of the play's six songs. While some of the lyrics to the songs may seem at times contrived or stilted, the songs themselves serve, nevertheless, an important function in the drama. Carlson remarks that they force on us "...a Brechtian linguistic catapulting from a seventeenth-century dialect to a twentieth-century vocabulary."²⁷ Like the playwright's deliberate jilting of the temporal framework in *Masterpieces*, the songs in *Byrthrite* produce a similar 'alienation' effect. Viewers are asked to distance themselves from the immediate action at hand and judge impartially the implications of this action in their own lives. In "From a Dish to a Dish", the act of distancing is one of the specific aims of the song as Lady H and the Doctor take turns delivering an historical overview of the advances made in reproductive technology and eugenics from the seventeenth century to the present. With the recent disclosures from Lady H of the death of her sister in childbirth at the hands of a male doctor and his new "barbarous instruments" fresh in our minds, the celebratory lyrics of the Doctor ring menacingly in our ears:

Have mastered techniques of *in vitro* fertilisation,
 Surrogacy, ectogenesis and superovulation,
 Won't stop now, intrauterine surgery will enrich our lives,
 And cloning will ensure that males outnumber wives.

...

We're in charge of the future, the future perfect nation,
 We're in charge of women's bodies, and isn't she a sensation. (pp. 404 - 5)

Such lyrics serve not only as a satiric indictment of society's male-controlled science, but they also function as serious warnings about the implications of this science. Layering her text with 'brave new world' overtones, Daniels encourages women to question in whose interests "their science" is ultimately designed. Although her own answer to this question is clearly implied in the lyrics of the songs, the playwright nevertheless allows the possibility

that advances in reproductive technology may be of benefit to some women. When Rose remonstrates against Helen's proposal to spend her money on doctors to cure her infertility, for example, Grace sternly replies: "Is all right for you Rose. You do not entertain thought of having children, but it be a severe mistake to dismiss them what do." (p. 370)

The issue of women's rights over their own bodies and the usurpation of these rights by men is one of a number of subjects which the female characters discuss, question and analyse throughout the play. Through such discussion, Daniels broadens her exposition not only of the various forms of oppression the women experience daily, but of the overall atmosphere of fear and repression pervading their village. After Rose's return from the War in Part Two, for example, Helen describes this atmosphere to her as one in which :

...women live in fear of drawing next breath for it
bringing the noose closer to their windpipe. When
women take to practising holding their breath in hope
they might sink and be then dragged from the water
alive.

... And you ask me what has been done in this place
where we dare not even look at one another or, God
forbid, converse for that be deemed conspiracy enough.
...For in these times, to my mind, life all but holds a
weak flame to fear. (pp. 390-91)

Given the sudden proliferation of persecutions against their sex during this time, the women try to come up with possible reasons why their powers are so strenuously curtailed. Grace attributes their increased persecution to a backlash against a concomitant increase in women's strength and resistance, as she explains to Jane: "When those who are accumbred kick back, the oppressor kicks harder." (p. 347) Jane blames religion for the burning of four hundred women in one hour in France: "Whole villages left with one woman. Just one alive. Was not doctors' doing, was the church." (p. 349) Later Grace theorises that men's fatal "attraction for lust, power and violence" (p. 338) is linked to the threat they feel at not being able to bring forth life: "Our sex with its single power to give birth, pose a threat to men's power over whole villages, towns, counties and countries." (p. 410) Earlier, Jane touches on the same subject as she speculates to Rose on the War and men's need for power:

So then, and I've been thinking on this, maybe is compensation for their inabilities. Alarmed that they cannot give life they do find glory in death. Surely that serves as explanation enough as to why they oft set themselves dangerous tasks for no other purpose than to prove themselves -- 'tis envy of birth. (p. 375)

By locating one of the primary sites of women's power in their bodies, Daniels attempts to place in perspective men's need throughout the ages to counter this power physically through either death or technology. From the Pricker's systematic torture and killing of 'witches', to the usurpation of midwives by male doctors and their "barbarous instruments", to the modern "technodoc" still wielding knives needlessly to female bodies, the message for women is clear: "not [to] rest until we have won back our bodies for ourselves." (p. 408)

The greater part of *Byrthrite* focuses on women's reclamation not only of their bodies, but of their voices too. Like the strategies for empowerment developed by female characters in certain of Daniels' previous plays, here too the women establish coping mechanisms and alternatives to male oppression, mount campaigns of active resistance to or subversion of this power, and pursue individual paths towards liberation and self-fulfilment. From its particular historical context, however, *Byrthrite* reminds us that the achievement of such goals is often bought at a very high price.

One of the most familiar coping mechanisms against male oppression in Daniels' plays (and in much feminist drama) is female solidarity.²⁸ In *Byrthrite* solidarity is organised for the women by Grace whose secret theatre group meetings provide refuge where they may all "...feel less afraid of these evil times against our sex." (p. 347) Given the previously cited description of the village where women dare not look at nor talk to each other, their attendance at these meetings is in itself a daring act of subversion, as Helen points out: "No place else in this country could you find a handful of women with no children." (p. 338) The fact that the purpose of the meetings is to rehearse plays by women for the entertainment of women at a time when "...singing, dancing, players, enjoyment of any kind is going against the law" (p. 337), makes the women's group furthermore a political gesture of defiance. In addition to rehearsing plays, the group provides a much needed outlet for

the characters to share their grief, form friendships, develop alternative sexual relationships, discuss their dreams and, perhaps most importantly, to experience a different kind of society constructed on the basis of female ideals and principles. Grace stands as the embodiment and chief advocate of these principles not only in the context of the group, but throughout the play. As midwife, healer, educator and mother-figure, she represents life, health, enlightenment and nurture -- ideals that are set in direct opposition to the principles of death, violence, and intimidation held by the play's men. Through Grace's vision and actions, moreover, certain ideas stemming from a modern essentialist or cultural brand of feminism can be distinguished. At certain points in the drama, these ideas, as will be outlined shortly, come into direct conflict with ideas of the more liberal feminism practised by Jane and, initially, Rose. Daniels' incorporation of a modern feminist debate in the midst of action occurring in the seventeenth century may at first seem misplaced. Upon further consideration, however, one finds that the kinds of issues in the play around which the debate revolves (for example, violent versus peaceful resistance or protest) are similar to those which sparked such debate around the time Daniels was writing *Byrthrite*.²⁹ Through an examination of some of the tactics by which the female characters actively resist or seek liberation from their oppression, many of these feminist arguments will be brought to light.

During the course of the play, Daniels counterbalances instances of male oppression and control with numerous subversions of this power by her female characters. Such subversion, enacted both collectively and individually, provides not only moments of great humour and comic relief, but often sources of deep personal and inter-personal conflict. Of the various methods with which the women defy and undermine male authority, two key ones emerge: laughter and language. In Part One, Scene Three, for example, we hear of Grace frightening off the Pricker with her "dish of tongues" (p. 343). Later she hatches a plan with Rose, Jane and Mary to scare off the Pricker's apprentice by means of laughter. When he arrives dressed as the devil and "*confident that his mere presence will scare GRACE half to death*" (p. 345), Grace not only intimidates him with her nimble wit, but the three others, perched in a tree outside, cause him to exit swiftly with their screeches of

laughter. Later in the play when Rose finds herself in a situation of danger trying to fend off the advances of a soldier about to rape a fellow cross-dressed 'soldier', she recalls Grace's advice and "*lets out an unnerving howl of laughter.*"(p. 379) Helen, in Part Two, Scene Two, uses laughter to express triumph over her subversion of and liberation from both the Church and her husband. After failing in her attempt to enlighten the Parson on his views of women and history, Helen coolly informs him that they can no longer stay married owing to the fact that he is not of *her* religion, a Quaker. As a symbolic gesture of defiance, she spits in the font on her way out of the church and, once outside its confines, laughs. Language is used as a gesture of defiance as well by Ann and Mary who join the voices of women in London protesting against war and the oppression of their sex.

The use of laughter and language as weapons of resistance or revenge is dramatised clearly as a female alternative to the more traditional male weapons of torture and violence. Of the thirteen appearances of men in the play, women are seen on seven occasions to outspoke, outwit, silence or scare them off with their tongues and howls of laughter. Such weaponry, however, is not the only kind brandished by the women. Lady H, for example, espouses the Old Testament 'eye for an eye, tooth for a tooth' brand of justice: her remedy for the violence of the doctor who killed her sister in childbirth with his "evil-looking hooks" is to take his life with an equally "barbarous" instrument. Jane proposes a similar method of countering the Pricker's violence: "...slice his brain-pan off his shoulders." (p. 343) Grace sternly opposes her solution: "Their tools, mistress, are best kept from them. Tis not our way." (p. 343). The polarity between these two views forms the basis of an internal or secondary level of conflict in the play -- conflict which, as mentioned earlier, reflects certain strands of modern feminist debate. Grace's emphasis, for example, on women's difference from men reflects one of the political strategies of cultural feminism which, in the words of Jill Dolan, "...is not to abolish gender categories, but to change the established gender hierarchy by situating female values as superior."³⁰ Throughout the play, Grace and other female characters make references to the superior qualities of not only women's values, but of their biology. We have heard already Grace's and Jane's remarks on

the power of women as life-givers and the threat this poses to men. Such valorisation of female biology, also one of cultural feminism's principle tenets³¹, gives added ammunition to the play's arguments against men's technological tampering with women's bodies. Indeed, as Alison Jaggar points out, many radical feminists believe "...that technology, especially reproductive technology, has been used...against women and to reinforce male dominance."³² In terms of the issue at hand, the various means of combating male oppression, the idea of using violence against the oppressor is one that would, according to Grace, alienate women from their superior nature. Jane and Rose, on the other hand, represent the liberal feminist stance where fire must be met with fire, and equality achieved only by fighting on an equal footing with men within existing power structures.³³ While dramatisations of these opposing views are often humorously portrayed (such as the failed attempt by Jane and Rose to have the Pricker mauled to death by a bear), in Part Two, Scene Eight, Daniels offers a more serious treatment of the conflict. In this scene, Ursula, Grace and Jane perform a 'dumb' show for Rose that depicts one of the most powerful instances of collective resistance by women in the play. Together they mime the efforts of a group of women gathered at the pond determined to put an end to the Pricker. After saving a woman recently 'swum', they seize upon the Pricker and serve him a taste of his own medicine. When the Pricker floats instead of sinks, the women then debate whether they should "complete the course of punishment". Ursula concludes (voiced over): "We did not kill him. We are not the same as him. We left him, still tied, in the place where women's bodies are left to be claimed by their loved ones at night." (p. 414) Rose, however, vehemently protests their decision: "Aye bodies. Bodies of dead women. Deemed then innocent for an invented crime. Dead to be collected and buried! How many of us will have to die while our good natures get the better of us?" (p. 414) As an indication of the extremity of the situation, Daniels has the midwife modify her views: "Then take that pistol and shoot him through the head. For is that not what they do to sick animals? And tell him from me, 'tis offer of death more humane than ever he has dealt in." (p. 414) Rose, stunned by Grace's change in attitude, ironically changes her own and suggests they leave the

Pricker to escape his fate. By dramatising these fluctuations in attitude in Grace and Rose so late in the play, Daniels not only furthers character development in the two women, but shows the impossibility of providing a definitive solution to any moral debate, feminist or otherwise.

Just as the playwright offers no single answer to questions of violent or non-violent resistance in the play, so she provides no single route towards the achievement of liberation for her characters. Rather, a number of routes are explored, some of which open the doors for further feminist debate. As mentioned in my discussion of the play's action, Daniels provides each of her primary female characters at the end of Part One the opportunity, through Jane's seizure of the Pricker's money, to pursue her dreams and ambitions. That the women can do so only because of their financial gain reminds us of the crucial link between the economic deprivation of women and male power, especially at that time. Daniels reinforces this point by making the only character able to fight for independence without sharing the Pricker's money a member of the upper class. Lady H's quest for liberation is only initiated, however, after she too loses a major force of oppression in her life: her husband. While the individual quest of each character differs in terms of goals and the methods to achieve it, they all share a common motivation: the desire to overcome a specific form of oppression, usually the one most formidable in their lives. Lady H, for example, embarks on a journey that seeks ultimately to eradicate class oppression. After the death of her husband, she asks to join the secret meetings of the village women assuming, mistakenly, that they are designed to find husbands for "women without menfolk". She is repulsed from these meetings, however, by women who fear her and distrust her intentions. Despite initial attempts to enforce the privileges that her status gives her, Lady H nevertheless perseveres in what emerges to be the true goal of her quest: to achieve solidarity with other women, regardless of class. By the end of the play, a radically altered woman appears -- one who announces to the other women that she is: "H only from this day forth. For I am hoping to have proved myself a lady no longer." (p. 417) Throughout Part Two, Daniels charts the various stages in Lady H's transformation, from

her desire to seek Grace's advice in setting up a school for midwives, to her joining forces with "that Quaker lady", Helen, and speaking publicly on women's rights. Through this last stage particularly, Daniels brings the issue of class oppression most sharply into focus. Standing next to Helen at a Quaker meeting in Scene Seven, Lady H attempts to read to a crowd of women extracts from feminist pamphlets circulating at the time. She is heckled, however, by several women who question the right of one of her rank to speak to those whom she previously oppressed. As one listener cries out: "What did you do when we was begging and them refused was cursing?" Another woman answers: "She didn't so much as lift a chicken leg off her table, that's what she did." (p. 407) A third woman, however, disagrees and argues that women need all the support they can get: "...'tis not only labourers' daughters what need telling. I say Lady H should join us." (p. 408) Recognising the division amongst women that class imposes, Lady H vows defiantly: "We will be despised, ridiculed and deemed mad but I vouchsafe that I am prepared to forgo my privilege in the name of truth." (p. 408) Daniels' linking of the liberation of women with the destruction of class in this scene is a strong reminder of one of modern socialist feminism's key goals. In the context of the play, Lady H's public renunciation of class, privilege and title is seen as an important gesture of solidarity, as well as a daring act of political subversion.

Like the quest of Lady H, Helen's focuses ultimately on a collective rather than individual liberation for women. In her life, the most formidable source of oppression stems from the Church and it is the subversion of this patriarchal institution to which she devotes her energy. Helen's dream initially, however, is to use her portion of money to seek medical help in London to cure her infertility. Upon experiencing humiliation there at the hands of misogynist doctors, she abandons her dreams of having a child and embarks on a different kind of journey. At her reunion with Rose in Part Two, Scene Four, we learn of the inspiration she received attending women's peace protests where, as she tells Rose, "...you have never heard women's voice so strong." (p. 388) Recognising the empowerment that such voices can give rise to, Helen develops her own and uses it forcefully to draw crowds

in her new role as Quaker preacher. The freedom this new religion offers women gives Helen the confidence to speak out against the repression and distortion of women that the established Church promotes. In a heated encounter with her husband, described earlier, she takes leave both of him and the Church on the grounds that they do not conform to *her* religion and visions. These visions, whose subject is "the nature of women's accumbrements" (p. 389), are detailed by Helen to crowds of women in order to educate and rouse them to action:

The battle of men against men is not the war of our time but the fight women have had for their lives. We have shaken their opinion of us as the weaker sex...

...

And they have responded with ways more forceful than ever before. Now is not the time for slowing down, for our lives swing more lightly in the balance than ever before. (p. 406)

Through such impassioned speeches, Daniels emphasises once again the power of language. In addition to its potential as a weapon of subversion and revenge, as we have seen, language emerges in this instance as a tool of enlightenment and liberation for women. Amidst the celebration of women's voices throughout the play, however, Daniels illustrates also the dangers of speaking out at such a time. Grace, for example, has to endure constant threats of 'swimming' and actual imprisonment not only for her alternative methods of healing, but for the "dishes of tongues" she serves to her oppressors. Ann and Mary pay an even higher price for vocalising their rebellion: hanging upon their return from London.

Rose's route towards independence exacts a price of a different nature. Motivated by a desire to overcome the sexual oppression that women suffer, she develops a vision of liberation that entails the denial of her sex. In Part One, she reveals anorexic leanings ("I eat so little...I would rather wilt than grow" p. 359) and begs Grace to concoct a potion to further stop her from growing into a woman. Rose, disgusted by the sexual advances of the farmer and other men, regards her body as a trap and learns to hate it. When the opportunity for freedom presents itself at the end of Part One, she not surprisingly chooses

to trade her women's clothes for men's and become, like Jane, a soldier in the war. Her decision, however, is not spurred solely by the desire to escape the sexual entrapments of her gender. In her view, becoming a 'man' is the most viable method of achieving true equality, as she explains, "I want to be equal, Grace. Treated the same." (p. 371) Rose's view, echoing again the liberal feminist stance, clashes with that of Grace and Helen who believe that liberation is to be found not in being treated the same by men, but in strengthening one's differences to men within an alternative framework of power. Grace tries to warn Rose before she goes to fight on the "other side" not to throw away the advances and strengths women have so recently gained. She replies, "I am throwing nothing away 'cept my servitude." (p. 372) Upon her return from the war in Part Two, however, Rose realises that she has only exchanged one kind of servitude for another. Admonished harshly by Helen for her abandonment of the village at a time when women "...can no longer afford to be left divided" (p. 391), Rose realises the true costs of the quest she has chosen and renounces, moreover, its ideological foundation. She sings:

The price I have paid to walk as a man
 Has lost me the trust of my kind
 ...
 I fought in their wars, and not with my sister,
 My pay is in shillings and being called mister,
 While women have hanged and drowned all the time,
 And being a woman's a death-bringing crime.
 I gave up my woman in wearing a disguise,
 Partly by bribery, partly by lies,
 And what they have got is a soldier to fight
 And one woman less to defend her birthright.
 ...
 The freedom to pass as a man is a curse --
 No woman would choose that for her life --
 And marriage to men is no better or worse
 For bearing the name of a wife.
 The only way through is to stand out and strong,
 And not wear disguise in *their* fight,
 But to be with the women here where I belong
 And to call on our strength and our might.
 ...(pp. 391-92)

While the principles of separatism and solidarity present in "Rosie's Song" appear to be those chiefly endorsed by Daniels throughout *Byrthrite*, she does present certain arguments for Rose's course of action within the context of the seventeenth century. Despite her renunciation of cross-dressing in principle, for example, Rose nevertheless continues in disguise until almost the end of the play. Her reasons are twofold: economic necessity ("...how else am I to hold down job as shipping clerk..." p. 412) and, ironically, to provide protection for other women. Instead of using her disguise to further her own individual liberation, Rose begins after Scene Four to use it to secure the liberation of others. In Scene Five, for example, she saves Grace and Ursula from imminent hanging by bribing the gaoler to release them from prison. And in Scene Six, she averts the knife-wielding doctor from bleeding Grace by threatening him with a sword. In addition to pointing out such practical freedoms that Rose's male persona provides, Daniels uses cross-dressing as a means to explore issues of gender construction - issues also prevalent in much modern feminist discourse.³⁴ Rose and Jane, for example, not only dress in men's clothes, but 'put on' so-called masculine behavioural characteristics when in the presence of other men. In Part Two, Scene Six, when a male soldier enters as Jane is hugging Rose, Daniels issues the following stage direction: "ROSE and JANE's body language and posture change in front of him. They 'act' and talk like men." (p. 376) Elin Diamond sees such 'alienation' of gender as a Brechtian device :

Feminist practice that seeks to expose or mock the strictures of gender usually uses some version of the Brechtian A-effect....When gender is 'alienated' or foregrounded, the spectator is enabled to see a sign system *as* a sign system -- the appearance, words, gestures, ideas, attitudes, etc., that comprise the gender lexicon become so many illusionistic trappings to be put on or shed at will.³⁵

Jane sheds her feminine 'trappings' and adopts male ones effortlessly. She speaks to the soldier "patronisingly", for example, and dismisses Rose's tears by explaining to him that 'he' was hit in the face by embers. Later Rose exposes the way in which gendered social roles can mask an individual's true feelings. She asks the soldier if he ever feels fear, to which he

responds immediately in the negative. Upon hearing Rose admit (as a 'man') to feeling fear, however, the soldier drops his 'tough masculine' defences somewhat and adds: "Well, sometime my gut do behave of its own accord like it was nothing to do with my head." (p. 378) Further in the play, Daniels underscores again the way in which supposedly inherent 'male' and 'female' behaviour is socially prescribed. In Scene Six when Rose (still disguised as a man) begins to cry, Ursula expresses shock and confusion at such 'female' behaviour. Her confusion increases later when she sees Rose and Jane (as 'men' still) rush into a passionate embrace upon Jane's return from the war. The sight of two men expressing affection for each other evidently belies Ursula's expectations of how men are supposed to behave. Her confusion in itself, moreover, may be seen as the expected reaction of a woman witnessing two men behave as women. In addition to the irony of this particular situation, Daniels points to a larger irony through Rose and Jane's relationship: that their alternative sexuality (and that of others, such as Bridget) flourishes only upon the adoption of an alternative gender. In her discussion of lesbian theatre, Nina Rapi talks of the necessity for lesbians to invent, or reinvent themselves: "In...constructing herself, the lesbian experiments with disguises, costumes, gestures, role-playing -- all very theatrical ways of being. Being in flux, continuously shedding skins, roles, costumes, and trying new ones. The performance of being."³⁶ In the context of the seventeenth century, Rose's and Jane's experimentation with roles and disguise is as much a protective measure as one that affords sexual freedom. Through such freedom, Rose reclaims the body she once despised.

While the reclamation of women's bodies (sexually or medically) is presented as integral to female empowerment in *Byrthrite*, Daniels lays equal emphasis on the reclamation, or more importantly, proclamation of women's voices. We have looked already at many of the ways in which female characters have used language as a weapon of revenge or resistance, as well as an agent of enlightenment. Through a closer analysis of Grace's vision of liberation, language emerges, moreover, as Carlson puts it, as "...the primary force of the feminist order Daniels proposes."³⁷ Grace's efforts to establish a 'feminist order' are in keeping with one of cultural feminism's strategies for the liberation of women: the

development and preservation of a female counter-culture.³⁸ Throughout the play, Grace seeks to unify the village women, to encourage in them a separate identity, and, above all, to enable them to develop an empowering language of their own. Central to the growth of Grace's 'counter-culture' is education. Numerous illustrations are given of the midwife's skills as a mentor primarily to Rose, and generally to other women. Her teachings revolve around two main areas: the natural world, and language and literacy. Of the former, she passes on her knowledge of the stars and the "Names and properties of herbs and plants and different ways to help heal the body." (p. 353) As well as nurturing women's bodies, Grace strives equally to nurture their minds. Rose reveals to an incredulous Jane, for example, her ability to read and write thanks to Grace's secret nocturnal teaching sessions. After Grace's death at the end of the play, Rose steps into her mentor's shoes and devotes her time to teaching other women to read and write and furthering her skills as a playwright. Throughout *Byrthrite*, Daniels stresses women's creative potential both through their bodies as lifegivers, and, even more importantly, through language as play makers. As Rose says to Grace: "I have plenty more preference for making a play than a child." (p. 360) *Byrthrite*, which begins with the proclamation of the birth of a baby girl, ends with the proclamation of the birth of women's theatre. Our task as modern spectators, as Helen suggests, is to 'unearth' the buried voices of history's forgotten female playwrights, and like Daniels, give them a "life" today. Such emphasis on the importance of women's theatre, however, is not merely a self-serving tactic on the part of the playwright. Rather, the passionate concern displayed by Grace about the purpose of women's plays more likely reflects Daniels' aim. At the end of Part One, Grace reveals her dream for a collective liberation through theatre:

I all but feel out of turn now. For I wanted us to
 remain together and form a band of travelling players
 to go from county to county entertaining women...
 Making them laugh, dispelling myths and superstitions
 and fears so that life and health and well-being were
 no longer mysteries but understood by one and all. (p. 371)

Despite the fact that 'a band of travelling players' never materialises for Grace, her goals for women's plays do not go unheeded. Indeed, not only are we, the audience, made aware that these are the very goals that Daniels is attempting to achieve throughout *Byrthrite*, but within the play itself, Rose strives to fulfil Grace's wishes in the drama she writes. Through Grace's critique of this play in Part Two, Scene Eight, Daniels presents what appear to be some of her own preoccupations with the strengths and shortcomings of women's drama. Her characters argue, for example, about the proper subject for plays, the dangers of idealising women, whether plays should primarily teach or entertain, and the importance of depicting women's resistance. While no definitive conclusions are reached, one message rings clearly throughout the play: that language, and particularly its enactment dramatically on stage, is one of the most powerful means for women to "fight back" and to celebrate their strengths and achievements.

The final scene of *Byrthrite* is a celebration not just of Grace's life and achievements, but of the achievements of all the female characters during the course of the play. After eulogising their friend and spiritual mentor, the women plan a future that promises further progress in the establishment of their counter world. Helen will continue with the Quakers, Jane and Ursula will reap the benefits of their new-found literacy, Rose will carry on with teaching and playwriting (using her own name), and future women will be granted their 'birthright' through the proposed school for midwives. Such affirmation of the women's strengths and accomplishments is not restricted, however, to this final scene. The entire play, rather, is an affirmation, or reclamation of the voices and achievements of women in history. *Byrthrite* celebrates above all women's ability, at a time when they were being not just excluded but physically eradicated from history, to survive, to heal, protect and educate one another, and to make their voices heard. While Daniels lays no claims to the accuracy of every detail in the play, many of the actions of the female characters (and of the Pricker) are historically verifiable. Women did cross-dress at that time, for example, not just as soldiers in the war, but in daily life -- an act which Lesley Ferris notes was extremely subversive considering the Church's and King's attacks on male-clothed women from

1620.³⁹ The pamphlets from which Lady H reads, furthermore, are taken from the writings of real women in that period⁴⁰, and the peace protests in London described by Helen were often led by women. Daniels' depiction in the 'dumb' show of the means by which the women rid their village of the Pricker is based, although not on historical fact, on popular legend. Matthew Hopkins did mysteriously disappear around that time and it was thought that, having been scared away by an angry mob of women, he subsequently left England to join his brother in Salem. Finally, many women wrote plays then, many of which were to flourish, as mentioned, in the Restoration and Queen Anne eras. Daniels' dramatic resurrection of the lives of such women is thus an important act not only of historical revisionism, but of righting a major theatrical imbalance. As Susan Carlson comments, in *Byrthrite* "...Daniels maps a way to create female subjectivity where only male subjectivity has before been known."⁴¹

Many reviewers of *Byrthrite* believe that Daniels went overboard in righting this imbalance. As in certain reviews of *Masterpieces*, critics point to the playwright's both one-sided and under-representation of men. Out of a cast of six, five actresses play eleven female roles, while one actor plays eight male roles. Mark Lawson comments:

It is typical of the writer's approach to characterisation that, whereas the women have names -- and often quite nice names like Grace and Rose -- the character played by David Bamber is called only Man. Looking at the cast-list in advance, it seems a little unfair that the male race should be allowed only one emblematic representative but Ms Daniels is not so subtle: the part of Man comprises several men and David Bamber gets to play, among others, a stupid and rapacious soldier, a megalomaniac and rapacious doctor and a cavalier and rapacious hangman.⁴²

John Peter expresses much the same opinion:

All the male 'characters' are played by one actor: a device which rams home the point that the enemy is Man, be he priest, doctor, soldier, or merely husband, and that all men are pompous, brutal, lecherous and usually sick.⁴³

While male reviewers tend to write angrily about what they see as the gross misrepresentation of their sex, female reviewers tend to point more to the shortcomings that Daniels' treatment of men produces in terms of the play's main ideas. Mary Harron observes, for example, that Daniels "...den[ies] men any share in reproduction, which is a touch unrealistic."⁴⁴ Along the same lines, Susan Carlson notes the limitations of lesbianism as the sole sexual alternative for the play's women: "While heterosexual relations, ironically, empower women to bring forth life, they are not part of the play's resolution."⁴⁵ Marina Warner critiques the absolutism apparent in Daniels' polarisation of the sexes: "The difficulty is that the sexual politics of her type of drama link Matthew Hopkins' gender with his criminal cruelties...The feminine gender, by contrast, engenders only good."⁴⁶ Notwithstanding the validity of such observations, it should be noted that Daniels never makes any pretence of giving a 'fair' and equal representation of both sexes. From the start she makes it clear that her subject is the persecution and oppression of women by men in a particular historical era and not how some men were really good human beings despite the atrocious activities of others of their sex. The men in her play, as their names should denote, are symbolic rather than human representatives of oppressive forces. As to critiques of the resolution *Byrthrite* offers, reviewers rightly point out the contradictions in Daniels' arguments. While on the one hand she suggests that the only way forward for her female characters is to establish a counter-world entirely free of men and patriarchal models of power, she stresses on the other hand that women's 'birthright' must be won and passed on to their daughters without any reference to the fact that for this to occur, heterosexual relations must exist. As Jeremy Kingston remarks: "The play's acceptable message is that women should be in charge of what happens to their own bodies, yet there seems to be authorial uncertainty as to how men and women can best work together in the real world."⁴⁷

The reviews discussed thus far have focused more on ideological rather than dramatic considerations of the play. Interestingly, many reviews of *Byrthrite* reveal an inability on the part particularly of male reviewers to separate their disapproval of Daniels' ideas from their analyses of the play as a production. Evident in many of their reviews, moreover, is a

tendency to vituperate against the playwright rather than to provide an objective account of what they are seeing on stage. Mark Lawson begins his review thus:

The one original and exciting idea in Sarah Daniels's dour and humourless new play is voiced towards the end when a 17th century feminist playwright buries the text of her unproduced play. The unspoken words will, she says, come to life when she is dead. This is a fascinating alternative to full theatrical production and one which Ms Daniels and the Royal Court might in future pursue.⁴⁸

What Lawson fails to accomplish in the remainder of his review are the requirements of his job as a theatre critic: no where does he mention the play's staging, technical devices, direction, or acting. John Peter displays a similar talent for invective rather than proper theatrical analysis:

Daniels also puts forward the mind-bendingly silly idea that medicine is inherently male and anti-feminist, and that modern genetics is no better than 17th century quackery...I find this ignorant and bigoted nonsense sinister and dangerous: someone should warn Daniels that all fascist movements, left and right, produce bizarre and nasty pseudo-scientific ideas.⁴⁹

Ironically, the lack of objectivity that these men condemn in Daniels' play is most glaringly apparent in their reviews. While it would be inaccurate to say that all male critics are as condescending and dismissive in their reviews (Michael Billington, for example, offers a more rounded discussion of the play), it is apparent that their critiques in general, like those we saw of *Masterpieces*, are written from a position of defence rather than objectivity. Women reviewers, on the other hand, tend not only to relate their criticisms of the play in dispassionate terms, as those previously cited, but to encompass far more of the play's theatrical elements in their discussions. Claire Armitstead writes, for example,

Although her arguments are not always easy to swallow, Daniels puts her case with vigour and wit. Her command of country dialect creates a sense of period that holds up well as the plot unfolds on to increasingly surreal scenes punctuated by Jo-Anne Fraser's up-front musical numbers which range from traditional folk stomps to an

amusing gynaecology tango. These are performed by an accomplished cast of six who double and redouble to create a *dramatis personae* including a splendidly poker-faced aristocrat from Janette Legge, and a wise warm old midwife from the excellent Maggie McCarthy.

But Carole Hayman's staging (on a set by Jenny Tiramani), is surprisingly inconsistent....⁵⁰

Finally worth noting is the tendency for women reviewers to appreciate and respond more readily to the play's humour than their male counterparts. In contrast to Mark Lawson's description of *Byrthrite* as "dour and humourless" or Jeremy Kingston's observation that "...the author's famed comedy is seldom in evidence",⁵¹ female reviewers consistently use adjectives such as "humorous", "witty" or "funny" in their critiques of the play. Carole Hayman describes Daniels' type of comedy as "mordant"⁵² -- a description that may go some way in explaining male reviewers' aversion to it since many of the play's most biting jokes are at the expense of men.

Despite the mixed reception of *Byrthrite*, Daniels nevertheless remained undaunted by the play's chorus of conflicting reviews. As an indication of her awareness of the barrage of criticism that women's plays may expect to receive, she has Grace arm Rose with the following advice: "You will have to learn to take criticism with a little more dignity. Do you think they'll not be shouting at you from all sides?" (p. 412)

The Gut Girls

In *Gut Girls* Daniels proves successfully to have ignored the 'shouting' and continued to develop her unique brand of humour and bold dramaturgy. In view of the specific guidelines of Kiendl's commission, even further credit must be awarded the playwright for devising a play faithful not only to these guidelines, but to her own goals for women's theatre. Like *Byrthrite*, *Gut Girls* aims at bringing to the stage the voices and lives of women largely forgotten by history. Unlike *Byrthrite*, however, the actual subject of *Gut*

Girls was developed to serve a larger goal: Kiendl's primary objective was to draw working-class Londoners to the theatre.⁵³ To this end, he called for a play that would highlight a period in Deptford's working-class history. Because of the Albany Empire's proximity to the old Foreign Cattle Market gutting sheds, Kiendl asked Daniels to write on the women who worked in these sheds, known locally as 'the gut girls', and what happened to them when advances in refrigeration technology eventually forced the sheds to be shut down around the turn of the century. In addition, Daniels was to include the philanthropic efforts of the Duchess of Albany who around the same time set up a school for these women in order to lure them away from what she considered to be revolting work and transform them into 'proper' domestic servants. Although Kiendl encouraged Daniels to base her characters on the actual 'gut girls' and Duchess of Albany, he left their individual narratives and structure of the play to her imagination. Daniels, who spent much time researching her subject in the Greenwich and Lewisham local history libraries, found little documentation on or from the 'gut girls' themselves save chance references to their low social status ("there's only one thing worse than being a gut girl and that's being a whore"⁵⁴), and the fact that people used to be frightened of them. With the Duchess of Albany, the playwright had more luck: she located her diaries and was able to discover in them records of the club she ran as well as some of her own sentiments and values.

While much of *Gut Girls* embellishes or adds to the basic story that Kiendl outlined (such as the subplot exposing the issue of domestic violence), Daniels nonetheless strives, as she did in *Byrthrite*, for historical accuracy in her dramatisation of social atmosphere and period detail. References are made, for example, to women's attire, to new methods of birth control ("sausage skins"), and to local developments such as the building of the foot tunnel at Greenwich. Daniels' delineation, moreover, of the working conditions in the gutting sheds, the emergence of trade unionism, the plight of 'fallen' women, the intersection of social classes, and local entertainment such as a night at the Music Hall, further enrich her portrait of turn-of-the-century south-east London. As to the specifications of her commission, Kiendl's subject proved ideally suited to Daniels' theatrical territory. As we

saw with the group of women in *Byrthrite*, Claire and Val in *Neaptide*, and Yvonne in *Masterpieces*, Daniels is able to explore once again in *Gut Girls* women stigmatised as social outcasts. We see, moreover, the familiar treatment of female solidarity and community, mother-daughter relationships, female friendships and the forms of patriarchal oppression that circumscribe women's lives. In addition, Daniels capitalises on the gut girls' reputation for camaraderie and exuberance in order to highlight, as she did in *Byrthrite*, the importance of laughter and humour as mechanisms of survival and retaliation for women. Finally, Kiendl's concern for the play to appeal to working-class people by foregrounding an aspect of their common history is very much in accordance with Daniels' concern throughout her writing career to bring to the stage the voices of those traditionally silenced in the theatre.

While *Gut Girls* shares many structural similarities with *Byrthrite*, as outlined in the introduction to this chapter, the action or movement of the play follows a reverse pattern. In *Byrthrite* we saw the fate of a group of women who, gaining financial independence, were able to pursue their dreams and establish ultimately a unique and lasting counter-world. In *Gut Girls*, we witness a group of women who from the start already have a definite community established and, as far as possible, are pursuing dreams and enjoying a degree of financial independence. The loss of their jobs in Part Two, however, signals a loss also of this independence and the subsequent death of their dreams as well as disintegration of their community. Significantly, the turning points in the lives of women in both plays are economically dictated. In *Gut Girls*, economic oppression, especially for women, is the driving force of the play's action. Throughout the play, Daniels demonstrates, moreover, how economic oppression is linked inextricably with class oppression. In addition to their contributions to plot, these two forces form the central focus of the playwright's critique of patriarchy.

Daniels' method of dramatising her critique is not so much through outright indictment, as voiced by many characters, for example, in *Byrthrite*, but through the juxtaposition of the play's two social worlds. Much of *Gut Girls'* theatrical energy, in fact, derives from the

collision of social environments, values and lifestyles between the gut girls and the Lady Helens and Lord Tartadens of Victorian England. In the first scene, for example, Lady Helena and Lord Tartaden, on a mission of Christian charity, enter the gutting sheds and come face to face with their appalling conditions of stench, airlessness and "ankle-deep" blood. Lord Tartaden, his refined sensibilities overwhelmed, faints immediately. Lady Helena perseveres, however, determined to see for herself "the plight of th[o]se poor, wretched, miserable girls" (p. 21) and to convince them that they need her salvation. Despite her efforts to cross the divide that separates their worlds, an enormous gulf nevertheless persists between them. This gulf is illustrated perhaps most effectively through language:

Lady Helena And what sort of work, I mean, what does your job entail?

Polly Put your finger right on it, Madam, entrails.

Maggie Chop up animal flesh, sorting and cleaning the tubes from the hearts, livers, kidneys, lungs and that.

Ellen Getting the meat ready for how you find it in the butchers basically.

Lady Helena Hence the collective noun for you all: The Gut Girls (*They look at her.*) Oh I'm quite *au fait* with the word 'gut' - and I often have to use the word belly - in the context of asking my cook occasionally if we may have (*Whispers.*) belly of pork. (p. 10)

Lady Helena's attempt to show familiarity with the gut girls' 'course' and earthy vocabulary is nevertheless overshadowed by the obvious privileges of her class: her education is superior (she uses phrases such as "collective noun" and the french "au fait") and her wealth affords her servants ("my cook"). In addition to linguistic and environmental contrasts, Daniels offers numerous images throughout the play that symbolise the disparity between the working and upper-class cultures. As Lady Helena takes leave of the gutting sheds, for example, she extends a white-gloved hand to shake with each of the women. The glove inevitably becomes blood-stained. Although she appears not to notice at the time, in the following scene she disassociates herself immediately with the world she so charitably

entered by instructing her maid to burn not only the glove, but the entire wardrobe she wore to the shed. The ease with which she can afford to extricate herself from any true connection with the gut girls is in stark contrast to their powerlessness to extricate themselves from the system of values and roles designed for them by her class.

During the course of Part Two, as we shall see, Daniels explicitly juxtaposes these roles and values with those the gut girls have envisioned for themselves. *Gut Girls*, however, is not simply concerned with contrasting the worlds of the upper and working classes. The playwright's representation of these worlds, rather, is much more complex. Instead of offering a one-sided critique of the one or celebration of the other, Daniels illustrates how both, perhaps equally, are at the service of a patriarchal, capitalist society. The gut girls do not lose their jobs, for example, because of Lady Helena's attempts to transform them into domestic servants for the benefit of her class. They lose them, as their foreman points out to Jim, because of "progress": faster methods of gutting animals on the ships before they reach the sheds and the introduction of refrigeration render their jobs obsolete. In the face of unemployment, Lady Helena's club becomes not just a school for repression and indoctrination, but, for the majority of the girls, their only viable means of survival: upon hearing news of their layoffs, they go "...running up to Creek Road to put themselves at Lady Helena's mercy." (p. 61) Lady Helena thus plays the dual role of oppressor and liberator to the women. Yet even in her role as oppressor, Daniels points to ways in which she both perpetuates and defies the dictates of her class. Despite her goal of molding the gut girls into "the shining ideal of christian womanhood" and quashing any 'unladylike' or independent behaviour in them, she herself displays remarkable feminist tendencies for her time. Ironically, her motivation for starting the 'School of Domestic Economy' stems from a desire to escape the traps of dependence and domestic enslavement for women, as she explains to Priscilla: "...we have to learn to help ourselves. And, what better way than to find an interest outside the confines of domesticity." (p. 37) Equal to Lady Helena's genuine concern for the "plight" of the gut girls is a surprising lack of concern for the opinions of her class about her actions. Not only does she visit the sheds in person, an

event which produces gossip like wildfire, but, to the astonishment of Priscilla and Edwin, she decides to run the club herself. Edwin criticises Lady Helena for what he sees as wilful degradation: "You will forgo your own happiness for the sake of the lowest of the low. Oh yes, Helena, even by their own kind they are seen as marginally better than whores." (20) Lady Helena's retort is both sharp and politically astute: "...if you want my opinion it is the men who live off those unfortunate women who are the lowest of the low." (p. 21) Despite her indictment of society's patriarchal capitalists, Lady Helena is shown, especially by the end of the play, to be an active participant in their scheme. She speaks of her school, for example, as a business. She mentions the "careful planning" and "hard work" she put into it, and the profits of her "accomplishment": "Two hundred and fifty of them placed to date in good households." (p. 81) The commodification of these women as so many numbers or 'products' for the use of the upper classes is enforced in Lady Helena's earlier remark: "Through diligence and persistence even the rawest of material has been transformed into a servant of lower middle class acceptability." (p. 81) Framji Minwalla notes, however, that Lady Helena is as much a victim of this kind of society as the gut girls:

Her behaviour is conditioned by the values instilled in her. Her initial action to get the girls out of the sheds and into a more nourishing environment seems feminist, but her "angle of vision" is grounded in class distinctions that prohibit the act from being revolutionary.⁵⁵

While Daniels' critique of Lady Helena is mitigated by considerations of the character's social (and religious) conditioning and feminist instincts, her critique of the play's upper-class male characters is unspared. Lord Edwin Tartaden and Arthur Cuttle-Smythe are harshly portrayed not so much for their perpetuation of their class' social code (they too are equally conditioned), but for their abuses of power that their privilege grants them. Lord Tartaden, "Tarty", is portrayed as a useless fop who goes along with Lady Helena's club scheme, not for her altruistic reasons, but in the hopes of forming a lucrative attachment with the widow. Upon finding himself powerless to secure even the faintest interest from Lady Helena, he turns to those he deems "the lowest of the low" to exercise his power.

After a club meeting, he stalks Maggie as she is walking home and, certain he can buy her sexual favours, offers her a shilling. When she contemptuously tells him not to touch what he can't afford, Edwin, steadfast in the belief of his privileged status, retorts: "Oh, I can afford anything I want." (p. 49) Maggie, however, undermines his economic prowess: she will not be bought. Instead of laughing off her refusal, as he did when one of his own class spurned his advances, Edwin resorts to violence and threatens Maggie with a knife. Although we cheer Maggie's dextrous intimidation of Edwin with a knife of her own, Daniels reminds us in later scenes that she is left far from unscathed by the incident. Sickened by the hypocrisy of Edwin and his fellow "toffs" ("All that gab about fallen women", p. 52), Maggie refuses to set foot in Lady Helena's club again. Her act of rebellion, however, is bought at a high price: when she is laid off, Lady Helena, at the instruction of Edwin, refuses to offer her employment.

In the subplot involving Arthur Cuttle-Smythe and his wife, Priscilla, Daniels illustrates the various abuses of power by men against women within the same class. Edwin's abuse of Maggie and not Lady Helena in the example above is for the reason that the latter held equal social and superior economic status with him. She was, moreover, a widow and, therefore, independent and in control of her money. Arthur is able to abuse Priscilla, on the other hand, because he, as her husband, not only has total control over her money, but is placed by society in a significantly superior position to her, despite their similar social origins. Just as Arthur owns shares in the Foreign Cattle Market, so too does he believe he owns his wife. He treats her accordingly as a piece of property -- an object to be manipulated for personal profit. Specifically, Arthur uses Priscilla as a pawn to help him climb the social ladder. Outside Lady Helena's house in Part One, Scene Nine, for example, he coerces Priscilla to befriend Lady Helena and go along with her "crackpot" ideas for his sake: "You're my wife, this is the chance to show your worth. ...If we can become good friends of hers who knows where it will lead...". (p. 35) Priscilla, shy and depressed, is desperately unwilling to partake of Arthur's scheme for social advancement. Arthur reminds her, however, that it is her duty as a wife to play any role for him that he desires, as he says:

"...please just look the part for me. Smile --". (p. 35) In Part Two, Scene Three, we discover that Arthur's methods of asserting authority over Priscilla differ drastically in the privacy of their home. Entering the club with a bruise on her face, Priscilla tries not only to conceal Arthur's violence through cosmetics, but to excuse it to Lady Helena by blaming herself. Later in Scene Ten we discover Arthur's violence extends to mental brutality: when Priscilla admits to enjoying the company of her servant as well as an unwillingness to attend Lady Helena's fête, Arthur accuses her of madness ("You're ranting, you're raving" p. 74), and threatens to have her put in an asylum.

Daniels' exposition of domestic violence in these scenes resounds disturbingly with an issue still very much prevalent today. Today, however, men's abuse of women within marriage, although for many women still a subject of shame, is far more openly discussed and redressed. In Priscilla's time, male violence wasn't even acknowledged as abuse but regarded as acceptable and 'normal' behaviour for husbands to exert over wives who displayed any deviation from society's patriarchal scheme. Priscilla's blaming of herself for Arthur's violence reflects the common view that not only is it the husband's *right* to assert whatever form of authority he sees fit over his wife, but it is entirely the wife's fault if his temper becomes uncontrolled. Sadly, even when Priscilla cries she does not claim her tears for herself: (to Lady Helena:) "It's not for me I'm upset you understand, it's for him really. He's quite distraught and I've been no help whatsoever." (p. 50) Daniels' portrait of Priscilla mirrors many aspects of the nineteenth-century conception of middle to upper-class women. Jane Ussher discusses this conception and how it came into being -- a process which also has direct relevance to *Byrthrite*:

As witchcraft died out, and the clerics of the inquisition lost their power, the psychiatrists moved in. The nineteenth century saw the roots of our present logical positivist position on madness, where science replaced theology, and the female malady replaced the curse of the witch.

This madness, rife during the nineteenth century, which some have termed the 'cult of female invalidism', apparently spread through the population of women in the same way that witchcraft had previously spread through Europe and America -- in almost epidemic proportions...It is no coincidence.

The label may have changed, the treatment may appear more humane, but the process is the same. Women who are rebelling; women who are depressed, are being categorized, chastized and imprisoned in their bodies, which are intrinsically linked with illness or badness.⁵⁶

Priscilla's 'symptoms' of depression, sadness, reclusiveness and fragility fit the common, and often fashionable, stereotype of what Ussher describes as the "frail, pallid and wasted...middle-class Victorian woman."⁵⁷ Arthur's perception of and behaviour towards his wife, moreover, accord equally with nineteenth-century male notions of how to 'treat' women. Since, as Ussher has pointed out, any indication of deviancy or depression in women was looked upon as a sign of physical illness⁵⁸, women's bodies, which were by nature weak and diseased⁵⁹, needed to be cured first and foremost. In Part Two, Scene Eight, Arthur pays a visit to Lady Helena on a "delicate matter": that of his wife's health. Explaining that Priscilla's participation in the club is not doing her any good, he begs to have her excused from her duties in order that she may "recuperate fully at home". (p. 68) Although Arthur's request to remove Priscilla from the club stems partly from self-interest (he believes Priscilla has served his function to gain Lady Helena's approval and that any further association with the gut girls would sully his reputation), it stems perhaps more strongly from the desire to arrest the growth of what he perceives, and Lady Helena confirms, as increasing "self esteem" in his wife. To curb this threat of possible autonomy -- autonomy fostered moreover in the company of other women -- Arthur prescribes for Priscilla one of the common treatments espoused by nineteenth-century psychiatrists for 'hysterical' women: 'the rest cure'.⁶⁰ His subsequent threat to have Priscilla placed in an asylum for supposed madness is another common treatment for the 'female invalid'. Placed in this perspective, Daniels' implicit condemnation of Arthur's actions throughout the play may be viewed as a twentieth-century feminist response to nineteenth-century accepted male behaviour. Her foregrounding of recent developments in psychiatry's 'treatment' of women at this time, moreover, proves part of the on-going critique throughout her work of this institution's role in oppressing women and exacerbating their suffering.

Daniels' Priscilla-Arthur subplot is an ambitious inclusion in a play whose main goal is to dramatise an aspect of women's working-class history. While the depiction of their relationship is connected in some measure to the main plot (through the story of Polly) and places it within a much broader social framework, it does at times, however, like the numerous subplots in *Byrthrite*, call into question the play's central focus. This focus is most clearly distinguished through Daniels' moving portrayal of the loss -- economic, social and ideological -- and powerlessness experienced by working women at the mercy of an increasingly industrial, class-structured and patriarchal society. The playwright's emphasis on the magnitude of the gut girls' loss, again through the use of contrast, places *Gut Girls* by the end in the realm of tragedy. However, the play begins as a comedy with the presentation of a vibrant community of women held together by bonds of friendship, idealism and, most notably, laughter. By the end of the play, this community has completely disintegrated, together with its friendships, ideals and laughter. Accompanying the tremendous shift in the gut girls' practical circumstances is a dramatic shift in the play's tone and atmosphere. In contrast to the sense of hope, enthusiasm and hilarity that prevails at the beginning of the play, we are left at its close with a profound sense of despair and defeat. How, then, does the playwright accomplish these transitions?

Between the opening and final scenes of the play, Daniels charts the processes of economic and social constriction of the gut girls' lives. So that we may appreciate the full extent of this constriction, we are presented at first with a portrait of the women's community and individual lives as yet untouched by these processes. This portrait, though far from idealised, is nevertheless a positive representation of working women coping admirably with the daily pressures of hard labour, poverty and discrimination which oppress them already. Daniels' introduction of a new girl into the gutting sheds in the opening scene is an effective method of introducing the audience at the same time to the individual women, their working environment, and the nature of their community. Like Annie, we discover immediately, and no doubt with equal horror, the appalling conditions of their work: thirteen hour days, no sick pay, no injury compensation, lay offs with no warning, the cold

and extreme lack of hygiene. At the same time, however, Annie experiences the gut girls' warmth, humour, camaraderie and solidarity -- mechanisms which strengthen and enable them not only to survive the misery of their work, but to transcend the discrimination and marginalization they suffer because of this work. Kate offers Annie advice, for example, on how to 'handle' the foreman and disregard the apparent 'hardness' in certain of the women; Polly tries to make her feel at ease by a constant stream of puns and jokes; Maggie and Ellen display sympathy towards her for being stigmatised as a 'fallen' woman; and Ellen offers to secure a room for her in her own house instead of the St. John's home for "loose and fallen women" in which she was placed. Such displays of support, strength, kindness and friendship by the women are not limited to their work community but extend as well to those outside it. Beginning in Act One, Scene Four, Daniels offers a glimpse into the gut girls' private lives through a series of vignettes or snapshots which "fade" successively into one another. In Scene Four, for example, we witness Polly arriving home from work with beer and stolen meat from the shed for her mother, as well as a broken stool from the pub intended for her severely impoverished neighbours. Despite their own needy condition, Polly and her mother take comfort in each other's company, sharing news of their days and showing concern for others. A similar sense of nurture and comfort between women is conveyed in the following scene as Ellen and Annie develop their friendship outside of work. Having secured a room for Annie in her house, Ellen listens as Annie confides her harrowing experience of emotional and sexual abuse in the house where she worked as a domestic servant in the past. Ellen hugs her as she begins to sob for the first time since her stillborn child was born. In contrast to these examples of female nurture and support, Daniels depicts in Scene Seven a mother-daughter relationship which is oppressive rather than sustaining. Eady's harsh admonition of her daughter's 'masculine' behaviour and refusal to accept women's "destined" lot (marriage, children and drudgery), however, only inspires Maggie to strengthen her resolution to resist this destiny, as she firmly states: "It's not going to be my life." (p. 32) Ironically, her mother fosters her dream of liberation: to live her life in direct opposition to the way Eady felt compelled to live hers.

The gut girls' possession of dreams and ideals not only empowers them individually, but further cements their community. Although the specific ideals of each woman differ (and are often mocked by others), collectively they express an underlying belief and hope in the future -- hope which unites the women in spirit and enables them to see beyond the horror of their present work. Kate tells Jim, for example, that one of the ways she averts this horror is through "daydreams". Like Maggie, her vision for the future is defined first and foremost by what she does not want to be: like Eady, a domestic slave "working like a horse fer nothing". (p. 29) Kate shocks Jim by her desire to work after they are married and to use contraception. While her dream entails both sexual and financial independence, Jim's (to own a shop), not surprisingly, focuses solely on the latter. Kate, nevertheless, shares in his enthusiasm and even dismisses his concern that people like them "don't get shops" by giving an example of a woman who did. Unlike Kate's and Maggie's, Ellen's dream entails a collective rather than personal liberation: to unite workers to form a trade union in order to secure improved working conditions. Ellen, whose progressive beliefs elicit ridicule from others, nevertheless remains steadfast in her ambition to achieve this goal. An avid consumer of books, she is part of what Maggie describes as a "band of educated pilgrims what go round stirring up folks." (p. 14) In her 'stirring up' of Annie, we witness a degree of success.

Daniels' concern for the gut girls to voice their dreams in the first part of the play serves, as we shall see, to intensify the impact of their shattering at the end. Similarly, her foregrounding of the women's laughter and humour in the first part heightens our awareness of its eventual absence. As we saw in *Byrthrite*, laughter for the gut girls is a tactic for both survival and retaliation. Compared with any of Daniels' other plays, however, the role of laughter/humour in women's lives is explored most fully in *Gut Girls*. Susan Carlson finds laughter basic "to all women's theatrical enterprise",⁶¹ and comments on its growing importance in women's plays today:

Although self-consciousness about comedy is as old as the genre, women writers are revising specific conceptions about laughing women. Laughter

itself is a principal part of women playwrights' ongoing meta-commentary about the comic genre they so often choose.⁶²

Frances Gray, in her study on women and laughter, comments on feminism's recent engagement with laughter as a social force, and outlines two main areas of scholarship currently under investigation: "raising consciousness of overt or tacit sexism in male humour, and exploring women's comedy in order to become aware of specifically female strategies of laughter."⁶³ Both these goals are apparent, as we shall see, in *Gut Girls*.

From Daniels' early plays forward, one can trace a development in the playwright's treatment of humour. Where in *Ripen* and *Gateway*, for example, satiric sketches or situations were created to produce humour, in *Byrthrite* and especially *Gut Girls*, humour itself is used by characters to shape and control situations. In this way, the production of laughter by the women becomes, like that in numerous woman-authored plays, an expression of their power.⁶⁴ The power of the gut girls is most readily discerned in their ability to create humour that relieves or subverts oppression. In the gutting sheds, for example, Polly's numerous puns on the various organs of animals transform their gruesome task into a type of word game:

Annie (*holds her nose, gasps*) It's awful.

Polly Nothing wrong with your eyesight, then.
That's right. Offal by name, awful by nature.
(*Holds up a piece of liver.*) Feeling a bit
liverish meself. (p. 1)

Polly is not the only character to hold dominion over words. Ellen and Maggie use language inventively to tell amusing stories or pull pranks on men. When Harry enters the sheds after Lady Helena's visit, for example, they make an appeal to his vanity and, in so doing, undermine his air of authority and control:

Ellen (*slyly*) She were asking after you Harry,
weren't she gils?

Harry You. How many times do I have ter tell you.
You call me Mister Dedham. (*Then enquiringly.*) What
d'you mean, asking after me?

Maggie She says ter us, she says, with a little like shiver

in her voice, who's that handsome bulky foreman?

Harry (*trying to be casual*) Go on wiv yer.

Ellen She reckons to us that she'd really like to let her hair down with a body like yourn.

Harry That's quite enough. (*But preening himself.*) (p. 13)

In addition to undermining the authority of men, the women use language ingeniously to undermine the authority of language itself: specifically, patriarchal discourse which denigrates women. Pretending she hasn't seen Jim enter the shed, Ellen begins a conversation in which she describes how the house in St. John's (in which Annie was placed) was to be torn down to make way for an enormous new building which would be changed into "a refuge for loose and fallen men." (p. 7) Polly confirms Ellen's story: "That's right. Any man who's so much as showed himself to anyone other than the midwife who delivered him is going to have to live there." (p. 7) By redirecting such stigmatic labels for women back onto men, the gut girls exact a kind of gleeful revenge. On a more serious level, they demonstrate the enormous double standard operating in society: the notion of a refuge for 'loose and fallen' men is considered ridiculous, whereas one for 'loose and fallen' women is deemed necessary and proper. In Polly's description of the tea in the same scene, our attention is directed again to the use of humour to undercut prescriptive language. Inspecting the tea Annie and Kate have just brought in, Polly comments: "Bloody hell. It isn't weak, it's helpless." (p. 8) By taking a phrase normally used to describe women ('weak and helpless') and applying it to a pot of tea, Polly comically undermines such clichéd stereotyping. Such tactics are also evident in much recent feminist scholarship where, Gray observes, a 'playful, punning attitude' to language is adopted in order to "...defamiliarize language itself, to expose the hidden agendas behind words taken for granted, and thus to underline the revolutionary nature of the subject matter."⁶⁵

Through their constant witticisms, jokes, stories and pranks, the gut girls establish for their community an atmosphere of unrepressed joviality and warmth. Their humour, at once spontaneous, creative and subversive, gives them strength not only to retaliate against forces that seek to dominate and demean them, but to use their demeaned social positions to

their own advantage. Society's labelling of them as 'bold', 'masculine', and 'outrageous' ironically frees them to behave even more boldly, more "like men", and more outrageously. We see them in Scene Three, having just been described by Lady Helena as poor, wretched and miserable, leaving work "*laughing and giggling*" and "*wearing wonderful hats and earrings*". (p. 21) As they parade to the pub, they take full advantage of the reputation they have been assigned:

Man (*off, shouts*) You're quiet tonight gels!

Maggie Sing! Sing something.

Annie starts singing, quite seriously, 'Jesus bids us shine, with a pure, clear light'. The others stop horrified.

Maggie Bloody hell! No, not that, Jesus Christ. (*She starts singing 'Joshua, Joshua...'. The others join in.*)

Bert (*voice off*) Oh Gawd, Charlie, the gut girls is out.

Charlie (*voice off*) Quick, duck down Queen Street.

Maggie (*calls after them*) You goin' to stand us all a drink then, mate? (*The women laugh.*)

Ellen (*calls*) Where are you off to in such a hurry?
Come back here. (p. 22)

The gut girls' ability to intimidate men through their 'brazen' behaviour and choruses of laughter is demonstrated again at the Music Hall. Bored by Madjacko's unimaginative, derogatory jokes about them, the women retaliate with their own humour. One by one they fire equally derogatory jokes back at Madjacko and, in so doing, show this brand of traditional male humour up for its ease and stupidity. Reminiscent of scenes in *Byrthrite*, the gut girls' laughter eventually drowns Madjacko out and "*he decides to beat a retreat*" (p. 39)

In the following scene (Part Two, Scene One) at Lady Helena's club, Daniels provides the play's most vivid illustration of the subversive power of the gut girls' humour. This scene, a testament of the playwright's comic genius, is rife with examples of the methods, both verbal and visual, with which the women undermine the oppressive Victorian and religious

morals imposed on them. United in a spirit of rebellion, they take turns mocking, mimicking, and pulling pranks on Lady Helena and her repressive regime of domestic industry and Christian indoctrination. Forced to sew pairs of knickers (for which they are famed for doing without), for example, Polly proudly shows Lady Helena her completed "*enormous pair of bloomers with about eight pockets, all shaped like pork chops or some recognisable piece of meat*". (p. 43) With similar feigned innocence, the girls make a mockery of Lady Helena's religious teachings:

Lady Helena Who knows what Holy Week is about?

Maggie Having a good time.

Lady Helena It is not. It is remembering that Jesus died and suffered for each and everyone of us. But...

Polly Who?

Lady Helena Our Lord, Jesus Christ.

Maggie Never heard of him.

Chorus of 'No'. (p. 46)

Of the women's numerous talents for comic manipulation displayed in this scene, perhaps the most impressive is their exploitation of the literal. In the following example, they combine verbal and visual tactics to undermine and point out the absurdity (once again) of the terms 'loose' and 'fallen':

Lady Helena (*talking over them*) This new rule is that no loose women should be allowed to come to the club.

Kate We don't know what you mean Mam.

...

Polly I know I could be leaner but (*Holding up her arm.*) this is all muscle. May look loose but honest, Miss, it's muscle.

Lady Helena Those who have strayed from the path of virtue.

Maggie Which side of Evelyn Street is that on?

Lady Helena (*deep breath*) I meant fallen women.

Polly (*trips and falls on the floor*) Oh blimey, what am I going to do, I've fallen.

The others slip off their chairs.

Maggie Oh no, we're all fallen women. (pp. 43 - 44)

At the end of the scene as they are leaving, Polly slips the slide of Jesus shown to them during the 'magic lantern' show into her pocket. When Maggie asks her what she is doing, Polly replies: "She said we had to tek Jesus home with us." (p. 47) The gut girls then all rush out "*laughing, screaming and shouting*". (p. 47)

The laughter and verbal exuberance of the gut girls is the most distinguishing feature of their community. Throughout the play's first half, Daniels clearly links the production of laughter with the strengthening of this community. In the same way, as Carlson has pointed out, the playwright connects the dissipation of laughter to the community's disruption.⁶⁶ After the loss of their jobs, we observe not only a marked decline in the women's production of laughter, but a steady disintegration of their friendships and ideals. Even before they have been laid off, however, the mere threat of unemployment begins to undermine the bonds between them. Annie chastises Polly, for example, for proposing a prank on Harry. "Ellen's telling us that we ain't going to have no jobs and all you can think about is having a laugh" (p. 54) Kate, displaying a similar concern to become serious, suggests the women had better be "...keeping in with Lady Helena just to be on the safe side." (p. 54) The following scene in the club (Part Two, Scene Five) is visibly and audibly more subdued than the previous episode there. Faced with the spectre of extreme poverty, the girls, with the exception of Maggie and Ellen, subject themselves more earnestly to the process of social molding and conformity demanded by their prospective jobs in the serving class. Lady Helena, regarding the gut girls' lay offs (of which she has received certain news before them) as a "Godsent opportunity", increases the rigor of her training scheme. Using her own maid as a model, she puts the girls through endless exercises which aim to 'correct' their appearance, deportment and speech. Although Polly protests at such indoctrination ("Oh my Gawd, she's going to dress us up as dollies" p. 57), by the end of the scene she, along with the others, appear thoroughly defeated:

Polly Will that be all, Madam.

Annie Very good, Madam.

Kate Thank you, Madam. (p. 60)

The contrast between the close of this scene with the close of the previous club visit is stark. With the confirmation of the women's loss of jobs in the following scene, contrasts such as this become ever more apparent. In this scene of fading 'snapshots', Daniels charts the drastic transitions the women are forced to undergo -- transitions that signal shifts from power to powerlessness, from rebellion to conformity, from laughter and "shouting" to silence, from joy to despair. Annie, for example, despite the abuse she suffered previously as a servant and Ellen's vehement protestations, goes back into service. She points out to Ellen: "You forget Ellen I've been on the streets once before. And, I can tell you, anything yeah virtually anything, is better than that ...what choice have I?" (p. 62) A similar lack of choice forces Kate to take a position in a household and, in so doing, she abandons hers and Jim's "dream" to own a shop. Maggie, who at this point still believes she can exercise choice, argues again with her mother, firmly resisting her suggestions to beg Lady Helena for a job ("I got more bloody pride" p. 64) or get married. Ellen, on the other hand, having been refused jobs at every factory in the area, is forced to abandon her principles. In a moment of poignant self-effacement at the end of the scene, she tries to sell herself to an employer at a factory in Southwark. "...I'm a fast learner. Please take me on. Give me a chance. (Pause) Oh no, I wouldn't have nothing to do with Trade Unions." (p. 64-5). Maggie soon discovers she must undergo the same process of self-effacement. We witness her in Scene Seven pleading with Lady Helena for a job, and in Scene Nine, having been thrown out by her mother, married to Len. In response to Ellen's astonishment upon discovering her reduction, Maggie asks: "What bleedin' choices did I have Ellen?" (p. 72)

Confronted with the necessity for survival, the gut girls must endure not only the death of their ideals and considerable economic devaluation (they are paid in service, for example, a fraction of what they earned at the sheds), but, most disturbingly, the 'taming' of their spirit. While Daniels indicates that society's taming of dangerous female behaviour then was a process applied to women regardless of class (Priscilla, for example, speaks feelingly of

Christianity's "stifling ideology" responsible for "tam[ing] the wild God", p. 69), she demonstrates how poor and working women were the more vulnerable to this process. In Part Two, Scene One, Lady Helena refers to the gut girls as "riotous beasts" (p. 47) and later, after they have been successfully 'trained', she proudly asserts: "As a species, they have been totally transformed." (p. 71) Such similes, as damning of Lady Helena's class bias as they are derisive of the gut girls, sadly reflect the treatment the women have received. Although Daniels makes it clear through the story of Jim that both working class women and men have suffered from the closure of the sheds, she stresses that it is the women who suffer further oppression solely on the basis of their gender: their behaviour, not that of men, must be transformed if they are to be re-employed. When Jim tells Ellen that he hopes Lady Helena might find a new job for him, for example, Ellen replies: "She ain't offering a service for men because she don't care how they carry on. It's women's behaviour she wants to change " (p 61)

In contrast to the gut girls' former energetic resistance to such social molding, by the end of the play we witness only acquiescence and defeat. In her monologue in Scene Seven, Ellen encapsulates the sense of powerlessness and profound spiritual demoralisation resulting from economic and class oppression:

It wouldn't have made a shred of difference what five hundred of us had done. We'd still have been out of work. They'd still have got their way -- those people with their schemes and funds and clubs and allowances -- all thought up out of fear -- out of a fear that we, the ones who made their wealth might get out of hand. So 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. ...I don't want to keep arguing and kicking against it. I don't want to stick out like a sore thumb and be seen as odd. Who am I to call the others fools when I am the biggest laughing stock of the lot -- actually believing that I had any say over what happened to me or anyone else. (p. 67)

Ellen's 'giving in' is paralleled in the lives of the other women who, in order to cope, are forced to undergo a separation not only from their former selves, but from their friends.

Kate's method of coping, for example, necessitates an outright rejection of her friends. Seeing her only hope now to be for promotion within the serving class, she tries to "better" herself socially. Eventually, Jim's 'common' language becomes distasteful to her and Annie's attempt to renew their friendship a source of social embarrassment. Ellen too, although she doesn't reject her friends, is compelled to disassociate herself from any form of female community. When Maggie asks why she hasn't come around to the pub recently, Ellen replies: "Times have changed ain't they? Lady can't go fer a drink on her own these days." (p. 71) Polly, the only one who continues to rebel by refusing to be struck by her tyrannical employer (Arthur), ends up in Holloway Prison for her act of combative self-defence. Although Maggie pleads with Priscilla to give Polly a good character reference in court, her act of solidarity is set against Kate's disloyalty to her former workmate. Convinced that Polly's 'crime' will taint the reputation of all the gut girls, Kate turns against her and determines "to prove to them we aren't all like that." (p. 77).

The play's final scene is a stunning theatrical dénouement to the collapse of the gut girls' community and to the constriction of their lives. Through the technique of spotlighting the women individually rather than collectively on stage, Daniels reinforces visually the outcome of the process of social molding begun in Lady Helena's club. In sharp contrast to the lively interaction of the women in the opening scene, here we witness them separately, describing directly to us some aspect of their present solitary, 'tame' existence. Juxtaposed with these grim assertions are the smug statements of satisfaction that Lady Helena records in her journal:

Lady Helena This morning I woke up and I felt like hugging myself.

Ellen It's hardly what you'd call a rewarding job.

Lady Helena The careful planning and hardwork (sic) has been of benefit to so many.

Ellen You put a button on a metal plate, then cover it with material.

Annie This morning I woke up and I realised that I

hadn't dreamed about running away for a whole week.
 It's much better not to hold on to your dreams. I suppose
 it's natural to let go of them as you get older. (p. 80)

While the statements of each gut girl undermine Lady Helena's vision of success, Ellen's provide an additional dimension of indictment. By counterpoising Lady Helena's accounts of the efficiency of her scheme with Ellen's descriptions of the mechanics of her new job in the button factory, Daniels sets up a brilliant metaphor that compares the button factory to Lady Helena's 'factory' of manners and the gut girls to buttons which must be manufactured and squeezed into the holes designed for them in the fabric of a class-structured, increasingly industrial and capitalist society:

Ellen You bring the lever down.

...

And there you have a perfectly covered button.

Lady Helena Through diligence and persistence even the rawest of material has been transformed into a servant of lower middle class acceptability.

..

Ellen At the end of the day you have a whole box full.

Lady Helena Two hundred and fifty of them placed to date in good households.

Ellen The conditions are cleaner but the whole place is very hot and noisy.

Lady Helena One tale of woe, Polly, an aberration. (pp. 80 - 81)

To Lady Helena's mind, Polly is like a button out of place -- one that refused to fit into her servant's 'hole' of compliance and degradation. The price she will likely pay for her inability to fit is to be snipped off of society's fabric (hanged), and easily replaced. As Arthur points out to Priscilla: "Christ, servants are two a penny, they're nothing." (p. 73)

Although the gut girls were never seen to have held positions of significance in society, their position of 'nothingness' at the end of the play points nevertheless to the further narrowing of margins and power that has occurred in their lives. Such a bleak and tragic conclusion, however, is somewhat mitigated by the playwright who, as with previous bleak

endings, provides a few rainbows. We see Priscilla, for example, defying the dictates of Arthur and renewing her relationship with Lady Helena. Hope emerges as well for Ellen who finally is working in a unionised factory -- unionised because of the efforts of one of her female co-workers. This woman, who gives speeches in public, becomes for Ellen what she used to try to be for the gut girls: a role model inspiring action and change. The final lines of the play are her call for the re-emergence of Ellen's voice and fighting spirit: "'So', she says. 'You just going to sit there and let it happen again, then'." (p. 82) The combination of these women's voices at the end points not only to their likely participation in the impending suffragette movement, but generally to the strength and persistence of women's voices throughout history.

Unlike the majority of Daniels' other plays, *Gut Girls* has enjoyed a success untainted by controversy or extreme critical backlash. Next to *Masterpieces*, it is the most frequently revived of Daniels' works and, despite the playwright's and director's prediction that the play would not live beyond its original production, has over the years increased in popularity not only in Britain but also, like *Masterpieces*, abroad. Produced in Denmark (1989), Canada (1992; 1994), Japan (1993) and New York (1993), *Gut Girls* is also the first of Daniels' plays to be published outside of Britain (by Samuel French Inc.). Initially saddened by the poor attendance of those the play was aiming to attract in Deptford, Daniels reveals that local audiences eventually built and in the end it was well attended.⁶⁷ The playwright still expresses surprise, however, that *Gut Girls* has not since then been forgotten.⁶⁸ One of the reasons could be the recent rise of scholarly and popular interest in discovering and reassessing women in history. Another reason is undoubtedly the technical and verbal brilliance of the play which transcend considerations of local history and audience class-consciousness. This is not to say, however, that the play is beyond criticism. One reviewer, for example, finds an uncertainty in Daniels' tone and comments on its division between "...condemnation of late Victorian exploitation and something akin to nostalgia for the glory

of the gutting sheds."⁶⁹ (While it is true that Daniels' tone often varies, the reviewer has surely misinterpreted the play's nostalgia: rather than for the "glory of the gutting sheds", the nostalgia is clearly for the relative freedom that the gutting sheds represented for the girls.) Another critic notes, as I have done earlier, on the tendency for issues to become "muddled" or obscured.⁷⁰ Finally, there are reviewers' invariable condemnations of what they see as Daniels' indiscriminate assault on men. Overall, however, reviews of the play are notably more positive and appreciative of the playwright's issues, humour and style. In both *Gut Girls* and *Byrthrite* we see Daniels extending the perimeters of her dramaturgy and, despite her tendency at times to overload the plays with issues, offering audiences unique and complex theatrical experiences that compel us to re-examine history from a distinct female perspective

¹See *Hidden From History* (London Pluto Press, 1973). Since Rowbotham, feminist historians have set out in various directions in order to include an account of gender in traditional historiography. One branch of scholarship, for example, has aimed to restore accounts of ordinary women's experience left out of histories by men. (See, for example, Gerda Lerner's *The Majority Finds Its Past: Placing Women in History*, 1979.) Other historians have placed importance on challenging masculine assumptions that shape historical models, and to create new models which deal with the new material from women's lives, such as histories of women healers, women's sexuality or working women. (See J. Newton, M. Ryan and J. Walhowitz, eds., *Sex and Class in Women's History*, 1983, or, for example, Lindsey Charles and Lorna Duffin's *Women and Work in Pre-Industrial England*, 1985, or Barbara Ehrenreich and Deirdre English's *Witches, Midwives and Healers: A History of Women Healers*, 1973.) Another feminist approach to history has been to address issues of race, anthropology or religion, and to look at the ways in which they can revise traditional conceptions of history. (See, for example, Rosalind Miles' *The Women's History of the World*, 1988; or Lerner's *Black Women in White America*, 1972)

Such scholarship has also taken place in the field of women's theatre history. In *Feminism and Theatre* (London: Macmillan, 1988), for example, Sue-Ellen Case discusses the phases of theatre scholarship that have gone from uncovering plays by women (primarily from the seventeenth century forward), interpreting images of women in plays written by men (in the classical periods), to finding ways 'to resist reading texts by men as they were conventionally read.' (pp. 5 - 7) See also Elaine Aston's *An Introduction to Feminism and Theatre* (London: Routledge, 1995). Chapter Two, for a discussion of women's theatre history scholarship.

²*Feminist Theatre*, p. 127. Churchill's *Topogical Tom* ('76) is the most obvious play to compare with *Byrthrite*, sharing as it does a similar subject, time frame, and an incorporation of contemporary songs. Churchill, however, although she makes similar connections as Daniels between the appropriation of women's bodies and skills by men in the seventeenth century and today (through songs), presents generally a more focused social document about witch hunting than *Byrthrite*, a play that also explores numerous other topics including playmaking, cross-dressing and various feminist dynamics. Bryony Lavery's *Witchcraze* ('85) too makes connections between past witches and modern ones (i.e. those of Greenham Common), and her *Origin of the Species* ('84) is a feminist revisioning of her/history.

Other plays that use history to re-examine women's lives are Lou Wakefield's *Time Pieces* ('82), a play again incorporating songs, which uses an agitprop style to re-present the histories of women in one particular family (a photograph album is the device providing the basis for dramatised excursions into the

women's pasts); and Timberlake Wertenbaker's *The Grace of Mary Traverse* ('85), although not essentially a 'historical' play, nevertheless uses history metaphorically, setting a young woman's quest for experience and knowledge against the backdrop of the social upheavals and restrictions placed on women in the late eighteenth century. History, thus, is used to create a kind of social parable rather than a factual portrait of London society in that era.

³*Plays: One* (London: Methuen Drama, 1991), p. 381. All references to *Byrthrite* are taken from this edition and will be listed parenthetically in the text.

⁴*Ibid.*, p. xi.

⁵Besides *Head-Rot Holiday*, *The Gut Girls* is the only play which Daniels was commissioned to write on a specific subject. (Taped lecture given by Daniels to graduate students at the University of Toronto, 8 December 1993).

⁶*Ibid.*

⁷Daniels reveals that the Albany Empire's theatre-in-the-round lent itself particularly to the development of this technique. (Interview with the playwright at the National Theatre, 4 May 1994).

⁸*Op. cit.*, n. 3, p. xii.

⁹*Independent*, 24 November 1986.

¹⁰*Ibid.*

¹¹*Op. cit.*, n. 3, p. 332.

¹²*What's On and Where To Go*, 4 December 1986.

¹³*Op. cit.*, n. 3, p. xii.

¹⁴*Op. cit.*, n. 12.

¹⁵*Guardian*, 25 November 1986.

¹⁶Claire Armitstead, *Financial Times*, 26 November 1986.

¹⁷*Op. cit.*, n. 5

¹⁸*Op. cit.*, n. 3, p. xii.

¹⁹Some examples of feminist discussions of cross-dressing and the social construction of gender can be found in Sue-Ellen Case's *Feminism and Theatre*, where Case deals in her first chapter with the history of 'classic drag' and the male creation and representation of female parts; Anne Hermann's 'Travesty and Transgression: Transvestism in Shakespeare, Brecht and Churchill', (in *Performing Feminisms: Feminist Critical Theory and Theatre*, ed. by Sue-Ellen Case, Maryland: Johns Hopkins Press, 1990, 294 - 315), looks at these playwrights' use of transvestism as a dramatic device 'to figure historicized forms of social transgression' and to explore social contradictions between the 'natural and unnatural' and the 'good and the bad'; in *Acting Women: Images of Women in Theatre* (London: Macmillan, 1990), Lesley Ferris presents an account of cross-dressing on the stage from the time of the Ancient Greeks to today, and examines in particular how the absence of women on stage 'created the notion of woman as sign, a symbolic object' manipulated by male playwrights and actors. She argues also that when women were first allowed to act, actresses 'played themselves' and, in so doing, were denied by the patriarchal scheme the possibility of cultural creativity; and in 'Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory' (in *Performing Feminisms*, 270 - 82), Judith Butler draws from theatrical, anthropological, and philosophical sources to illustrate ways in which 'naturalized' conceptions of gender can be seen as 'constituted and, hence, capable of being constituted differently'.

²⁰*Op. cit.*, n. 7. Daniels reveals that the feminist debate present in *Byrthrite* is reflective of many of the ideas circulating in society in the early to mid-eighties, particularly those emanating from the aftermath of Greenham Common. Debates surrounding violent versus peaceful protest at this time, for example, fired the publication of several collections of essays by women on topics ranging from nuclear war, non-nuclear alternatives and civil defence to the relationship between feminism and militarism. (See, for example, *Over Our Dead Bodies: Women Against the Bomb*, ed. by Dorothy Thompson, 1983; or the reissuing of *Militarism versus Feminism: Writings on Women and War*, ed. by Margaret Kamester and Jo Vellacott, 1987; also Sarah Ruddick's 'Preservative Love and Military Destruction: Some Reflections on Mothering and Peace', in *Mothering: Essays in Feminist Theory*, ed. by J. Trebilcock, 1984.)

For an account of radical feminism's distrust of reproductive technology and the debate between feminists over this issue, see Alison Jagger's *Feminist Politics and Human Nature* (1983), Chapter Five; other examples of the debate can be found in Michelle Stanworth (ed.) *Reproductive Technologies* (1987).

²¹Lesley Ferris in *Acting Women* discusses the importance and success of women playwrights during the period known as the Queen Anne era (1695 - 1714). Referring to research carried out by Kathryn Kendall

(1986, University of Texas dissertation), she reveals: "...from 1695 to 1706, of all new plays produced for the London stage, between one-third and one-half were written by a group of six women -- Mary Pix, Catharine Trotter, Delariviere Manley, Susanna Centlivre, Jane Wiseman, and Mary Davys." She also points to these women's conscious awareness of following Aphra Behn, "a dramatist who had challenged the supremacy of male playwrights in the previous generation." (p. 155)

²²Aston, *An Introduction to Feminism and Theatre*, p. 23.

²³Daniels' character of the Pricker is based on the historical figure of the notorious Matthew Hopkins, known as the 'Witchfinder General'.

²⁴*Op. cit.*, n. 12.

²⁵'Self and Sexuality: Contemporary British Women Playwrights and the Problem of Sexual Identity', *Journal of Dramatic Theory and Criticism*, 3 (1989), p. 173.

²⁶*Op. cit.*, n. 12.

²⁷*Op. cit.*, n. 25.

²⁸The foregrounding of female solidarity as a coping mechanism against male oppression is often achieved by the placement, as noted in Chapter Two, of groups or communities of women on stage. Such models of resistance or alternative female networks can be found, for example, in Ntozake Shange's 'choreopoem' *for colored girls who have considered suicide when the rainbow is enuf* ('74), where a 'rainbow' chorus of Black women, recounting at first stories of misogynist treatment by men and racial abuse, counter such oppression with communal celebrations of (self-)love, pride, and solidarity towards the end; or in Nell Dunn's *Steaming* ('81), set in the Turkish room of a public baths, a group of women find friendship and strength in one another during their weekly meetings, and also in their combined act of resistance to the threat of the baths' closure by the local council (represented in the play as a male authority).

²⁹See n. 20.

³⁰*The Feminist Spectator as Critic* (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1988), p. 7.

³¹*Ibid.*, p. 6.

³²*Feminist Politics and Human Nature* (Sussex: Harvester Press, 1983), p. 93.

³³*Op. cit.*, n. 30. Dolan, establishing liberal feminism's derivation from liberal humanism, writes: "Rather than proposing radical structural change, it suggests that working within existing social and political organizations will eventually secure women social, political, and economic parity with men." p. 3.

³⁴*Ibid.* Dolan writes "In materialist discourse, gender is not innate. Rather it is dictated through enculturation, as gender divisions are placed at the service of the dominant culture's ideology." p. 10.

³⁵'Brechtian Theory Feminist Theory Towards a Gestic Feminist Criticism', *The Drama Review*, 32 (1988), pp. 84 - 5.

³⁶'Hide and Seek: the Search for a Lesbian Theatre Aesthetic', *New Theatre Quarterly*, 9 (1993), p. 148.

³⁷*Op. cit.*, n. 25, p. 174

³⁸*Op. cit.*, n. 31, p. 6

³⁹*Op. cit.*, n. 21, pp. 9-10

⁴⁰*Op. cit.*, n. 7. In Lady H's speech to the women at the inn in Part Two, scene seven, Daniels reveals that she incorporated some of the ideas from two pamphlets written by Quaker women circulating in the seventeenth century.

⁴¹*Op. cit.*, n. 25, p. 172

⁴²*Independent*, 28 November 1986

⁴³*Sunday Times*, 20 November 1986

⁴⁴*Observer*, 30 November 1886

⁴⁵*Op. cit.*, n. 25, p. 174.

⁴⁶*Op. cit.*, n. 9.

⁴⁷*The Times*, 28 November 1986.

⁴⁸*Op. cit.*, n. 42.

⁴⁹*Op. cit.*, n. 43.

⁵⁰*Op. cit.*, n. 16.

⁵¹*Op. cit.*, n. 47.

⁵²*City Limits*, 20 November 1986.

⁵³*Op. cit.*, n. 7. All succeeding details on the genesis of *Gut Girls* were related by Daniels in this same interview.

⁵⁴Sarah Daniels, *The Gut Girls* (London: Methuen, 1989), p. 7. All references to *Gut Girls* are taken from this edition and will be listed parenthetically in the text.

⁵⁵Sarah Daniels: 'A Woman in the Moon', *Theatre Yale*, 21 (1990), p. 29.

⁵⁶*Women's Madness: Misogyny or Mental Illness?* (Hertfordshire: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1991), p. 61.

⁵⁷*Ibid.*, p. 78.

⁵⁸*Ibid.* Ussher notes that it was commonly held amongst Victorian psychiatrists and the medical profession that madness had a somatic basis. p. 67.

⁵⁹*Ibid.*, p. 70.

⁶⁰*Ibid.* Ussher reveals that hysteria "...became the accepted diagnosis of all aspects of female madness, as well as a whole cornucopia of other female maladies." The rest cure treatment for hysteria, advocated by Silas Weir Mitchell in 1874, was designed to confine women by "seclusion, enforced bed rest, and the absence of mental activities". p. 75.

⁶¹*Women and Comedy: Rewriting the British Theatrical Tradition* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1991), p. 232.

⁶²*Ibid.*, p. 228.

⁶³*Women and Laughter* (London: Macmillan, 1994), p. 33.

⁶⁴*Op. cit.*, n. 61, p. 233.

⁶⁵*Op. cit.*, n. 63, p. 35.

⁶⁶*Op. cit.*, n. 61, p. 300.

⁶⁷*Op. cit.*, n. 5.

⁶⁸*Ibid.*

⁶⁹Jeremy Kingston, *The Times*, 19 November 1988.

⁷⁰Georgina Brown, *Independent*, 14 November 1988.

CHAPTER FIVE
Women and Madness: Daniels in the 1990s

From *Ripen* through to *Gut Girls*, Daniels' plays of the 1980s may be characterised not by any single feature, but by their diversity of subjects, styles, historical frameworks and feminist issues. In the 1990s, the playwright narrows her critical focus and for the first time follows a more singular direction in her writing. *Beside Herself* (1990), *Head-Rot Holiday* (1992) and *The Madness of Esme and Shaz* (1994) form a unified trio that emerges as the culmination of Daniels' most significant preoccupation throughout her career: women and madness.

In each of her previous plays, the subject or question of women's mental health has achieved considerable prominence on Daniels' agenda of feminist concerns. From the psychiatric hounding and suicide of Mary in *Ripen*, the labelling as 'mad' of peace protesters in *Gateway*, the depression and nervous breakdown of Val in *Neaptide*, the repercussions of sexual violence against women in *Masterpieces*, the torture and killing of 'witches' in *Byrthrite* to the treatment of Priscilla's 'female malady' in *Gut Girls*, the issue of women's madness or, more often than not, women's positioning as 'mad' in society, is one which the playwright in the '90s examines from new perspectives and places more emphatically centre stage. Her heightened attention to issues surrounding women's mental health in these plays may be seen also in conjunction with a larger feminist enquiry into the links between women and 'madness' taking place over the last decade. Elaine Showalter notes, for example:

Contemporary feminist philosophers, literary critics, and social theorists have been the first to call attention to the existence of a fundamental alliance between "women" and "madness". They have shown how women, within our dualistic systems of language and representation, are typically situated on the side of irrationality, silence, nature, and body, while men are situated on the side of reason, discourse, culture, and mind.¹

While reflecting as well as broadening this enquiry to some degree in all of her plays, Daniels reveals that up until *Beside Herself* the specific subject of women and madness was never a deliberate inclusion in her plays. In a recent interview, she explained:

I don't know why I'm so fascinated by it [women and madness], and why it keeps coming up. In *Masterpieces*, for example, I deliberately set out to write a play against pornography -- and that's quite a clear thing. I haven't deliberately set out to write about women and madness as such in the previous plays, but it comes up again and again.²

Despite this, Daniels admits that since the mid-eighties the question of how women's mental health is defined has become a growing preoccupation. *Beside Herself* is her first play written exclusively on the subject of women's mental health, and specifically, as in *Head-Rot* and *Esme and Shaz* as well, on the links between the sexual abuse of women and mental health. In addition to the general discussion on such issues occurring in society at this time, Daniels' previous writing contributed considerably to her more focused feminist exploration in these plays. The original idea for *Beside Herself*, for example, goes back to the mid-eighties when the subject of *Masterpieces*, sexual violence towards women, was still uppermost in her mind. Daniels discussed the possibility of doing another piece on this theme with Jules Wright, who eventually commissioned the play through Women's Playhouse Trust and Methuen. In addition to her idea for *Beside Herself*, Daniels had also during the mid-eighties discussed with playwright and director Paulette Randall the possibility of her directing a play (as yet not written) involving a woman sent to Broadmoor for having killed her husband. In 1991 when Clean Break Theatre Company wanted to commission a playwright for their 1992 production, to be based around the experiences of women in Special Hospitals, Randall, who herself had just written a play for the company, recalled her conversation with Daniels several years earlier, and suggested her to the company. (She also, as it turned out, ended up directing *Head-Rot*.) Clean Break, aware of Daniels' growing reputation for sensitivity to issues of women's mental health, as well as "the integrity and quality of her writing", felt that such a "secret" and painful subject as they

were proposing would be ideally suited to her.³ From Daniels' intensive research for *Head-Rot* into women's placement, treatment and the conditions they face in Special Hospitals, the idea for another play germinated. Taking advantage of an open commission from the Royal Court, Daniels wrote *Esme and Shaz* which premiered at the Theatre Upstairs in February 1994.

In view of their varied origins, it becomes clear that *Beside Herself*, *Head-Rot* and *Esme and Shaz* form a 'unified trio' only in retrospect. Although Daniels never set out to write three consecutive plays on 'women and madness', the persistence of this theme from the beginning of her career suggests that the present direction of her playwriting is one towards which all previous paths were leading. Despite the ubiquity of the theme, however, Daniels states: "I don't think there's anyone in the plays who is mentally ill."⁴ Her fascination with women's mental health, as stated earlier, lies primarily with its definition -- definition by society at large and, specifically in these plays, by doctors, nurses, social workers, community 'carers', and by the women deemed 'mad' themselves. While Daniels does not reject the reality of mental illness in people, she strongly rejects the labelling, and more often than not, mislabelling of women in particular whose behaviour and distress run contrary to patriarchal definitions of 'normality'.⁵ The playwright believes that it is impossible to try to measure a person's mental health because, in her words, "we are all on a continuum of mental health. There isn't an objective yardstick."⁶ In Scene Eleven of *Ripen*, we may recall the playwright poking fun at this persistent need by 'experts' to define or label deviant female behaviour:

MARY. I am not mental.

MARSHALL. That's a very old-fashioned word that we no longer like to use these days. Instead we have a less crude, more specifically defined vocabulary of terminology.

MARY. In that case, I'm not psychopathic, hysteric, neurotic, psychotic, paranoic, schizophrenic, manic depressive, hypochondriac, a raving lunatic or a screwball. (p. 60)

In the three plays under scrutiny in this chapter, Daniels takes a more serious look at the issue of labelling. In particular, she exposes how language, through its capacity to stigmatize, misrepresent or obfuscate a woman's reality, can act as oppressively as any one person or institution to exacerbate her distress. According to the playwright, the very act of labelling a woman as 'mad' is yet another means of "rendering her invisible or writing her off."⁷

In all three plays Daniels' goal is to render visible the forces that collude to undermine women's sanity and, like in most of her plays, to offer women opportunities to understand and, in certain cases, to combat these forces. In each play, the sexual abuse of women as children or teenagers is presented as a significant force in precipitating 'madness' in female characters. While the links between the sexual abuse of children and the possibility of deteriorating mental health in later years is by now well documented⁸, Daniels points to the difficulty she faced in tackling the subject.

You have to be quite careful because there's such a large percentage of women who have been sexually abused; but that doesn't mean to say they will become mentally ill. It's difficult because you don't want to create a stereotype of abuse -- and you certainly don't want to put abuse and 'victim' together. Obviously the definition is that women have survived it.⁹

Daniels' dramatisation of the issue encourages us to address it on a human rather than statistical level. Covering a broad range of ages, social classes, professions and sexual persuasions, the survivors of abuse in these plays illustrate the impossibility of locating the occurrence of this crime within a particular social bracket. The only thing these characters share is the devastating legacy of abuse and some of the ways in which this legacy is commonly manifested. Daniels points specifically in *Head-Rot* and *Esmé and Shaz*, for example, to the issue of self-harm and the tendency for women to turn their grief and anger inward. In *Beside Herself* and *Head-Rot* we witness the trauma of fractured female identity resulting from sexual abuse and how this can lead to the supposition of madness in women.

In all three plays Daniels looks at the legacy of anger that is left female survivors and, in the case of *Head-Rot* and *Esme and Shaz*, the way in which this anger, when manifested through violence, is criminalised and used to punish women further. Although the incidents of female violence in these plays are not shown in any way to be condoned by the playwright, they are presented as understandable responses to former abuse that women have suffered at the hands of men, usually fathers or father figures. Daniels points out that by criminalising a woman's reaction to abuse, however desperate, instead of her abuser's crime, the legal system and 'special' institutions reverse the profile of perpetrator/victim and the original crime against the woman is easily forgotten.

While *Beside Herself*, *Head-Rot* and *Esme and Shaz* share much in common thematically, their stories and styles differ greatly. *Beside Herself* and *Esme and Shaz* are both what Daniels terms "works of the imagination"¹⁰ whereas *Head-Rot* is an 'issue-based' play whose issues were detailed in Clean Break's brief. *Esme and Shaz* and *Beside Herself* clearly contain issues as well, but in both plays Daniels incorporates elements of fantasy or narrative that go beyond the 'docu-drama' style of *Head-Rot*. The surreal 'Prelude' to *Beside Herself*, for example, was added by Daniels in an effort to lift the play out of the genre she calls "social-work-play-for-today".¹¹ Similarly with *Esme and Shaz*, despite the subject matter it shares with *Head-Rot*, the playwright deliberately changes the focus: "It's not about issues, only people. All of whom are fictitious...".¹² Of the three plays, *Beside Herself* is the most technically innovative. In addition to the Prelude which sets 'hard done by' biblical wives in a modern-day supermarket, Daniels physically splits her female protagonist so that both 'ego' and 'alter-ego' are played by separate actresses. While Daniels faced numerous restrictions on her creative license with *Head-Rot*, set entirely in the closed world of a Special Hospital, she incorporates the visit of an angel to one of the patients -- a surreal incident reminiscent of Mary's ascension to the 'feminist heaven' in *Ripen*. *Esme and Shaz*, perhaps the least technically experimental of the plays, offers nonetheless the broadest range of settings (from a Regional Secure Unit to a Mediterranean cruise liner) and is also the first piece where Daniels chose an all-female cast.¹³ In terms of its narrative *Esme and*

Shaz is also unique. In addition to it being Daniels' first play in which a lesbian relationship is of central rather than peripheral importance to the narrative, it is the playwright's first dramatisation of "a love story".¹⁴ The love discovered accidentally by two unlikely women takes them on a journey, both metaphoric and physical, wherein they learn eventually to come to terms with and break free from a similarly damaged past. The story of *Beside Herself* is also that of a journey undertaken, albeit reluctantly, by a woman trying to come to terms with sexual abuse she suffered in the past by her father. *Beside Herself's* narrative, however, is multi-layered so that Evelyn/Eve's story becomes in many respects the story not only of other women in the play, but, as the Prelude and the name 'Eve' suggest, of all women. Unlike *Beside Herself* and *Esme and Shaz*, the narrative or plot in *Head-Rot* is loosely structured and only of secondary importance to the play's issues. *Head-Rot* is primarily an expository piece wherein each scene or episode is designed to illuminate different issues facing women who are either detained or working in Special Hospitals. Like *Masterpieces*, all three plays are shocking and painful. Daniels' style in each is typically confrontational: both the characters and audience are forced to face at every turn difficult truths or emotional horrors. Typical of the playwright too, however, is the way in which she interweaves, incredibly at times, an enormous amount of humour into such painful subjects. During an interview on BBC Radio Four, Daniels talked about her use of humour specifically in *Esme and Shaz* and generally elsewhere:

I don't think a conscious decision came into it. It's the way I write. It's a serious subject, but there's a lot of humour, I hope, in the play. It's the way I approach life really: the fact that it's very frightening is also very funny, or vice versa, I'm not sure which. But I also think that humour is so much part of life that you can't exclude it. Without it often subjects become alienating or very 'worthy' and alienate the audience. I think one of the ways to identify with a character is to make people laugh.¹⁵

Daniels' deftness at balancing enormous pain with an equal abundance of humour in these plays (and in previous works) has become one of the most distinguishing stamps of the

playwright. But while such originality of style and content must be credited entirely to her, the way in which these plays finally reached the stage was the result of more communal or collaborative effort. *Beside Herself*, *Head-Rot* and *Esme and Shaz* all benefitted considerably from rehearsed readings -- processes which enable a playwright and director to hear a work performed out loud by professional actors before it goes into rehearsal. Recognised as a useful working practice by such companies as Gay Sweatshop and the Women's Theatre Group (re-named Sphynx), the rehearsed reading has through the years become integral to the development of feminist theatre, particularly when funding for full productions is scarce.¹⁶ A number of Daniels' plays have been given rehearsed readings in the past but not all of them have gone on to be produced on stage.¹⁷ While Daniels expresses reservations about the potential for readings to be "graveyards" for a playwright's work, she describes the ones given to *Beside Herself*, *Head-Rot* and *Esme and Shaz* as "all extremely helpful"¹⁸ Of these plays, *Beside Herself* has undergone the most transformation since its rehearsed reading at the Royal Court Theatre Upstairs on 20 August 1988.¹⁹ Then entitled *The Power and the Story*, Daniels admits that at the time the play was only "half-baked" and was therefore presented to the audience as 'work in progress'.²⁰ As a result of this reading, Daniels reworked the play after many discussions with director Jules Wright and the actors. Despite numerous rewrites, however, Daniels reveals that the final version of the play was still being decided in rehearsal and indeed after opening night.²¹ This would suggest that in addition to collaboration between actors, director and playwright, the reaction of an audience too can play a role in determining the 'finished' version of a play.

Prior to the rehearsed reading given to the first draft of *Head-Rot* in January 1992, Daniels underwent a collaborative research period set up by Clean Break. The company's detailed account of this experience sheds light not only their own methods of theatre production, but generally on the interactive process characterising the production of much feminist theatre in recent years:

A research period was set up by the

Company, which included interviews with seven women whose experience of life in a Special totalled approximately 70 years. ...Clean Break also liaised closely with WISH [Women in Special Hospitals], and was able to set up further meetings with former 'patients', nurses, psychiatrists, clinical psychologists, etc.

There was a public reading of the first draft of the play by Emma Thomson, Harriet Walter and Sophie Okenado at the end of January, and this became a second draft with the help of constructive criticism from women from Specials, and the Company. The play rehearsed for five weeks in September/October, during which time the production team and cast all visited a Special Hospital and had further discussions *with women ex-patients* to ensure the integrity and authenticity of the production ²²

Daniels has described this process, and particularly the public rehearsed reading, as "one of the most exciting experiences I've ever had in the theatre."²³

Another significant experience for the playwright was the public *rehearsed reading of Esme and Shaz* given by the Audrey Skirball-Kenis Theatre on 18 October 1993 in Los Angeles. As part of the Royal Court's Exchange Series (in association with the Royal National Theatre Studio), this reading enabled Daniels not only to assess the viability of the play's structure and dialogue, but to test the reception of her ideas with non-British actors and audience. So enthusiastic was their response to the play that Paul Heller, a member of the Skirball-Kenis Theatre's board, arranged for a second reading to be given after its London run at the Lincoln Centre in New York. Unlike the Los Angeles reading, this one, held on 7 June 1994, was 'by invitation only' and, according to Daniels, was not as successful as the first.²⁴

Beside Herself

Of the three plays under scrutiny in this chapter, *Beside Herself* stands out as the most thematically complex and theatrically effective. Like *Byrthrite*, the play boasts an abundance of styles, tones, characters and themes woven together in a rich dramatic tapestry. As such, it is difficult, as in *Byrthrite*, to sum up what the play is 'about' in one sentence. While I have stated previously that it deals primarily with the links between childhood sexual abuse and 'madness' in women, this in fact forms only part of the play's busy agenda. Not only does Daniels highlight the story of one woman's experience of incest and her journey towards healing, but she incorporates as well a secondary story of child molestation involving a stepfather and daughter and her estranged mother, the comings and goings of staff at a 'half-way' hostel for ex-psychiatric patients, the history of one homosexual resident, institutionalised originally for buggery, and his experience of mental health 'care', the exposition of public attitudes towards the mentally ill through the monologue of Mr. 'Brittain', the revelation of yet another story of child abuse through the monologue of his wife, and a satirical overview of patriarchy's silencing and abuses of women throughout history in the play's Prelude. From all these narrative strands, three distinct perspectives emerge -- the historical, social and personal -- through which to view the play's central subject. While Evelyn's personal story of incest (and its repercussions) stands at the centre of *Beside Herself*, the interaction or paralleling of other narratives with this one creates numerous critical vantage points with which to assess it. In terms of the play's movement, the interaction between narratives plays an important role as well: often a crisis in one narrative precipitates a crisis in another. Through this 'domino effect', a high level of tension is sustained throughout the play.

Daniels' placement of her subject in the three perspectives mentioned is reflected also in the play's settings and time frame. All twelve scenes, for example, take place "in London in the present", thus specifying modern British society. The Prelude, however, is set at once in the past, present and future. infamous biblical wives (from Eve forward) are "condemned" for eternity to wander the corridors of hell, a modern-day supermarket. This sweeping

historical perspective opens up the play and signals that the ensuing scenes should be filtered critically through an historical and more universal lens. In terms of the specific settings of the play's twelve scenes, Daniels alternates between both private and public spaces. The first scene, for example, takes place in Evelyn's father's house and is actually entitled 'In her father's house'. This indicates (to a reader) that the following narrative will be a personal one and that it belongs to Evelyn (it is entitled '*her* father's house', not '*George's* house'.) At the same time, however, we sense that Evelyn is located somewhere on the margins of this house -- it belongs after all to George. This could suggest not only some degree of alienation between father and daughter from the start, but that Evelyn's story, although it will begin at George's house, must also take place elsewhere. In the following scene we move to a recently vandalised Community Group Home, St Dymphna's, where a different set of characters are busy repairing damage and preparing for a meeting. With Evelyn's entrance into this scene, our expectations from the previous scene are confirmed and the first important link between social and personal spheres is established. The remaining ten scenes of the play occur alternately at St Dymphna's (a place which presents a cross-section of society) and various private locations, including Evelyn's father's and Lil's homes and Roy's office. The eighth scene, however, places Evelyn and Nicola at the same supermarket of the Prelude, a symbolic reminder of the common plight of women throughout history. Daniels' labelling of this scene as "Exodus" and the following one as "Genesis" (the only scene to take place in the "open air") indicates metaphorically to women a 'way out' from their hell and the opportunity for a new 'beginning'.

Much of *Beside Herself* is informed by the idea of 'beginnings': the search by female characters for new beginnings in their lives, and the playwright's quest to uncover and revise history's beginning from a feminist point of view. This latter quest not only 'begins' the play, but establishes its central themes and goals. Daniels' Prelude, like Val's 'choric' introduction to *Neaptide*, frames the play and gives historical resonance to the events that follow. With *Beside Herself*, however, Daniels goes much further back than the seventeenth century to frame her play; she starts, in fact, 'in the beginning' of Judaeo-Christian history. As we saw

in the history plays of the previous chapter, Daniels' aim in this 'biblical' prelude is both to rewrite and 'right' history by giving voices to traditionally misrepresented and silenced women. Unlike *Byrthrite* and *Gut Girls*, however, Daniels makes no attempt here at realism in her depiction of history. The stage directions indicate the Prelude is "*a dream*" and, similar to the feminist 'heaven' in *Ripen*, it is presented surrealistically. Like the heaven scene in *Ripen* as well, *Beside Herself's* Prelude is extremely funny: notorious wives from both Old and New Testaments, together for the first time since their descent into hell, take over the aisles of a supermarket and attend feminist seminars, exchange stories of personal injustice, and explode two millennia of historical myth. Typical of the playwright's caustic humour, the scene is full of parody, ironic wordplay and situational farce. While Daniels has admitted that much of the comedy in her plays is not deliberately constructed as such, she admits that this Prelude, as mentioned previously, was designed specifically to lighten the "social work" atmosphere of the ensuing scenes and "to make people laugh".²⁵

The larger function of the Prelude, however, is to set out the goals of the play and to establish historical precedents for the ensuing present-day stories of Evelyn and other characters. Since the scene takes place in hell (an eternal setting), the characters who inhabit it may be viewed simultaneously as historical figures, reflections of present-day women and, if we do not heed their lessons, paradigms for future generations. What lessons, then, do they teach?

The emphasis of the Prelude is on education, and particularly the education (or re-education) of women by women. The scene opens with Eve, the prototypical mother, trying to enlighten her 'daughters' by organising seminars such as 'The burden of guilt and two thousand years of misrepresentation'. Eve's organisational skills, however, are ineffective and she finds that her fallen offspring, much to her annoyance, are keener to have their hair cut by Delilah or attend more popular talks like Mrs. Noah's 'How to survive a barbecue in a storm'. Eve persists, though, and chides the women for their trivial pursuits and apparent lack of concern over the history of their oppression. Her goal, she tries repeatedly to tell them, is to set the record of history straight: "to sort out" and "put right" twenty centuries

of men's attempts to undermine, falsify and trivialise women. Despite much bickering and witty repartee amongst characters, a discussion nevertheless ensues wherein the 'true' stories of their lives emerge. Delilah explains, for example, that although she was damned for being "an evil castrating bitch", she was really only trying to help Samson when she cut off his hair: "He was so strong, see, that if he woke up with a jerk he nearly yanked his own bloody head off. I done him a favour really. Not that you'd know it."²⁶ Mrs. Lot, who considers herself worse off than Delilah because history never even gave her a name ("All I'm known as is the wife of Lot, the stupid slag who deserved all she got", p. 3), attempts to unravel the shroud of ignorance surrounding her true story as well:

see we had to abandon our house in a
hurry I only had the shoes I stood up in.
Well, when one's home town suffers an arson
attack from God, one doesn't exactly *dither*
around pondering on which worldly possessions
to pack So there I was right, running hell for
leather, molten brimstone spurting and squirting
on my heels when me left shoe got caught in
the rubble So the choice was turn round and
retrieve the shoe or hop to the Promised Land
I turned A mere revolution for which I got
metamorphosed into a pillar of salt. (p. 3)

While Mrs Lot's and others' stories may seem at times ridiculous, it is in fact through their absurdity that Daniels makes her point because the Bible's stories of women clearly serve the interests of a *man*-made, patriarchal religion, there is no reason to believe that their version of events is any less absurd Indeed, there is every reason to believe, as Rosalind Miles has argued, that the very language of God, and therefore of men (since they recorded it), is a fabrication

'In the beginning was the Word,' declared St
John, 'and the word was God ' In fact the word
was a lie In the beginning, God was not But
as history unfolded in different nations and at
different times it became necessary to invent him ²⁷

Through the clarification of Eve's story (and by extension the story of all women), Daniels points similarly to biblical fallacy and men's need for it

Delilah (to Eve) ...I mean all credit to you. You climbed the tree of knowledge even if it did fall into your lap in the shape of a manky bit of fruit.

Jezebel I've always meant to ask, was it actually an apple?

Eve No, it was a ripe avocado.

Jezebel Did it taste nice?

Eve Horrible -- why d'you think I only took one bite

Mrs Lot They perk up with a bit of salt.

Eve I caused your downfall and all you care about is a mouldy avocado.

Mrs Lot Don't take on, Eve. We all know you was talked into it

Eve A red herring.

Jezebel Oh? I always thought it was a serpent. Still, I've never claimed oral history was my strong point.

Eve It was a snake but it didn't talk. Just being. That was my crime. When mankind gets found out he points at me Her fault -- seducer. Made from Adam, for Adam. His wife and his daughter -- legitimizer of his will. (p. 5)

Eve, despite her efforts to dismantle the myth surrounding her, is nevertheless unable to destroy it entirely. Ironically, her very existence in this drama confirms her powerlessness to do so. The myth of Eve, and those of others we have seen, have become so embedded in our culture that they continue to shape, despite their absurdity, the social and sexual mores of our time. Thus, while Daniels satirically undermines the authority of these misogynist myths in one short scene, she demonstrates in the remainder of the play how their implications are not so easily deposed. Immediately following Eve's 'homily', a modern-day woman, encumbered by two bratty young children and shopping trolley, enters the scene. The voices of the biblical wives fall silent as they listen to what seems a typical day in the life of a young mother. Feeding, controlling and entertaining kids, "bloody boring" shopping, queuing at the post office etc. This depiction of a harassed mother performing

the domestic labours that since Eve have traditionally burdened women illustrates the ideological legacy of the biblical scribes. Most importantly, it illustrates the effect of this legacy on women mentally. Not only is the mother under enormous pressure to accomplish her domestic workload single-handedly, she must struggle at the same time to retain her sanity: she tells her kids that if they do not co-operate, by the end of the day she'll be "asking for a padded cell". (p. 6) Jezebel's pun immediately after the mother's harangue, moreover, shows the ease with which women are perceived as mad:

Mrs Lot What the bleedin' heaven is she on about?

Jezebel Take no notice, she's lost her trolley. (p. 7)

With these two references to the woman's mental health and its perception by others, Daniels paves the way thematically for the drama that follows. Having established her aim to "put right" the patriarchal fallacies that have vilified and misrepresented women from the beginning of history, the playwright now prepares her audience for a similar process of demystifying present-day myths surrounding women's 'madness'. At the close of the Prelude Daniels makes clear that these myths are generated by the 'lessons' of misogyny and woman-blaming contained in the early patriarchs' religious ideology. As the wives resume their squabbles after witnessing the desperate young mother, thunder and lightning interrupt them and the voice of a "Man" (i.e. God) issues from the 'heavens':

Man (VO) Would those women causing absolute havoc please put a sock in it. Yes, you in the biscuit aisle. Some poor devil has collapsed by fresh fruit and we're holding you responsible.

Mrs Lot Oh, crumbs.

Eve Oh, Christ.

Delilah What's new? (p. 7)

Once again, as Delilah's rhetorical question implies, God/Man is "pointing at" women for men's ills -- ills both figurative and literal in this case. In the following scenes we may expect further enactments of this age-old scenario.

Like most dramatic preludes, the significance of *Beside Herself's* can only be appreciated fully at the end of the play. In the first few scenes, however, the Prelude's themes and goals are not immediately obvious. Scene One, for example, seems at first to contrast starkly with the preceding supermarket 'dream'. In addition to the shift in setting, discussed earlier, there is an immediate shift in tone (from satirical lightheartedness to tense seriousness), and in perspective (from the historical or universal to the personal). As the scene unfolds, though, certain parallels from the Prelude surface. Events open, for example, with Evelyn, on her fortnightly visit to her father, delivering groceries she has just bought at a supermarket. Her visit, we gather from George's complaints, is a 'duty visit', and one she performs with simmering resentment ("It's quite a trek...", p. 9). Like the harassed mother of the Prelude, Evelyn too seems caught in the traditional servicing/nurturing role demanded solely of women throughout history. (Evelyn's brothers, we discover, live conveniently at a distance from their father) This parallel with the Prelude, then, situates Evelyn in the same patriarchal framework as the mother (and other wives) and so establishes an ideological perspective with which to view Evelyn's particular story.

Throughout the first scene, the actual facts and circumstances of Evelyn's 'story' remain hidden. Daniels' deliberate obfuscation of matters is not only an accurate reflection of the hidden nature of most incest stories, but a useful means to emphasize first and foremost the *effects* on Evelyn of George's abuse. While the audience of course is not aware at this point of the nature of their relationship, the fact that Evelyn is (literally) emotionally and mentally shattered by it is made abundantly clear: waiting to greet her as she enters George's house is her dreaded alter-ego. The relationship between Evelyn and this inner persona, Eve (whose name is never revealed to the audience except in the programme notes), provides the second, and perhaps most crucial, level of dramatic conflict in the play. Daniels' reasons for dramatising Evelyn's mental torment by splitting her (physically) in two stem from both psychological and theatrical considerations:

I wanted to create the other part of her
[Evelyn], the other self [Eve] that she has
tried to cut off, that's more the child of her,

the alter-ego, in the hope that that would
make it somehow more exciting theatrically.²⁸

Certainly from both a viewer's and reader's point of view, the Evelyn/Eve dynamic is the most distinguishing feature of the drama. Not only does it proclaim its centrality in the play's title, but it tells us that Daniels' most basic concern lies with the relationship of a woman to her inner self -- to her mental well-being. Since Evelyn from the start is severely at odds with her inner self, the resolution to the play must be found in the resolution to this conflict: through a process of enlightenment, healing, and finally self-integration.

Daniels, as we know, has already pointed in the Prelude to the connection between women's placement in the patriarchal scheme and the deleterious effects of this placement on their mental health. For Evelyn these effects seem so extreme that we suspect early on there to be deeper reasons for her resentment of George than just having to shop for and visit him. Through the responses of Eve to Evelyn's every word and move, we discover a woman wracked with self-hatred on the one hand, and passionate hatred of her father on the other. Eve's presence poses serious danger to both and is, therefore, particularly unnerving for Evelyn as she steps through her father's door: "**Evelyn is visibly shaken by Eve's presence. She looks at her. Hesitates. Makes a decision to focus on George...**" (p. 8) Evelyn's evasion of Eve here characterises the nature of her behaviour towards this inner self. Eve, whose constant ridiculing of Evelyn's presumed worthlessness ("Thanks, Dad. Only me. Nobody. Nothing " p. 8) and extreme hostility towards George ("...drop dead." p. 11) is too painful for Evelyn to cope with and hence she attempts to shut her out. Eve, however, whose feelings for too long have been repressed by Evelyn, has no intention of being shut out. As Evelyn tries hurriedly to put away George's groceries and make an exit, Eve is there to demand, whether in word or in gesture, her attention and recognition:

Evelyn The microwavable dinners are
arranged in order of their sell-by date.
And, oh, you've still got some left...

George I still get invited out from time
to time, dinner parties and do's of one sort
or another. Besides, I don't like a lot of that
goo under ruptured cellophane.

Evelyn Why didn't you tell me? (*Turns to face him.*) What do you like, and I'll make sure I get it next time?

Eve *kicks the fridge.*

Eve *walks away from Evelyn, stands back but between Evelyn and George.*

George What I'd really like is for you to sit down and talk to me. (p. 10)

Throughout the scene, Eve both literally and metaphorically 'stands between' Evelyn and her father, thus making their relationship fraught with tension. George, like Eve, is extremely demanding of Evelyn. He too would like her full attention, as the previous citation indicates. Evelyn, however, is just as evasive with him as she is with Eve: she avoids his needs by busying herself with the groceries and by making excuses for her lack of time. Eve all the while stands sneering and making sarcastic remarks to both (heard only by Evelyn). With Evelyn at the centre of this dangerous triangle, the tension in the scene builds to a shattering climax. As George loses patience and gets angry with Evelyn, he accidentally sends his tea cup and saucer crashing to the floor. In reaction to the noise of the smash, Evelyn and Eve for the first time behave in unison: they "*jump in fright*". (p. 11) Their integration, however, is short-lived. In the following sequence of events, Daniels poignantly illustrates the pattern and reasons for their separation. Although both personae have responded in fear to George, only Eve, the child figure, is able to express the true devastation she feels at his angry demand: "**Eve covers her face and drops to the floor.**" (p. 11) Evelyn, on the other hand, the one who copes and survives, suppresses her feelings (albeit "shakily") and tries to minimize the incident: "It's all right. It was only an accident. No real damage done." (p. 11) While George's sexual abuse of Evelyn has still not been made explicit at this point, the fact that Eve's response to this seemingly harmless incident is so extreme implies that "real damage" has indeed formerly been done. In the remainder of the scene, Daniels' clues as to the nature of this damage become increasingly pointed. As Evelyn reasserts her efforts to evade George, he reasserts his demands to see her (and her

family) more often and casually mentions a letter he recently received from Joanna, Evelyn's daughter away at school. For a second time, Evelyn and Eve respond similarly: not only are "*both unnerved*", but Eve moves "*closer to Evelyn at this point than at any other point in the scene.*" (p. 12) Since their last unified action was motivated by fear, so fear appears to be the reason for this instinctive reaction. When George adds further that Joanna might come to visit him in the holidays, Evelyn can barely mask her panic:

Evelyn She can't. Not on her own.

George Nonsense.

Evelyn She's not old enough.

George She's old enough to get on the tube.

Evelyn It's too far

George I'd meet her at the station.

Evelyn No (*Then*) I'll bring her over.

George Would you? That would be nice. Thank you.

Evelyn (*hurriedly*) And I'll see you in a fortnight.
I must dash now. Sorry, I really do have to go. Sorry.
'Bye (p 13)

As Evelyn makes her escape from George's house at the close of the scene, we are left with a sense of renewed tension and a clearer idea of the source of this tension. Evelyn's distress at the prospect of her daughter spending time alone with her grandfather leaves little doubt as to the reasons for her own mental torment when similarly alone with George.

At the start of Scene Two, we meet a new set of characters in a different location where the tension in the drama is temporarily suspended. The stories both at and of St Dymphna's, revealed gradually during the course of the scene, are integral to the play's themes and issues. Established as "an alternative to the dreaded Victorian asylum" (p. 25), St Dymphna's is a 'half-way hostel' seeking to reintegrate ex-psychiatric patients into the community. As such, it represents a kind of social haven for people recovering from mental distress and not least for Evelyn who, as the wife of a local MP, works dutifully as a volunteer there. From the start, however, this haven is in more need of protection itself

than it presumably can give. Recently desecrated by vandals, it appears in a state of disorder and degradation. The word 'Loonies', sprayed along the inside wall, has "pride of place" beside the picture rail, while the fragments of a smashed mirror litter the floor. Apart from the public hostility towards the mentally ill which such vandalism denotes, the desecration of St Dymphna's reveals a more symbolic message once the origin of the place's name is divulged. Roy, the resident psychiatrist, relates the story, ironically, to George in Scene Six. St Dymphna, the patron saint of the insane,

...[is] supposed to have left home after her mother died and her father turned his attentions to her, so the story goes. He caught up with her and proposed marriage. When she *refused* he cut her head off. And she became enshrined or whatever they call it in the thirteenth century. (p. 69-70)

St Dymphna's, thus, has been similarly violated and its shattered mirror, paralleling the saint's severed head, symbolizes the shattering or fragmentation of women's identity that can result from such incestuous violation.

While the links between this story and that of Evelyn (and other female characters) become evident only retrospectively, the details about St Dymphna's revealed in Scene Two underpin thematically the events at hand. The broken shards of mirror, for example, gathered significantly by Lil, are a fitting reminder of the fragmented Evelyn/Eve we have just witnessed. Lil reinforces this connection as she comments to Shirley: "Unnerving, ain't it -- how you can only see a piece of yourself in a shard of mirror." (p. 16) Soon after, Evelyn and Eve enter themselves; Evelyn's first action is to look at herself in what remains of the mirror. The contrast between her apparent self-confidence in this setting with her self-deprecation at George's house is startling. Her other 'shard', Eve, is there, however, to contradict everything positive she sees:

Evelyn I knew it was supposed to be unlucky to have a mirror over a fireplace but -- (*Pause.*) I look good.

Eve Stupid.

Evelyn (*to Eve*) I feel okay.

Eve Dirty.

Evelyn (to Eve) I'm all right.

Eve Worthless. (p. 18)

In addition to the significance of its mirror, the very function of St Dymphna's holds a powerful resonance with Evelyn's situation. As a hostel for those recovering from mental illness, St Dymphna's, although a 'haven' to which Evelyn escapes from her father's, is ironically a dangerous place for her, as Eve warns: "You shouldn't talk to yourself. Not here of all places." (p. 18) In a subconscious effort to mask her doubt about her sanity, Evelyn hangs the picture she has brought to redecorate St Dymphna's over the 'Loonies' graffiti.

As the scene progresses, the threat posed to Evelyn by the *interlocking of her story with* that at St Dymphna's increases. Initially, however, this threat is only obvious to her subconsciously. Evelyn's purpose at St Dymphna's in this scene is to attend an emergency allocation meeting. Also attending the meeting are the rest of St Dymphna's 'Management Committee': the homophobic Reverend Teddy Kegwin, the house manager of St Dymphna's, Shirley, the 'liberal' social worker, Greg, the working-class 'community-carer', Lil, the sanctimonious psychiatrist, Roy Freeman, and his nursing assistant, Nicola (the estranged daughter of Lil). The various functions of these characters suggest that Daniels is presenting, as mentioned previously, a cross-section of society. Their meeting, thus, acts as a forum for the expression of prevailing social attitudes towards mental illness and its treatment. From psychotropic 'therapy' advocated by the "heavy drugs merchant", Dr. Freeman, to the perils of labelling and objectifying the 'mad', the characters run a gamut of topics, each one arising from their discussion of the backgrounds of prospective residents. Of more significance to the play overall, however, are the attitudes expressed by characters towards the issue of incest. Daniels' brilliant orchestration of the meeting allows this subject to become eventually the discussion's main focus. Through her introduction of a secondary narrative, furthermore, we discover that the implications of this discussion are more far-reaching than just for Evelyn and, by extension, middle-class women. The dramatic tension

of the scene stems from both the gradual revelation of Nicola and Evelyn's connection and the responses of these women to the discussion at hand.

Ironically, it is Evelyn who elicits the first reference to child sexual abuse at the meeting. Undeterred by Roy's patronising dismissal of a prospective resident's past history, Evelyn believes it to be in the interests of the woman's (Dawn's) welfare to hear her full story. At the end of it, Roy casually mentions that "she was sexually messed about with as a child." (p. 30) Eve, alerted by this reference, suddenly pipes up and tells Evelyn, "You started this. Don't just look out the window." (p. 30) In contrast to Evelyn's evasive action, Nicola makes the first of many brave attempts to tackle the subject head on. She is interrupted by Greg, however, who adds further information that the father of Dawn's child could have been her own father. With this shattering revelation, even Eve tries to escape: "Let's go. Come on. Who wants to hear all this?" (p. 30) As Evelyn/Eve's distress rises, so too does Nicola's (she lights a cigarette, despite universal disapproval), and an emotional link between the women is established. The ensuing debate between characters (spurred by Shirley's request to re-examine Dawn's case) is one of the most critically focused and emotionally intense sequences of the play. Using each character as a vehicle either to expose or 'put right' various myths surrounding incest, Daniels sets the stage for a simultaneous illustration of the emotional devastation that incest has wrought on Evelyn:

Teddy Well, it's a well-known supposedly regular occurrence in some rural pockets -- incest, that is. Not to me -- to us. Our values. But isn't that what tolerance is all about -- not imposing our own brand of morals?

Shirley Isn't that what the church is there for though?

Eve Think of something else.

Teddy For example...

Eve Don't think about it.

Teddy I have recently been enlightened about the impact of the imposition of Anglican missionaries on other countries' modus vivendi.

Greg I agree with Nicola. It's not an activity confined by geography or social class Teddy. (To Nicola.) That is what you were driving at I take it?

Roy (*before Nicola can reply*) That's not my experience.

Greg Could be because middle class crises don't often cross our path on the NHS these days.

Eve The bathroom. Think about re-decorating the bathroom.

...

Roy ...In all my years of experience I could count on one hand the number of patients who've admitted that to me. And they were naughty precocious girls who certainly had no doubts about their attractiveness to men

Eve Count on one hand. Dirty white, blue grey ... blue grey ... blue grey ...

Greg We do have to be careful in the present climate not to make unfounded or rash judgements based on partial information.

Nicola I do know.

Eve Try and remember the names of the pencils in the box. Ivory, black, gunmetal, terracotta. (p. 33 - 34)

So painful is this debate for Evelyn that she disappears (mentally) and, as we saw in the previous scene, leaves Eve to stem the tide of emotional devastation. In this scene, however, Eve is shown to be more a friend to Evelyn, a partner in survival whose words are meant to advise and soothe. Her enumeration of the set of coloured pencils is a poignant reminder that she is also the child in Evelyn, the one who at the time of being abused might have focused on such a favourite object.

In direct opposition to Evelyn/Eve's evasion of the situation, Nicola seeks to confront and challenge the issue. Her role in this scene, like that of the Prelude's wives, is to 'set the record straight': in this case, the record on incest. Although Nicola's history of abuse is not known at this point, Daniels, as with Evelyn, provides pointed clues. We have heard her

confirm to Greg that her information about incest is neither "unfounded" nor "partial" ("I do know"), for example, and we have observed her nervousness at the start of the discussion. Despite this nervousness, Nicola, a mere nursing assistant meant only "to observe" (as Roy condescendingly reminds her), bravely challenges the misinformation and sexist assumptions about incest survivors spouted by her 'superiors'. She points out, for example, the difficulty survivors face in being believed ("unless haemorrhaging is actually occurring"), the statistical magnitude of abuse ("a quarter of the female population"), and the fact that physical bullying often goes hand in hand with "these nurturing so-called relationships", (pp. 34-36). Through Nicola's attempts to enlighten others about the reality of incest, Daniels illustrates at the same time how this reality is constantly distorted or denied by others. Here, as in the Prelude, we see how the blaming of women for every human 'ill' is still the most common means by which men distort female experience. Roy refers repeatedly, for example, to both the child's and her mother's complicity in incest: he says girls are "naughty" and "precocious", and he has "statistics to prove mothers collude". (p. 39) Greg, despite his moderation that incest is not the fault of any one individual but rather of an entire "dysfunctional family", nevertheless stresses the culpability primarily of mothers:

I agree it happens in all classes but is the product of a dysfunctional family where the man is looking for affection and nurturing, albeit inappropriately, and therefore the whole family, starting with the mother, need re-educating into their appropriate roles. (p. 37)

For survivors, such misattribution of blame serves not only, as Nicola points out, to "reinforce the girl's feeling of shame, self disgust and guilt" (p. 37), but to deny the reality of their experience. This, according to Daniels, is the crucial link between sexual abuse and mental illness:

With a lot of sexual abuse, nobody believes the person who has been abused; so if you have your reality denied, you have no where to go except into your own reality -- which by a lot of definitions

is madness.²⁹

During the course of the debate, thus, we see both the process by which the reality of survivors is denied (through attempts to discredit and undermine Nicola) and the effects of this denial (through the reactions of Evelyn/Eve).

Throughout the remaining scenes of the play, Daniels takes this scenario (the denial and legacy of incest) and dramatises it further in various narratives. We see Nicola's abuse denied not only by her stepfather, but (initially) by Lil; we hear Gaynor Brittain in her monologue blaming herself and driving herself "mad" at the thought of her brother's abuse of her daughter; we see Evelyn, described by Teddy as "barking mad" (p. 41), driven further to the brink of mental breakdown by the mere mention of her father or incest by others. In addition to these first-hand accounts of abuse, Daniels' inclusion of Dawn's case history as well as the legend of St Dymphna makes clear that we cannot dismiss the play as simply the dramatisation of one woman's ordeal. Evelyn's story, although highlighted throughout, is also the story, as Nicola's statistics indicate, of thousands of women.

Daniels' aim in the play, however, goes beyond illustrating the high incidence and psychological repercussions of incest. Equally important is her goal to point women in the direction of possible healing and liberation *from the emotional and mental scars of sexual abuse*. We have just seen the first stage in such a journey through Nicola's attempts to defuse the myths surrounding incest. Like Eve's mission in the Prelude, Daniels stresses here too the necessity for women to speak out and enlighten not only other women but society in general (i.e. the staff at St Dymphna's or we, the audience) about the real 'story' behind the crimes against them. In the second part of the play, Daniels dramatises a further and more painful stage in the journey for survivors towards healing: disclosure and confrontation with their abusers. In view of the shame and guilt women are made to feel about their abuse, as Nicola pointed out, this part of the journey is not willingly undertaken. Daniels' recognition of the resistance on the part of survivors to confront their pain is reflected by the fact that the journey of Evelyn is only embarked upon accidentally: only through a bizarre set of circumstances and crises centred at St Dymphna's is she forced to

come to terms, as we shall see, with her own internal crisis. In so doing, she not only pieces together the fragments of her broken self, but furthers the process of 'putting right' the misconceptions and fallacies surrounding incest.

The dramatisation of Evelyn's journey towards healing is Daniels' primary concern in the second half of the play. With this journey, however, she interweaves the similar journey of Nicola and Lil in order to provide greater insight into the impact of incest on different familial relationships. Following the debate in Scene Two, the focus on stage alternates between these two narratives and the events occurring at St Dymphna's -- events which serve to precipitate the journeys of each character. Nicola and Lil, for example, having been estranged for years, are brought together coincidentally through their work at the community home. Through these two characters, Daniels highlights the repercussions of incest on a mother/daughter relationship and examines the issue, brought up by Roy during the debate, of the culpability of mothers in cases of (step)father-daughter incest. Daniels stages the moment of awkward recognition between mother and daughter immediately following a second remark by Roy to Nicola concerning the 'collusion' of mothers. While Nicola's bitter recriminations against Lil towards the end of the scene appear to confirm Roy's comment, Daniels' delineation of Lil's character and of her relationship with Tony shows the issue to have far greater complexity. In Scene Three, for example, Lil realises how the so-called collusion of mothers should be understood in terms of the way in which they are socialized to place their love for their husbands above everything, even cries of help from their daughters. In this scene Lil, deeply affected by her recent encounter with Nicola, questions her previous 'blind loyalty' to Tony by confronting the now ailing man about Nicola's accusations. When Tony asks her why she is asking him the same questions that she asked years ago, she replies. "I didn't believe it. (*Pause.*) It's not the sort of thing you tackle someone you love about when you want to believe them, anyway." (p. 46) Here Daniels also draws our attention (again) to the difficulty survivors face in being believed when faced by denial not just by the abusers themselves (as Tony and later George demonstrate), but by those supposedly closest to them. Lil's inability to 'hear' and protect

Nicola illustrates also the degree to which Lil, herself formerly abused by an ex-partner, was possibly transferring subconsciously her own sense of victimization onto her daughter. Helena Kennedy, in her study on women and British justice, postulates:

The apparent collusion in violence towards their offspring has often seemed to me to be a consolidation of what they [mothers] have come to expect themselves. The whole cycle is a paradigm of the worst kind of power imbalance.³⁰

Lil's confrontation of Tony and of her own reasons for ignoring Nicola is shown to be a crucial step on the road to righting this imbalance and to dismantling the cloak of secrecy and denial surrounding sexual abuse.

St Dymphna's proves the starting point as well for Evelyn's first steps in confronting her own and her father's denial of abuse. In Scenes Four and Five, Daniels places Evelyn in the midst of an increasingly complex web of circumstances at the community home. Such interaction of narratives makes for chaotic action: characters, continuously entering, exiting and re-entering the stage, create situations of crossed communication and often farcical misunderstanding. During one of these situations in Scene Five, Evelyn, along with Eve, is thrust onto her painful emotional journey. Unable to resist Shirley's increasing demands on her time, Evelyn is coerced into showing representatives of the local ratepayers association, the 'Brittains', around St Dymphna's. During their tour of the living room, Evelyn happens upon the dead body of Dave, one of the residents. Daniels' brilliant staging of this episode parallels her staging of incidents in Scene One where we first observed Evelyn/Eve's pattern of dichotomous response to crisis:

They go into the living room. Evelyn turns consciously obscuring their view of Dave who looks asleep in the chair, his cup of tea lies on its side, its contents spilt. Evelyn acts normally. Eve jumps back in fear.

Gaynor (to **Richard** pointing at the picture) Oh look darling. Do you remember when we first moved, we borrowed that picture from the library. (To **Evelyn**.) Those were the days before you could buy reasonable

prints.

Eve (*turns to look at Dave*) He's dead. He's dead!

Evelyn I'm afraid the mirror got broken and we're still waiting for a replacement.

Eve Stop being so polite, that man in that chair there has died.

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

Evelyn (*unmerved*) Please come through to the kitchen. The kettle's boiled and you can see what it looks like. (p. 64)

Despite Eve's growing trauma and questioning of her own sanity ("Are you mad? Are you mad? You are mad!" p. 65), Evelyn continues to act as if nothing is wrong -- a disturbing indication of the extent to which she has similarly learned to ignore her own inner devastation. Unlike the crises in the first scene from which Evelyn could eventually escape, however, the public nature of this crisis (once Dave's death has been discovered by others) forces her to face its aftermath for the first time as 'Evelyn'. Eve, nevertheless, stands close by during the investigation, or 'inquisition', of the death in Scene Seven. Evelyn's terror that she will be blamed for Dave's death, especially by Roy Freeman (a colleague of the retired doctor George) resonates throughout the whole episode with her inner fears that she is somehow to blame for her father's molestation of her. Such conflation of emotional agendas, as in the previous debate in Scene Two, fuels the tension in this scene and gives rise to multiple layers of conflict. Not only do we witness confrontations between all characters as they battle to attribute or accept blame for Dave's death, but we witness the inner conflicts both of and between Evelyn and Lil and between Lil and Nicola:

Evelyn Shirley asked me to see those people. I met them in the hall. I showed them in here like you said. ... I didn't expect -- I didn't think anything was wrong. Well, I sort of did but I didn't want to make a fuss, cause alarm.

Lil You didn't want to make a fuss.

Eve I did. I did.

Evelyn I couldn't.

Nicola (to Lil) I'm surprised you find that hard to believe.

Lil (to Nicola) You didn't know him like I did.
(To Evelyn.) How could you carry on like nothing had happened?

Evelyn I don't know. (p. 73)

As we have seen so often throughout *Beside Herself*, the most crucial level of dramatic conflict lies beneath the surface of the actual events at hand. The central crisis in the play occurs when its central conflict, that between Evelyn and Eve, can no longer be contained at such a subterranean level. As the investigation into Dave's death continues, Eve undergoes a complete emotional breakdown -- a furious and desperate cry for help that finally pierces the unruffled facade adopted by Evelyn:

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.

Roy So he was on his own. When Evelyn came in he'd died?

Evelyn Are you blaming me?

Roy No, of course not.

Evelyn You think I'm to blame though, don't you.

Roy No I don't.

Lil If anyone's got stick, it's me.

Greg No one's to blame. It's not a question of blame.

Evelyn You think it's all my fault.

Shirley No one's implied that Evelyn.

Roy Are you all right Evelyn?

Evelyn Is that a real question or is it, what's the word, Lil, you're so much better with words than me?

Lil Rhetorical?

Evelyn Rhetorical.

Roy Of course it's a real question. You're imagining ...

Evelyn Yes, yes, I know all about imagining that I'm not here, I'm somewhere else.

Greg Evelyn, I think you're in a state of shock. Do you feel cold?

Roy Here. (*Offers his coat.*) Put this around you.

Evelyn Don't touch me.

Roy Now, I think we should all calm down and drink our tea.

Evelyn We? You mean me. That I need a cup of tea. I don't want a cup of tea, as though a cup of tea will make me better. I don't even like tea. How will that calm me down? You -- you stride in here, pointing the finger, attacking me ... (p. 75-6)

The process of merging Evelyn's two selves has finally begun and she is ready for her journey out of hell

The following scene, entitled "Exodus", takes place appropriately in the supermarket 'hell' of the Prelude. Nicola, having rescued Evelyn from the meeting, stands watching her rebelliously fling groceries for George into a trolley and argue (apparently) with herself. Eve, her rage now usurped by Evelyn, "cowers" against the shelves trying to convince her that she need no longer perform such service to her abuser. After several attempts, Nicola finally interrupts Evelyn/Eve's argument and persuades Evelyn to leave the supermarket. Evelyn, determined not to go home, tells Nicola that first, "There's something I want to tell you." (p. 78) Her decision in this specific location to "tell" Nicola, a fellow survivor (although unknown to her), mirrors the disclosures of the Prelude's wives to each other. Unlike those women imprisoned wrongfully in history and in hell, however, Evelyn has the

power to break free from her hell and to 'right' her own history. The two women exit the supermarket where a new beginning awaits them.

Scene Nine, entitled "Genesis", is not only the 'creation' of a new beginning in Evelyn's life (through the disclosure of her abuse to Nicola), but also, metaphorically, a radical feminist proposal for the creation of a new beginning for all women from their common history of oppression. Daniels' placement of Evelyn and Nicola in the "open air", for example, indicates that such a beginning must occur both with other women and 'outside' the social and political structures of men -- patriarchal 'hells' that for centuries have enslaved and abused women. In the context of the play's specific issues, Daniels makes clear that the family is one such hell and incest the most insidious and devastating form of oppression that can occur within. Eve's cries in Scene Seven for the complete destruction of her father's house were not just cries to Evelyn for help, but calls for the dismantling of the patriarchal family wherein the crimes of men are hidden, protected and on many levels condoned in society. As Evelyn, with the help of Eve and Nicola, achieves greater understanding of her abuse by actually giving voice to it, she prepares herself for the final stage in her journey towards healing and self-integration: confrontation of George and 'her father's house'.

In the following scene, we return to this house, now the "House built on sand", where Daniels stages the dramatic climax of the play. Evelyn's confrontation of her father not only brings resolution to her own inner conflict -- and thus the play's central conflict -- but it draws together many of the issues surrounding incest that have been touched upon previously. The scene opens with Evelyn/Eve arriving at George's house with two bags of groceries. This parallel with Scene One draws our attention to the distance Evelyn has travelled since that time. Unlike the timid, self-effacing person in that scene, here she is self-assured and in control. Where in the first scene as well Eve was waiting for Evelyn and hostile to her every word and move, here, no longer her enemy, Eve arrives *with* Evelyn and helps and often mirrors her words during the confrontation. At every step of this confrontation, Daniels details the resistance survivors face in having their abuse acknowledged and their reality confirmed: we see George's attempts to manipulate Evelyn

emotionally through "pressies" and self-pitying remarks about his old age ("what use is money to me at my age?"); we hear him deny Evelyn's accusations of rape ("I don't know what you're talking about"; "It never happened"); we hear his numerous efforts to minimise and excuse his actions when he can no longer avoid the truth ("It was the only way I knew to show love"; "You know ... how men are. We're all weak and we're all strong"); and we hear him verbally abuse Evelyn as well as taunt her with accusations of madness when he discovers she has exposed his crime publicly ("How dare you? You stupid bitch"; "They won't believe you. They'll think you're mad." pp. 83-88). The power of the scene is intensified by Evelyn's refusal, in the face of her father's numerous emotional ploys, to let him off the hook:

George (*upset*) Oh Evelyn, you don't understand. I loved you. You musn't think for one moment I didn't love you. I never wanted to hurt you. Really I didn't. I just wanted you to love me.

Evelyn You didn't love me. You bullied me, despised me I was always hurting.

George Evey, I'm an old man now please forgive me You're all I've got. You, Phillip, Joanna.

Evelyn It's not our secret any more. I've told them....
(p 87)

Despite her show of strength, however, Evelyn is not entirely immune to George's manipulative tactics -- tactics which often inhibit survivors from ever confronting their abusers. Of these, as Daniels has highlighted previously in the play, the threat of 'madness' is the most intimidating. For Evelyn it is not just the act of being labelled 'mad' but the possibility that she may really be so that is acutely distressing to her. When George first denies Evelyn's accusations and asks "Are you mad?", Eve immediately questions herself (as she did in Scene Five) "Who's mad? Who's mad?" (p. 85) Eve's question points equally to the madness of abusers, and, owing to the necessity of her existence in Evelyn's life, to a kind of madness that women can suffer in order to survive. By the end of the scene, Evelyn

reveals that she has come to understand this 'madness' and that it, or others' imputations of it, will no longer have any power over her:

George They won't believe you. They'll think you're mad.

Evelyn I wonder why. But I'm not protecting you any more. (p. 88)

In a complete reversal from the first scene, Evelyn is now the one with power and George the only child on stage. As he "explodes" into a tantrum, Evelyn "calmly" hands back the burden and responsibility for her no longer "secret" pain to the person who must rightfully shoulder it: "I've lived with it and I don't want to any longer. You can live with it....And I won't forgive you because what you've done is unforgivable." (p. 88) In her final act of liberation, Evelyn embraces the person from whom she had been "robbed"; both then cleanse themselves, literally and symbolically, from their father's crime:

*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. 88)*

A week later at St Dymphna's, Evelyn enters the stage for the first time without Eve -- she is now 'whole'. Daniels times her entrance with Lil looking at her through the recently erected and polished new mirror. While the symbolism of this moment may seem too obvious, it nevertheless provides a symmetrical finish to the theme of women's fragmented identity. The purpose of Evelyn's visit to the hostel also provides symbolic closure to the question of madness that has plagued her from the start of the play: she is there to remove the picture she hung over the "loonies" graffiti in Scene Two. As the picture is removed, so too are any doubts about her sanity. Her final action in the play is a movement towards friendship with Lil, a relationship formerly fraught with class tensions. The answers of both women to the question posed by Evelyn reveal the placement of each on their personal journeys:

Evelyn Are you still frightened of flying?

Lil No. I never was. What I'm frightened

of is crashing; sinking with the wreckage.

Evelyn So was I. (p. 90)

While Evelyn has reached the end of her journey, Lil and Nicola, as we find in the final scene, still have a distance to travel. Daniels' decision to close the play with the 'unfinished business' in this narrative signals that the possibilities she proposed for healing were not just applicable to Evelyn, but to all women who have been touched by similar experience. Central to the process of healing, Daniels emphasizes again the importance for women to nurture their relationships with other women, be they between friends or mothers and daughters, above their relationships with men. As Lil opens the front door to her hesitant daughter, we hear Tony (voiced-over) bellow: "Who the hell is it?" (p. 90) In answering him, Lil finally asserts her voice over his and has the last word and decisive action of the play:

Lil It's for me.

Steps over the threshold shutting the door behind her. The two women stand facing each other. (p. 90)

Daniels' placement of the women outside, with the door to the house and Tony firmly shut, recalls Evelyn's and Nicola's emergence from the supermarket 'hell' into the "open air" in Scene Eight. This second illustration of Daniels' feminist proposal for 'new beginnings' is underscored by her labelling of the scene, "World without". Like the revisions to biblical stories by the Prelude's wives, the playwright encourages a feminist emendation of this phrase too: instead of "end", the word "men" rings in our ears.

By now a distinct pattern may be noted in the endings of Daniels' plays. Here, as in *Ripen*, *Gateway*, *Neaptide*, *Byrthrite*, and as we shall see in *Esme and Shaz*, the play's women, having freed themselves from the abusive clutches of patriarchal oppressors, are left to forge new beginnings or female counter-worlds in solidarity with other women. In view of *Beside Herself's* complex and harrowing subject, however, this essentialist ideal of a 'world without men' seems too simple. While it may be possible for the likes of a well-off,

middle-aged woman to sever any connection with her father and quit a painful job, many women have neither the financial nor emotional support to be able to extricate themselves from families or oppressive patriarchal structures. Daniels' failure to address this issue is a curious omission in view of her emphasis on the parallel working-class narrative of Lil and Nicola. While her suggestions for healing between and for mother and daughter are undoubtedly positive, the playwright nevertheless does not account for the fact that Nicola, as she has been portrayed, is in no position to leave her job or work independently of the Roy Freemans of the medical profession. Furthermore, Nicola's attempts to enlighten this profession (and others) about the realities of incest, one of the play's chief aims, are seen to make no impact on male characters. For the majority of women who must still live and work within the ranks of patriarchy's agents and institutions, the play also leaves dangling the important issue, raised first in the Prelude, of the deterioration of women's mental health in the face of oppression or abuse. Although Evelyn's re-integration with Eve in Scene Ten provides moving dramatic closure to the play's central conflict, the threat or fears of 'madness' remain for the woman in the supermarket, *Mrs. Brittain and her daughter*, and the countless other women alluded to who, unlike Evelyn/Eve, are unable to exit the stage from abusive situations. One reason for such partial treatment of issues may lie in the playwright's tendency, as we have often seen, to pack too many subplots and tangential issues into her plays. Daniels herself has admitted to "overloading" *Beside Herself* with her inclusion of the community group home and the numerous narratives centred there.³¹ Reviewers of the play too have found Daniels' ambition to be a source of weakness, as Claire Armitstead writes: "Homophobia, mental health care, the phoneyess of family values all take a battering in a first act that is far too diverse in its targets to strike any one in the bullseye."³²

Despite the number of issues left unresolved in the play, there can be no disputing the importance of those raised and the power and compassion with which they are dramatised. Michael Coveney writes: "Here is the dramatic analogue of a contemporary social tragedy which exists on a scale we are only just beginning to comprehend."³³ Coveney, however,

stands alone amongst male reviewers in his praise of the play. Perhaps more than for any of Daniels' previous plays (with the exception of *Masterpieces*), *Beside Herself* has attracted particular indignation from male critics. Chief amongst their objections is the feeling that men have been 'left out' of the drama. These objections, however, are based not on the fact that Daniels deals incompletely with the problems she sees arising from men and patriarchy (which may be a valid argument), but simply on the grounds that female subjectivity is placed powerfully and unapologetically centre stage throughout. Michael Billington complains that Daniels "still refuses to enter the minds of those with whom she disagrees".³⁴ To say that the playwright "disagrees" with men who sexually violate their daughters is not only a gross misreading of the playwright's tone throughout, but a suggestion that perhaps there is something to 'agree' with in these men's actions. Furthermore, Billington ironically confirms one of the play's crucial points in his implicit condemnation of Daniels for not portraying abusers sympathetically (i.e. 'entering the minds of'): once again, as we saw in the debate in Scene Two, the male point of view is presented as a mandatory yardstick against which any female argument must be weighed. The reviewer goes on to condemn Daniels for her 'lack' of an equally proportioned male perspective:

One gaping flaw is that she deals with sexual abuse entirely in terms of father-daughter relationships, ignoring the proven fact that there are male victims as well.³⁵

Paul Taylor joins Billington's outcry against male exclusion, noting indignantly that "*Beside Herself* fails to acknowledge...that little boys get abused too."³⁶ What both reviewers fail to acknowledge, more to the point, are the actual issues and central narrative of the play. Lizbeth Goodman, in her analysis of the 'gendered reviewing' *Beside Herself* has received, addresses these reviews in particular:

Daniels does not deny -- either in the play or in 'real life' -- that there are male survivors of sexual abuse...But the point is not relevant to the play, which is quite clearly and deliberately focused on a father-daughter relationship. In reading the choice of this relationship as a denial of other possible relationships which might have

been depicted, the critic assumes an anti-male 'anger' not present in the play itself. The criticism thus operates according to a double standard by making demands of feminist playwrights which are not generally demanded of male playwrights or non-feminist female playwrights. It is difficult to imagine any critic arguing that every playwright should present all sides of every controversial issue in every play.³⁷

Daniels herself has expressed outrage at the double standards of these male critics:

Since when have they ever said that about women in plays written by men about men? It never works the other way around. Male experience of life is taken as the norm, universal; it is women who are the Other. One of the reviewers felt it important to add how sorry he felt for the father, describing him as 'this poor old man'. Or let me try to be generous here: maybe they couldn't deal with it because it wasn't within the mainstream of male concern, either way, it wasn't objectivity.³⁸

The lack of objectivity that Daniels notes in male reviewers does serious disservice to a play which deserves critical attention *as a play*. Billington, so caught up in licking the wounds of the collective male ego, only makes cursory reference at the end of his review to the play's "polemical vigour" and "a well-knit plot". Jeremy Kingston goes as far as to 'analyse' the function of the play's humour: the jokes, he comments, are there "presumably to help the feminist medicine go down".³⁹ David Nathan's view that Evelyn's confrontation with her father "lacks any dramatic force" is unsupported by any explanation, as is his comment that the play is "superficial". Instead, he sees fit at the end of his review to point readers to Shelley's "The Cenci" which he believes, in his infinite critical wisdom, "dealt more dynamically with the subject".⁴⁰ Interestingly, the only male reviewer to offer positive remarks about Daniels' "important and red-hot new play", Michael Coveney, is also the only one who offers any consideration of its structure, style and production:

The information emerges sideways, the coincidences necessary for texture well controlled, the play written in the short-gasp style of Caryl Churchill, easing out into some superb long arias and duets, ...

Jules Wright directs this exquisitely acted co-production with the Women's Playhouse Trust.⁴¹

Female critics, as noted in the reviews of *Byrthrite*, address more consistently the play's form as well as its content. Lyn Gardner writes, for example:

Mirroring the play's confidently asquint construction Daniels takes a lateral approach to her material mapping out, in perfect detail, the interior landscape of female experience and raising familiar Daniels themes: sanity and madness, the denial of women's experience and the apportioning of blame. It is truly a staggering achievement, a landmark play, given a bold and brave production by Jules Wright...⁴²

Such approbation from one woman does not mean a universal front of female critical approval for Daniels. What sets women reviewers' criticisms apart from those of their male colleagues, however, is that they are more often than not backed up intellectually rather than emotionally. Claire Armitstead, who takes issue with what she views as the play's "unresolved" structure, for example, places her critique within the context of new trends in feminist playwriting: writers such as Daniels, she sees, are "rebut[ting] received ideas of structure."⁴³ Similar to the reviews of *Byrthrite* as well, female critics respond to and appreciate Daniels' humour far more readily. Far from dismissing it as an antidote to the play's "feminist medicine", Catherine Wearing finds: "One of the joys of this theatre is its biting humour, by turns ironic, pained and bawdy",⁴⁴ while Gardner describes the Prelude as "cheeky, inventive and hilariously witty".⁴⁵

The differences between female and male critics in their reviews of *Beside Herself* often reveal as much about their acceptance of Daniels as a playwright as they do about the play itself. In *Head-Rot*, Daniels again displays her ability to stand firm against the tide of critical controversy and depict as unapologetically as ever the voices and lives solely of women -- women who inhabit a hell from which, unlike Evelyn's, there seems no escape.

Head-Rot Holiday

At the beginning of *Head-Rot*, Jackie offers the following greeting to Sharon, the newly-recruited fellow nurse: "Hello. ...With the emphasis on hell. Welcome to Head-rot Hotel."⁴⁶ At the end of Scene Twenty-four, Jackie closes the play with the exact same greeting, only to a different recruit. In this play there is no question of an 'exodus' or 'genesis' for the women enclosed at Penwell Special Hospital. The claustrophobic insularity of such institutions is foregrounded by the circularity of Daniels' opening and closing. Jackie's greetings, uttered with a none too ironic "*grin*", resonate with the play's euphemistic title, both phrases emphasising the stark contrast between what is commonly conceived of as a 'holiday camp' and the reality of the Special Hospital's closed and painful world. In *Head-Rot*, as in *Beside Herself*, one of Daniels' primary goals is to demystify commonly held assumptions, or to enlighten audiences about issues which are rarely aired in public. Her second main task, in accordance with Clean Break's own policy, is to give voices to women in Specials (or prisons) who are never heard in public. *Head-Rot* is comprised entirely of these voices -- voices of real women whom Daniels, during her research period, interviewed extensively.

The play came out of their experiences.
There's nothing in the play that isn't true
or hasn't happened, although none of those
women is one woman's story.⁴⁷

Although Daniels interviewed both patients and staff, the play favours the patients' point of view -- those women who, unlike the staff, are unable to "go home" at the end of the day, as Barbara condescendingly reminds Dee in Scene Nineteen. In keeping with the authenticity of the play's material, however, Daniels is careful throughout to depict all characters in as 'objective' a light as possible; the play holds neither angels (with the exception of course in Scene Twelve) nor villains, just women who, in greatly varying ways, are trying to cope. Towards the institution itself and the invisible powers that govern it, on the other hand, the playwright is unambiguous in her condemnation.

While *Head-Rot* bears the unique stamp of Daniels' style of writing (her blending of anger and humour and of the real and surreal, the use of monologues etc.), it is important to keep in mind that much of the content of the play was dictated by Clean Break's brief. This brief details the issues that Daniels was to dramatise -- issues which form the central subject matter of the play. The following list are the most significant of these:

- a) the length of time women spend in Special Hospitals.
- b) the high proportion of women in Special Hospitals who should never have been sent there, and the lack of alternative places for treatment.
- c) the unsatisfactory conditions under which women are referred to Special Hospitals.
- d) the lack of therapy once inside Special Hospitals.
- e) the issue of male nursing, especially since many of the female patients have been sexually and physically abused by men in their childhood.
- f) to reflect the racial mix of women in Special Hospitals, and to demonstrate racism awareness.⁴⁸

While these issues deal with conditions and problems specific to the world of the Special Hospital, they also lend themselves to similar areas of concern the playwright has explored in previous plays. Daniels, thus, is able to tie in with Clean Break's agenda certain of her own long-standing thematic preoccupations. Foremost amongst these, not surprisingly, is the theme of women's 'madness' (and its connection with former abuse). Not only does this theme declare itself in the play's title, but throughout the play it is explored and questioned on numerous levels. Stemming from the theme of madness, Daniels dramatises the theme, so prevalent in *Beside Herself*, of the fragmentation of women's identity. As in *Beside Herself*, as well, the playwright exposes our culture of woman-blaming and explores with greater depth the more disturbing repercussions when women blame themselves for their anger and others' crimes. The issue of self-harm, given cursory reference at the allocation meeting in *Beside Herself*, is one of the most shocking elements of the play and one to which, as we shall see in *Esme and Shaz*, Daniels returns.

Given the importance and centrality of issues to *Head-Rot*, Daniels subordinates, as she did in *Masterpieces*, the play's structure, characterisation and thematic development to them. Her manipulation of these 'tools' of dramatic construction, thus, is primarily to draw attention to or to illustrate the issues of the play. In terms of structure, for example, every scene or event is designed to dramatise a specific concern (or concerns) facing women either detained or working in a Special Hospital. As such, the plot or narrative fabric is loosely woven, although the movement of the first and second parts is geared towards the build-up and aftermath of one central event, the Christmas disco. In the middle of Part Two, however, this event (or its repercussions) gets superseded by further crises, so that the overall narrative to the play is easily lost. Rather than a sign of structural weakness on the part of Daniels, this lack of a focused narrative may be considered an astute reflection not only of the very nature of the women's directionless lives in a Special, but of the nature of much feminist theatre which defies conventional ideas about 'linear' narrative or plot.

Head-Rot's narrative unfolds episodically, each (short) scene unveiling bit by bit the atmosphere and conditions of life at Penwell, the events that occur there, and the delineation of its main characters. Each of these characters, similar to each 'issue-based' event of the play, brings into focus one or several specific issues on Clean Break's (and Daniels') agenda. While the theatre company's budget restricted the play to three actresses, Daniels was able nevertheless to meet the demands of her brief's "racial mix" requirement with her depiction of both Black and White patients and staff, as well as her inclusion of three 'outsiders' (a social worker, a step-mother and an 'angel'). With the necessity of constant character doubling or trebling, the scenes are most often either two-handers or single monologue sequences. The device of the monologue, used in almost every of Daniels' previous plays, figures most frequently in *Head-Rot*. Apart from economic considerations, the playwright's use of the monologue here is a way of 'filling in' important background information about characters that may not otherwise have been worked easily into the events at hand. Both Chris' and Helen's monologues, in Scenes Seven and Eighteen respectively, are good examples of this. In addition, characters' monologues allow the

audience a chance to step back from the often traumatic immediate action and assess a character or situation from a different point of view.

While Daniels may reveal her characters through the use of monologues (as well as their relationships with others), it is an important aspect of the drama that there is no true 'development' for the play's primary characters, Ruth, Dee and Claudia. Unlike most female protagonists of Daniels' previous works, these three patients undergo severe deterioration rather than development by the end of the play -- their journeys measured only in steps backward. Throughout the first part, however, a distinct mood of optimism prevails amongst the women as possibilities for tribunals and freedom seem imminent. One may be reminded at this point of *Gut Girls*, itself also a heavily researched 'docu-drama', whose female characters' hope and freedom at the opening give way eventually to despair and entrapment. Similar to *Gut Girls* as well, Daniels begins *Head-Rot* with a familiar device: the introduction of a new person to the environment. The entrance of Sharon in the first scene, like that of Annie, allows the audience at the same time to become acquainted with the world of Penwell and to see its conditions, atmosphere and inhabitants with similarly fresh eyes. Before examining the issues at the heart of this world, a look at the introductory scenes (One and Two) will shed light on how Daniels initially maps it.

The first part of Scene One is a group scene, the only one in the play, that presents Penwell from a wide angle to the audience. The scene opens with Jackie, sporting "protective" glasses, doling out misshapen articles of laundry as well as sarcastic remarks to a group of as yet nameless patients. Daniels' decision to label the women simply as "patients" at first is an effective means of conveying the blurring or confusion of identity that the women experience at Penwell. Not only does Jackie deliberately misname people, but she identifies them primarily according to bra size: "Whose is this one? Jesus God, would you look at it? Next size is the scaffolding firm....Thirty-eight double-D. It's yours isn't it Wanda, sorry I mean Ruth." (p. 192) When Ruth tells Jackie that the bra does not belong to her, Jackie tells her to have it anyway, thus obliterating any possible distinction between Ruth and the bra's rightful owner. Jackie's flippant remarks also underscore the

way in which women are commonly identified in a sexist culture. Later Ruth comments on the pain and degradation associated with female sexuality that Jackie's insensitivity has conjured for her:

Only men like big breasts. The women who have them never like them much. They get in the way. They attract attention and things happen you don't need. My life would have been different with small breasts. To be called 'Flat as a pancake' or 'fried eggs' would be honey to my ears. (p. 193)

While Jackie is not portrayed as insensitively throughout (in her monologue, for example, she expresses a genuine desire for "helping people"), Daniels' aim here (and in later scenes) is to point to the often insufficient or inappropriate training given to those 'caring' for distressed women, a large percentage of whom having suffered former abuse. Before her recruitment to Penwell, Jackie's work experience, as we later learn, was as a cashier at B&Q -- a job where she learned, in her words, "Nothing." (p. 212) Despite the experience Jackie inevitably gains at Penwell, we gather in Scene One that she has been taught only a policing rather than therapeutic role towards the women, as the following comment indicates: "One more interruption and we'll have a few minutes silence for five minutes." (p. 191)

With the exit of Jackie (and Sharon) from the scene, the "patients", on their own, assume identities and we learn their names and aspects of their personalities. Ruth's character emerges as the most distinct in the scene with her constant musings on language, sound and the circularity of life

Ruth ...You just keep pushing my love over the borderline. Sometimes I say things I think but sometimes I say lines from songs, they just slip out. It's here all day in the background, the music, like a mask with the emphasis on marshmallow and no features.

...

Around. Round. Sound goes round. It never dies. It is connected to going round. And then there's a connection between words that rhyme. So sound and round --

Dee Why can't you just talk about the weather?

Ruth I can't see any. It goes round and round,
bouncing round the universe because it can't get
out. How can it get out? It can't. So that every-
thing everyone has ever said is trapped inside
forever. ...(pp. 193-94)

Ruth's words shed light not only on her own troubled state of mind, but also on the conditions at Penwell. We learn, for example, of its incessant "background" muzak, lack of windows, and, most notably, its claustrophobic atmosphere of entrapment. Ruth, although governed to a large extent by the voices, or "sounds" that go "round" in her head, points out to Dee that her "talking daft all the time" is also a survival mechanism: "I don't have to but it helps." (p. 194) Dee, a 'butch' lesbian, tries to follow a more practical route to survival: 'to play their own game'. With her impending tribunal and possible freedom in sight, she explains to Claudia the reason why she needs her help to get 'dolled up' for the upcoming disco. "Cos it's like it just finally sunk in that if I'm going to stand a chance at my tribunal I'm going to have to start doing what they want when they want --" (p. 198). Later in Scene Eight, Daniels foregrounds the way in which Dee, who earlier has described herself as "born with a pair of Doc Martens in my heart" (p. 209), 'puts on' femininity like a costume for a stage role.

Dee (*placing a tape recorder inside the door*)
Now ladies I must have your full attention and
admiration. So when I come through this door
properly I want all eyes on me.

*She switches the tape recorder on and goes out,
shutting the door behind her. The song 'I'm Too
Sexy For My Shirt' booms out. Dee flings open
the door and makes a grand entrance. She is
wearing a dress. The dress is nice enough but Dee
looks very odd in it. She is carrying a pair of high-
heeled shoes. She starts to prance and pirouette
around the room.* (p. 220)

Daniels' introduction of the issue of sexual stereotyping in the first scene opens the door, thus, for further exploration of the social equations of 'femininity' and 'normality', and the 'unfeminine' and 'criminal' or 'mad'.

The theme of madness runs strongly through the first scene. Daniels' treatment of it here is through humour -- humour, though, that is often bitter and double-edged. Jokes about madness abound as all three patients use their punning skills as weapons of survival or retaliation. Ruth and Dee, for example, have the following exchange:

Ruth ...if I suddenly shout out 'Like a virgin', it doesn't mean anything except I like Madonna. ...Just as well my name isn't Donna or they'd call me Mad Donna.

Dee No they wouldn't. They'd call you mad slag.

Ruth What? What do you go and say that for?

Dee Take it easy. I didn't mean nothing personal by it. I was only mucking about. Whore and Madonna and that. Forget it. (p. 193)

Although the women's jokes are often made in jest (as Claudia says to Dee, "Did I just see you offer her a cigarette.. or am I going sane?" P. 195), Daniels shows how their attempts at humour can also belie much graver concerns about their sanity. After Claudia taunts Dee with the prospect of refusal at her tribunal, for example, Ruth says: "No one gets out of here in a year unless they top themselves. (*Laughs.*)" (p. 196) When Claudia discovers Ruth hanging from the ceiling in Scene Seventeen, echoes of her "laugh" in this scene ring disturbingly in our ears.

In view of the bleakness of the patients' lives in *Head-Rot*, their humour for the most part is a testament to their strength and hope. As we saw in *Gut Girls*, the presence of hope in the first part of the play is prerequisite to the women's ability to laugh. When this hope dwindles and eventually disappears in the second part, so too does their laughter. In the first scene, however, Daniels sets up several upcoming events for the patients which offer possibilities for hope, freedom and fun: Dee's tribunal, Claudia's placement on the Parole Ward, and the Christmas disco. The latter event, as mentioned earlier, provides the focal point for much of the play's action. Dee's and Claudia's tribunals, however, are also sources of discussion, argument and excitement for the women, as well as proving launching pads for many of the play's issues. Claudia, for example, after bantering with Dee

over who will be let out first (if at all), initiates a discussion on the length of time each of the three has spent at Penwell. Not only do we learn that none of the women has been inside for less than seven years (Ruth for twelve), but that, according to Claudia, "...all most of them did was fart in front of their Social Worker." (p. 196) Despite the bitter understatement of this comment, it brings up the issue, examined further on, of the "high proportion of women in Special Hospitals who should never have been sent there."

If the first scene of *Head-Rot* introduces Penwell primarily from the patients' point of view, the second scene does so from the perspective of the nurses. In Scene Two, Daniels uses Sharon as a means to convey information to the audience about the running of Penwell and its staff's treatment of patients. As Sharon is instructed and briefed by Barbara and Jackie, we too are able to register what she discovers with a similar 'outside' objectivity. We learn early on, however, that although Sharon is a newcomer to the world of Special Hospitals, she has had previous experience in psychiatric nursing. In view of this experience, the fact that she expresses surprise and dismay at the nurses' treatment of patients (here and in later scenes) is an implicit indictment of this treatment on the part of Daniels. When Sharon discovers, for example, that the tray on Barbara's desk is the breakfast of a patient in seclusion, Barbara dismisses the newcomer's shock:

Sharon But it's virtually stone --

Barbara We have to cater for the majority first. We can't allow the whole ward's meals go cold while we serve the one or two in seclusion -- (p. 201)

The fact that Barbara and Jackie are hanging around the office smoking belies Barbara's righteous indignation. Both Barbara and Jackie, as they are revealed in this scene, come across as disillusioned and hardened to their jobs. In spite of this, they try to impress Sharon as 'experts' in their field of work. Jackie informs Sharon, for example, that "We've got the most dangerous people in the country in here..." (p. 200), and Barbara, despite her assurances that Penwell is a "very safe place to work", reinforces the threat of danger from patients by her advice "...to make observing the position of the emergency bells a priority."

(p. 202) In addition to her role of sage ("Only two things to remember in this place. One, none of them are here for picking daisies. Two, give 'em an inch and they'll take a yard." p. 203), Barbara also tries to present herself as a model of ethical behaviour: "...my policy is to let new staff get to know the patients, before allowing them to read anyone's notes. I don't agree with pre-judging or prejudice of any kind." (p. 201) A few moments later, she warns Sharon not to be taken in by Dee's "charm", but to beware her "volatile" nature. This indication of hypocrisy in Barbara sets the stage for the blackmailing episode in Part Two, as does the bruise on her face and her attempts to dismiss any reference to it.

With the world of Penwell outlined by the end of Scene Two, Daniels begins to clarify its hidden depths with her delineation of the play's central issues. Rather than approach these issues chronologically as they appear scene to scene, I shall focus on them individually and examine the various ways in which they are dramatised throughout the play. As mentioned earlier, the three basic methods used by Daniels to elucidate issues are plot (episodes, events), characterisation (monologues, interaction between characters), and thematic development. While certain issues are given only passing reference (such as the length of time women spend in Specials, previously cited, or the issue of male nursing where Ruth reveals in Scene Thirteen, for example, "I've been forcibly stripped by six men in here and left naked without even a tampon. I've been watched in the bath by men. They get paid to do it." p. 233), most are examined more thoroughly and in several contexts. The issue introduced in the first scene, for example, concerning the number of women sent inappropriately to Special Hospitals, as well as the lack of alternative places for treatment, is examined in the context of all three patients' lives. Each woman's story in turn brings up some aspect of society's double standards for the criminalisation of women compared to men, or the relationships between 'feminine' behaviour and sanity or madness. Claudia's story is revealed both through her discussion with Ruth as they prepare for the disco in Scene Six, as well as through the monologue of her social worker, Chris, in the following scene. Daniels' inclusion of this 'outside' figure not only ensures a more rounded perspective on Claudia's situation, but provides a source of valuable insight into the

powerlessness of social workers to intervene against a judicial system bent on criminalising women's anger. Claudia, whose revelation of depression to her GP ("The biggest mistake of my life", p. 216) led to her children being fostered, medication that deepened her depression, and an impossible "'If-you-behave-well-enough-you-can-have-your-children-back' game" (p. 217), was placed eventually in Penwell after an incident where, during a fit of anger, she tried to attack Chris with a potato peeler. Although it is later revealed that Claudia ended up only ripping Chris' coat, she is transferred to Penwell because of her previous admission of depression, and, most significantly, because she was "potentially violent". (p. 217) Claudia, whom Chris describes as not "...well enough to have her children back but ...[not] ill enough to go there" (p. 219), gets caught in a system apparently deaf to the personal pleas and advice of its professional carers; Chris' success in having all charges dropped against her client have no power to stop the "terrible chain of events which has taken years and two children from a young woman's life." (p. 219) Chris' monologue, in addition to highlighting the tragedy of Claudia's misplacement at Penwell, focuses our attention on the common linking of female anger with madness. Her remarks serve to defuse such myths and raise important questions:

It's . a myth that women who are angry are mentally ill, but it's the rest that's difficult to sort out. Like what is mental illness? I often catch myself standing on the escalators in the tube, during the rush hour wondering how come more of us aren't trying to stab each other. It sometimes seems to me a miracle that any social order exists at all She had every right to be angry. (pp. 218-19)

In tandem with Daniels' bringing such issues to the stage, as mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, are the research and findings of other feminist studies in precisely the same area around this time. Kennedy, for example, confirms many of the issues presented in *Head-Rot*. On the inappropriate sectioning of women, like Claudia, she contends:

...many women are made the subject of the Mental Health Act Sections who should not be sectioned at all. They are left to spend indeterminate periods in the prison asylums ... largely because they have

been aggressive and angry or generally acted inappropriately for their sex.⁴⁹

Inside the world of the Special Hospital, a female patient's manifestation of anger or violence not only incurs further punishment (in the form of seclusion), but reinforces the view that she is first and foremost 'unfeminine', and, therefore, mentally unsound. In the programme notes to *Head-Rot*, Clean Break includes a table comparing evidence on which 'psychopathy' is established for women and for men.⁵⁰ Not only do the criteria for women far exceed those for men, but they prove consistently to include far more minor 'offences', such as "sexual promiscuity", "lesbianism" or "attention seeking behaviour" -- categories that do not exist for men. In terms of violence, in order for men to be hospitalised, they must have committed "persistent SERIOUS violence", "gratuitous" or "sexual violence", whereas women need commit "ANY persistent violence". Jane Ussher confirms such findings and notes, furthermore, that these double standards consistently posit criminal men as 'bad' and criminal women as 'mad'. "The courts are liable to sentence women to psychiatric treatment for a 'crime' for which men will receive a prison sentence."⁵¹ Kennedy, writing about the same issue, observes that "...crime is seen as an inevitable extension of normal male behaviour, whereas women offenders are thought to have breached sacred notions of what is deemed to be truly female."⁵²

Such gross inequality in matters of judicial and psychiatric assessment is brought under the spotlight in Daniels' exposure of Dee's history as well as the repercussions of her behaviour at the Christmas disco. Dee's incarceration at Penwell is also another example of inappropriate placement. In a short monologue during her seclusion at the beginning of Scene Twelve, she recalls with bitter irony the reason for her transfer from prison to Penwell:

...I often distract myself by imagining my life as a film. I can see a picture of myself on the poster, a sort of cross between Martina and kd only younger. With the caption underneath. 'When the rescue services arrived, the nightmare began ' But I said I wanted help. I don't admit that to no one now. Oh, shit I could kill myself. Fancy admitting, in Holloway, that I wanted help.

I'd have been out months ago if I hadn't opened
my pathetic squealing gob. (p. 229)

When Sharon discovers Dee's case history in Scene Sixteen, Daniels uses her character again as a means to ally her sense of shock (hopefully) to our own:

Sharon ...she's not done anything much.

Jackie Read on. She's been in prison three times.

Sharon For really petty offences --

Jackie Arson!

Sharon All of twenty pounds' worth.

Jackie Assault and she's only twenty-two.

Sharon That makes it worse. This place is
the end of the road. No one gets referred on
from here. She's twenty-two and she's ended
up here (pp. 240-41)

In terms of the criteria for psychopathy listed in the programme notes, Dee has more 'strikes' against her than either Claudia or Ruth. Not only is she a lesbian, former drug user, and displays what others regard as 'attention seeking behaviour', but she is also stigmatised as violent and 'dangerous' *Dee's awareness of the necessity for her to reverse such an 'unfeminine' profile to secure release at her pending tribunal leads to extraordinary efforts, as we have seen, to appear "wet and feminine" --i.e. "more normal" and "less mad" (p. 237) -- at the Christmas disco* Ussher writes about these codes of femininity to which women must conform in order to escape such institutions:

.. [they] are rigid, defined and decreed from
above by those in control. Artificial beauty
(successful application of cosmetics was
applauded), passivity and gentleness are to
replace the anger, the rantings, the depression
for which these women are condemned. Madness
(aberrant femininity) is replaced by acquiescence
(acceptable femininity).⁵³

Daniels uses the Christmas disco both to elaborate on such issues and to bridge Parts One and Two structurally. As the focus for hope, reward and enthusiasm for the patients in Part One, the disco in Part Two becomes a source of blighted hope, punishment and

disillusionment. During the actual event (Scene Nine), Dee, unable to contain her fury at one male patient's boasting of the "gory details" of his crimes and another's "mauling" of Ruth, lashes out with her fists at the men. Her behaviour, however, is misinterpreted by the staff and she is condemned for being "short-sighted", "an aggressive queer", and a "mad tiger" -- labels that reinforce her 'dangerous' status and land her in seclusion. Once there, she attempts to explain to Sharon the "truth" of the situation. Despite Sharon's casual dismissal of her explanation, Dee presses the matter further:

Did either of those blokes get banged up?
 No. They most probably got parole for showing such normal behaviour. Secondly, if I was on the outside and I made a relationship with a serial killer or rapist or both you'd consider me mad but that's what you have to do in here to prove you're sane. Now what's more loony, me or that? (pp. 237-38)

Dee's words, besides pointing out the absurdity of a legal system that places women in the same institution as men for crimes of drastically differing magnitudes, stress the sexually biased double standards for behaviour in this system. Her words point as well to the distortion of logic and values that occurs in the closed world of the Special Hospital. Such distortion forms the basis for the play's most persistent thematic motif: the inversions of 'madness' and 'sanity' at Penwell. Back in Scene One Claudia comments dryly, "If you're not mad when you come in here, you will be by the time you get out -- " (p. 196), and later Dee speaks of the "topsy-turvy world" of Penwell and the "Alice Through The Looking Glass, arse-about-face existence" its patients experience. (p. 235) Throughout the play, Penwell is depicted as a character itself and one, furthermore, with more 'head-rot' than any of its patients. Not only does Daniels portray quite literally the 'rot' or corruption that occurs in those who 'head' or run the institution, but she dramatises how its 'topsy-turvy' nature convolutes or aggravates the sometimes very real mental distress of its patients.

Of the three patients depicted in *Head-Rot*, Ruth is the one who from the beginning is most clearly mentally distressed. She is also, as we know, the one who has spent the most time at Penwell. The revelation of her case history and current state of mind highlights

again the inappropriateness of Special Hospitals for such women, and, most disturbingly, the lack of proper therapy once inside. Unlike Dee's or Claudia's, Ruth's original crime, attempted murder, was of considerable gravity. Despite the fact that Ruth, had she been sent to prison for actual murder, would have been free by now (as Jackie points out in Scene Twenty), Daniels makes clear that her extended time at Penwell is linked directly to the institution's only form of 'therapy': drugs. During her research for *Head-Rot*, the playwright admits that this aspect of Special Hospitals was for her one of the most shocking. She reveals: "Most drugs given are to enable women to block out the horror of the institution, not because they need them. Doctors have admitted this."⁵⁴ In addition to their use as a form of control over patients, Daniels' emphasis on drugs at Penwell is to demonstrate first and foremost their debilitating effects on patients. The first mention of drugs in the play occurs soon after the opening and is presented, typically by Daniels, in the form of a joke. Following a gibe at one of the patients for gaining weight, Jackie continues, "Never occurs to you lot to ask how many calories there are in your medication." (p. 191) Like much of the humour surrounding madness in the play, this joke too is grimly double-edged. In Scene Three we begin to see that the issue of medication is no laughing matter. Dee, sewing teddy bears in the workshop with Ruth, comments on her partner's change in behaviour since the morning: "Here, they been messing about with your medication again? Cos when you woke up you was your usual head-the-ball self and now you're on the ball, almost." (p. 205) Ruth, who later reveals she was never given her medication that morning, suddenly experiences the effects of this omission: "I can't connect anything you're saying. I should have had my tablets. It's no good. My brain's completely --" (p. 208) Ruth's inability to "connect" in this instance (and later in the play) explains in part her constant impulse, described earlier, to vocalise the "connection between words" -- reassurance, no doubt, that she isn't completely disconnected mentally. Like the splitting of Evelyn/Eve or the shattering of St Dymphna's mirror in *Beside Herself*, here too Daniels dramatises powerfully the fragmentation of women's identity that can result from past abuse and, in Ruth's case, that is made worse by medication. Similar to her previous treatment of this

theme as well, Daniels highlights it visually through the image of the teddy bears whose heads are either missing or "*hanging on by a few threads*". Although Ruth and Dee see in the bears opportunities for puns (Dee describes her inability to "get a head") and jokes (Ruth warns Dee against making statements about "capital punishment"), their humour is tinged by pathos, especially when Ruth casually tears the head off her own bear and gives it to the hapless Dee.

While the issue of drugs 'therapy' is developed poignantly through such themes and images, it is portrayed most powerfully through the physical appearance and actions (or inaction) of the patients themselves. From the middle of Part One to the end of the play, Daniels charts the decline of both Ruth and Dee through ever increasing doses of drugs by staff. Although it is obvious that Ruth and Dee's displays of 'uncontrolled' or self-injurious behaviour demand medical attention, the only treatment they receive is through drugs rather than therapy that would address the real pain behind their trauma. After the shock of seeing her step-mother in Scene Four, for example, Ruth next appears with slow and slurred speech, "*shaky in movement and her cardigan buttoned up wrongly*." (p. 214) Her physical helplessness is highlighted throughout the scene (Six) by her inability to apply her make-up or even dress without the help of Claudia. Scene Twenty-two focuses solely on the quantity of drugs administered to patients, and offers an even more shocking example of the body- and mind-numbing effects of medication. Dee, the once "loud-mouthed", "aggressive", "mad tiger", sits slumped in a chair while Sharon tries to give her "*a fistful of tablets*" -- "all colours of the rainbow". (p. 258) In a state of physical and emotional inertia, the only energy she can muster is to ask for water to quench her constant thirst and to apologise to Sharon for swearing. Such defeat contrasts sharply with her previous displays of rebellion against staff and their "shit double standards". During her monologue in Scene Twelve she refers again to the inversions of 'madness' at Penwell:

If emotion seeps through that's a sure sign
of relapse in this topsy-turvy world. They
can act out all the time, all they want but if we
laugh and cry in the same day we end up with

medication for manic depression. (p. 235)

Before her final defeat in the play she attempts once again to draw the nurses' attention to this kind of madness, pointing out angrily her knowledge of Barbara's hypocrisy and violence towards patients. Barbara dismisses Dee's accusation by imputing madness in her:

Barbara Maybe you're even less well than we thought.

...

Dee ...Obviously. Look I can hardly control my mouth never mind stand up straight. At least when I was an illegal junkie I used to feel great. (p. 247)

Clearly, Daniels' dramatisation of the issue of drugs 'therapy' points a damning finger at the injustices and short-sightedness of the institution's policy and staff. At the same time, however, she is careful not to depict the issue entirely in 'black and white' terms. Ruth and Dee, although their distress is exacerbated by drugs, also suffer from their own inner torment and pain. Much of *Head-Rot* addresses this pain and examines in particular what happens when it is not treated appropriately. The issue of self-harm, perhaps the most shocking of all the play's issues, is the focus not only of two entire scenes (Twelve and Thirteen), but also of several key themes. As with other of the play's issues, Daniels presents two perspectives on the subject. Jackie once again is the spokesperson for commonly held assumptions (or misconceptions) about people who injure themselves. In her monologue she reveals "The stuff they get up to, slashing themselves, swallowing stuff it's nobody's business. Of course it's all a rouse for attention." (p. 214) Jackie's belief is not only shared by other staff at Penwell, but is borne out by the institution's policy to refuse pain-killer to those being treated for self-inflicted injuries. Daniels expresses horror at this aspect of Special Hospitals again through Sharon. The first half of Scene Fourteen is devoted to an argument between Sharon and Barbara where Sharon displays disbelief and anger about the issue. The playwright heightens the impact of the episode by having both women arguing whilst pushing the wheelchair-bound Dee, recently stitched up with no pain-killer:

Sharon The RMO's never give any pain-killer when stitching women up?

Barbara Never. Not for self-inflicted wounds. It only encourages them to go on doing it. Besides they can't feel it.

Sharon But they can. You should have seen the way her body shook afterwards.

Barbara They can't feel it when they do it. Pulling your own toe-nail out and slicing into your breast and arm with it would be a physical impossibility if she could feel it.

Sharon Imagine the pain she must have been in to do it.

Barbara Talk to yourself Barbara, what have I just been saying, she wasn't in any pain. She wouldn't have felt it.

...

Sharon Excuse me but if they can't feel it how would giving them a pain-killer encourage them to do it again, then?

Barbara I haven't got time to go all round the houses with you now, Nurse.

Sharon No, I don't suppose you do but for what it's worth I think that sewing up women who have cut themselves without the use of anaesthetic merely serves to reinforce the notion that they are shit.

Barbara Rubbish.

Dee People who never feel pain, seldom believe it can be felt (pp. 235-36)

Dee's one comment is as easily hushed up by Barbara as her wounds have been dismissed.

As well as highlighting the way in which the pain of these women is rarely acknowledged, let alone addressed, this argument is a telling reflection of how their voices are either stifled or go unheard. Although Sharon speaks up for Dee and challenges Barbara's ignorance about her pain, even she never seeks Dee's own voice about the matter. Such silence Daniels (and Clean Break) seek to end.

In the two scenes preceding Scene Fourteen, the playwright allows the complexities behind the issue of self-harm to be revealed solely from the perspectives of two patients. Scene Twelve focuses on Dee in seclusion where her reflections on her past history of abuse and internment are interrupted by the appearance of an Angel. This spirit, like the members of the 'holy feminist trinity' in *Ripen*, is a protective, nurturing one and meant to represent that part of Dee that "not only wants to survive but fly." (p. 231) Dee, however, cannot help being deeply suspicious of her so-called 'Angel'. One of the funniest sequences in the play ensues:

Dee ...Hang on, what d'you mean MY ANGEL?
Call yourself an angel and I end up in hell. Holy
fucking *ghost* you must be *fuck awful* at your job.

Angel My mobility was severely impaired by a
wedge of Bazooka up my bum.

Dee Shit!

After all this time, you still remember me?

Angel I've always been here. I'm part of you.

Dee I'm not talking to you. *You're not there.*

Angel I'm not going to go away until I've told you a
story --

Dee You can stop right there. You're an angel.
This is Christmas. Let me tell you straight off I'm
not having a baby for no one. (p. 230)

Daniels' skill at relieving the intensity of a scene by such humour is perhaps never more needed than in *Head-Rot*. As is typical with Daniels, however, the serious or more painful aspect of the scene is never far behind. The Angel has come with a riddle which, when revealed, jolts the audience into a recognition of the vulnerability and pain behind Dee's hard-edged banter:

...There is a child somewhere, who's very frightened.
Someone is cutting into her, slicing at her body, slashing
her flesh to the bone, stabbing to the tendon. They are
freeing her of her life's blood. What have we got to do? (p. 231)

As the Angel departs and Dee is left protesting after her, Daniels visualises for the first time on stage the shocking reality of the riddle: "*Dee holds up her hands to reveal a deep cut in her arm and a very bloody foot.*" (p. 231) This disturbing sight immediately recalls Dee's words, spoken just prior to the riddle, where she tells her Angel, "...I wish I was made of stone. Sometimes I feel so torn apart I imagine my flesh exploding and huge chunks of it careering round the ward." (p. 231) Dee's wish points again to the theme of women's fragmentation so prevalent in Daniels' work. In this case, however, it is not just a theme but a harsh physical reality -- one which we are forced to confront, along with the issues surrounding it, on a number of occasions throughout the play.

For Dee, slashing her body is the only means she can find to exert some form of control over her life, as she says to her fleeing Angel, "Every other fucker's done things to me. I'm going to do things to myself for a change. Don't you understand? I'm creating order." (p. 231) Her self-mutilation, however, is also an indication of the implosive nature of women's anger. In our culture, as Daniels made explicit in *Beside Herself*, women are socialised to blame themselves for every social and personal evil, particularly those of men. While *Beside Herself* demonstrated the psychological damage that can result from such socialisation, *Head-Rot* focuses on both psychological and physical self-harm. Through Ruth in particular, Daniels exposes the self-loathing and cycle of violence that sexual abuse can trigger, as well as society's hypocrisy in blaming women for such crime. Just as Scene Twelve focused solely on Dee, Scene Thirteen focuses on Ruth and her similar impulse for self-destruction. Unlike Dee's benevolent Angel, the voices with which Ruth must contend have become malevolent and provoke her to self-destruction rather than survival. So powerful is their presence that Daniels personifies them (textually) as enemies, almost external to her:

Voice Go on then. What's stopping you?

Voice Kill yourself. Kill yourself. Kill yourself.

Voice You'll have to do it sooner or later.

Voice Go on do what he says. I'll help you --

Voice Listen to them Ruth. Kill yourself -- (p. 232)

Ruth, despite her lack of control over the voices, still manages to blame herself for their presence ("It's my own fault. I let them in," p. 232). Initially, however, she tries to resist them by countering their challenges with her own voice -- a voice which in turn challenges us, or society at large, to examine (once again) our double standards for the sexual behaviour of men and women. Ruth's monologue sequences address the audience implicitly:

Voice Slag, slag, slag --

Ruth I can't understand why they call me a slag. They all do, voices and people. Maybe the voices spoke to the nurses and told them to call me one. I can't understand. Why? Why? Isn't that what they call natural, men exploring your body, doing sexual things to you? Isn't that what we're all supposed to aim for? Why then do you get called all these names when it happens? It's happened all my life in much worse ways in the past, much worse than any of the category A blokes have done to me in here. There are people out there who are having a great time who really fucked me over. (pp. 232-33)

Ruth's words also bring the issue of sexual abuse to the fore for the first time. Not only do we discover that abuse goes on within the institution itself (one of the many related issues outlined by Clean Break), but that the true criminals in *Head-Rot* are free, "having a great time". Daniels elaborates on this disturbing reality: "Most of the women's crimes were no where near as disturbing as the crimes that had been committed to them as children -- crimes which had gone without punishment."⁵⁵ Kennedy reinforces this view, stating: "A significant majority of the women who go through the [criminal justice] system have been subjected to more criminal behaviour than they have been responsible for."⁵⁶ Daniels' foregrounding of the details of Ruth's past abuse in Scenes Eighteen and Twenty further clarifies this injustice and connects it also to the issue of woman-blaming. In Ruth's step-mother's monologue, for example, Helen explains how it was a "relief" for her to deny what she actually witnessed as sexual abuse and to attribute Ruth's subsequent knife attack to her

history of being "a bad girl, always bad" (p. 245). Ruth's attempted murder of her step-mother adds a further dimension to the issue in its tragic illustration of how she found it easier to blame Helen than her father for her abuse: "...I killed the wrong one didn't I? When I was doing it I stopped seeing her. All I could see was him." (p. 250) Despite this admission, Ruth also sees Helen's former refusal to recognise or acknowledge her abuse as in itself worthy of blame:

Jackie Sharon spoke to her [Helen]. She said she wanted to tell you that it was all okay.

Ruth Really? Well, you can tell Sharon to tell her that it's me that hasn't forgiven her. There are worse things than being knifed you know.

Jackie Really? A list of them isn't exactly springing to mind.

Ruth Being betrayed. (p. 249)

The tendency for women to exonerate men or to blame women for men's violence against them -- an issue explored previously in *Beside Herself* -- is given considerable emphasis throughout *Head-Rot*. After the Christmas disco, for example, Ruth is condemned by Jackie for "letting" the male patient maul her, and referred to as "a right slag" and "little slut". (p. 227) Later on Daniels presents Barbara's abuse of Ruth as a misdirection of anger over her own experience of domestic violence. This incident furthers the play's exploration of women's self-harm and its connection with abuse and madness. Barbara, whom we know to be abused by her husband by her frequently bruised appearance, perpetuates a cycle of violence at Penwell by her physical mistreatment of female patients. Such abuse, we discover in Scene Seventeen, contributes to Ruth's own personal cycle of violence which culminates in her suicide attempt. Earlier in Scene Fifteen, she speaks to Jackie about the cyclical nature of abuse and violence:

Bad things don't die you know. All the badness
in the world never dies. It goes on and on --

. . .

Someone's bad to you. You don't get the chance

to be bad back but then you're bad to someone else because it has to come out. And they have to be bad and it goes on and on without hope, especially if you know the secret of being bad because that means you are mad and then there's only one way to stop it. (pp. 239-40)

For someone in Ruth's position -- imprisoned, demoralised and powerless -- the only way she can find to 'let her badness out' is to be bad to herself. Barbara, on the other hand, is able, owing to her position, to take her 'badness' out on others. Daniels' point throughout, however, is not to encourage the audience to judge Barbara, but to see how both women are placed on the same continuum of violence in society. In the play's penultimate scene, this point is driven home explicitly. Barbara, brought finally before Penwell's administrators for her abuse of Ruth, defends her actions to an 'independent person' during an interrogation in which we hear the voice only of Barbara. Like the numerous monologues in the play, this one-sided 'dialogue' is an effective means of directing our attention more fully on Barbara. Through her words, Daniels emphasises again the strength of our woman-blaming culture where even women condemn other women for being victimised:

... I still feel angry. () More to do with the fact that she [Ruth] just took it. I'd feel relieved, validated if she retaliated. ... Well, no it's not exactly her behaviour I'm angry with but this blaming everything on something else, on the past. It's no excuse is it? () Oh well we're all entitled to our own opinion. But for my money too much is made of it. What good does it do carping on about these things? You've just got to get on with life. She's no better now, Ruth. Lets blokes get away with murder. () (*Long pause.*) I'm angry because she allowed it to happen in the first place. () No, not me hitting her. Him. () Him, who ever he was who abused her. I hate her for it. () I hate it. () What is all this about? Why are you picking on me? (pp. 259-60)

Barbara's response to the interrogator's implied questions, however, reveal equally her own self-loathing for 'allowing' herself to be abused by her husband. In this light, her violence towards Ruth (and other patients) becomes as much an expression of self-hatred as a perpetuation of the continuum of violence to which Ruth refers. Tragically, Barbara's inability to recognise the placement she shares with Ruth on this continuum (or, as Ruth

puts it, "the bit of me that is her" p. 234) reinforces for Ruth the dynamics of her past abuse where she is left ashamed, discredited and isolated. In Scene Twenty, Ruth strives to bridge her isolation from staff by befriending Jackie. Still struggling against her malevolent Voices, she nevertheless shares with Jackie painful details of her crime as well as revealing the true perpetrator of her recent injury. Jackie, however, like Helen formerly, refuses to believe her:

Jackie (*laughs*) Who was it really?

Ruth I told you, you wouldn't like it.

Jackie It's not a question of not liking it. I simply don't believe it.

Ruth And for your information it's not just me and it wasn't just the once.

Jackie Don't talk rubbish. I thought you were so much better.

Ruth When people don't believe me it drives me mad.

Jackie When people lie to me I feel crazy. For your information. (*She goes.*)

Ruth Me too, that as well. Me too. Don't go -- (p. 251)

As we saw in *Beside Herself*, the true threat of madness for survivors seems to stem not so much from the abuse itself, but from others' denial of their pain and thus of their reality. For Ruth, such denial, along with high levels of medication, distort and fragment her reality so that she can't, as she reveals in Scene Twelve, "...connect myself to my body any more." (p. 233)

The lack of solidarity and understanding between Ruth and both Jackie and Barbara characterises the nature of staff-patient relationships throughout *Head-Rot*. From the opening scene we saw how Daniels highlighted the gulf between nurses and "patients" through Jackie's condescension towards and ridicule of the women. Although Daniels also portrays certain nurses' efforts to help or display compassion towards patients, more frequently she shows how the uneven power dynamic existing between them is open to

abuse. From cold breakfast trays to the use of medication and seclusion as punishment, such abuses of power on the part of nurses also get played out in the arena of racism. While this issue is addressed most obviously in Part Two through Jackie's and Barbara's scapegoating of Claudia, the presence of racial tension at the institution is depicted in more minor instances throughout the play. In the following interchange in Scene Two, for example, Daniels points to the sense of marginalization felt by Black people at Penwell:

Dee [*to Barbara*] ...I was just wondering what she'd done wrong to deserve to end up working here.

Sharon I'm not sure.

Dee You're not in the minority then.

Sharon I'm very much afraid that I am.

Dee Yeah, I see what you mean. ... (p. 203)

In Scene Eleven, Barbara responds to Jackie's comment that Sharon has been trying to "ingratiate" herself with patients by observing: "I suppose she has to in her position." (p. 227) Later in Scene Sixteen, Sharon shows how such assumptions, although not explicitly racist, reflect nevertheless a white-centred mentality. Upon questioning Jackie's accusation of Claudia as the one who hit Ruth, for example, she says: "Don't look at me like that, either of you. I'm not going to stick up for her because of the colour of her skin. We're not like white people in that respect. Fairness comes into it." (p. 242) Unlike Sharon's efforts at fair play, Jackie's automatic assumption of Claudia's guilt, despite the fact that she had just saved Ruth's life, as well as Barbara's cowardly acceptance of it, point more directly to an inherent racism in both women. In keeping with *Clean Break*'s stipulation only to "demonstrate" racism awareness at *Specials*, however, Daniels' aim again is not to encourage judgement against the nurses -- although this admittedly is difficult to avoid given her emphasis throughout on Barbara's hypocrisy -- but to expose how their racist tendencies feed into the institutional power politics already loaded against patients. This is demonstrated most clearly through Barbara's attempts to 'buy off' and eventually blackmail Claudia in Scene Twenty-one. In this climactic scene, Daniels emphasises again the

inversions of madness at Penwell where racism is not only displayed by staff towards patients, but then used as a further weapon of oppression if patients dare expose it. Claudia, secretly exonerated by Barbara as part of a "little bargain", discovers in her notes this double-edged sword:

Claudia (*reading*) Walks arrogantly, talks in a loud voice, claims racism, paces up and down in her room at night, calls us white trash.

Barbara Claudia, we can talk about this later --

Claudia Later? Later? In another ten years perhaps? How long has this, this, fucking shit been following me around?

Jackie What you so wild about? None of it is lies.

Claudia Claims racism? What a laugh, what a laugh. You know what I'm called on the punishment block?

...

.. My claim of racism was just the once. This is the 1990s and that white trash on your so-called intensive care ward call me Niggs, not just the once but repeatedly, like it was my name. I wouldn't care but as an insult, Nigger went out with the ark.

Jackie Yeah, but they don't mean nothing by it, it's only teasing, they say it nicely --

Claudia And the last time I complained about it was five years ago. I'd never have got on this ward if I'd even thought about racism. ... (pp. 253-54)

Outraged by these injustices, Claudia exercises for the first time at Penwell a well-earned power: she threatens to expose Barbara's cover-up of Ruth's injury. Barbara, however, quickly disillusioned her of the possibility of any real power:

You have a choice Claudia. You are due on the Parole Ward at the end of the week. And you will get there if you leave the office now. If you don't you'll go back in seclusion, your disruptive behaviour will be well documented in that file and you know there's no one around who'll dispute it and what's more you know you won't get another chance to go on the Parole Ward this side of Easter. (pp. 254-55)

Despite the fact that Barbara in the end is called up before Penwell's administrators, it is clear in the final scene that their reprimand is intended as a political gesture and that Claudia's complaint had no bearing on it, as Jackie states to Sharon:

...Now they've been seen to do one [complaint] they can sit back. Even then they wouldn't have done nothing if it was just Claudia. But then Ruth's Aunt wrote on that headed notepaper and Doctor broken Reed thought he'd chime in with his eaves-dropping evidence. ... (p. 261)

Claudia's failure to secure justice or effect change in this episode is only one of a number of grim defeats at the end of the play. Unlike the ending to *Gut Girls* where Daniels at least provided a few rays of hope for the women, there is clearly no future for the patients at the close of *Head-Rot*. By Scene Twenty-four, both the patients and nurses are seen to have come full circle, or, even more disturbingly, to have regressed: Jackie announces that Claudia is to return from the Parole Ward; Ruth is, by her own admission, still "not right" (p. 250); Dee's Angel has left her and she has given up hope (she "can't be arsed" about her tribunal any longer, p. 258), all patients have received either increased doses of drugs or seclusion instead of proper treatment; Sharon, formerly the arbiter of 'fair play' towards patients, becomes emotionally anaesthetised to them -- when she takes over Barbara's job, she also assumes her attitude ("*three breakfast trays*" lie cold on her desk, p. 260); Barbara, instead of facing the violence in her life, escapes from its sources (her husband and Penwell); Dee, we gather from Ruth's urgent call for help, has injured herself again (or worse), and Jackie, as mentioned at the start, offers the same greeting to a new nurse as she did to Sharon in Scene One. Throughout *Head-Rot*, the emphasis has indeed been on hell. Furthermore, contrary to the Easter decorations adorning Penwell's wards in the final scene, there is no sign of redemption for the women imprisoned there. For Daniels, the most shocking aspect of *Specials* was this lack of hope for the women as well as proper redress or even concern for their pain, as she points out. "Nobody really seems to do anything about it; it just continues to go on"⁵⁷ Her sense of shock, Daniels hoped, would make itself

felt through the play and alert audiences to the bleak realities of Specials that demand our concern and action.

The overall reaction to *Head-Rot* indicates that Daniels' hope was realised. Not only did audiences across Britain attest to the play's power ("Moving and thought-provoking...", "Challenging stuff", "it has opened my eyes")⁵⁸, but critics responded for the most part supportively and favourably. It is difficult, however, to assess in only theatrical or academic terms the 'success' of such a play. While one can applaud Daniels for dealing with an appalling set of issues with imagination, compassion and spirited (if hard) humour, the real success of *Head-Rot* should perhaps be measured by the response of the women prisoners themselves, as Daniels states:

I was terribly afraid of the women prisoners' criticism -- more so than that of any literary manager. . . One of the young women said, 'it doesn't hurt enough'. I still don't think I have put it right ⁵⁹

In the final play under consideration, we see Daniels veering away from the duties (commissioned or self-imposed) of social enlightenment. *Esme and Shaz*, despite the subject matter it shares with *Head-Rot*, is above all, as the playwright has stressed, a work of the 'imagination' in which people, not issues, are of primary dramatic interest.

The Madness of Esme and Shaz

While *Head-Rot* focuses solely on the hell of sexual abuse, madness and incarceration of women, *Esme and Shaz* is a play about deliverance and redemption from this hell. Thrown together by a "sign" from God, its two central characters are an unlikely pair: a thirty-three year old, blaspheming, chain-smoking, institutionalised, self-lacerating, 'butch' dyke and her

"very quiet, nicely spoken, retired", suburban, and devoutly Christian aunt (p. 273). Daniels has described *Esme and Shaz* as:

...a sort of love story -- a story about two women who had never experienced love. When they do discover how much they mean to each other, or why, it becomes a story of how [this love] changes their lives.⁶⁰

Esme and Shaz, however, is not just Esme's and Shaz's 'love story', it is also, more broadly, a story *about* love -- love in many forms: platonic, Christian, sexual and self-love. In addition to it being the central theme of this particular work, love proves also a fitting subject, or resolution, with which to conclude this painful 'trio' of plays.

Esme and Shaz shares much in common with *Beside Herself* and especially *Head-Rot*. Its central characters, like Evelyn and Ruth, are incest survivors and suffer the legacy of this abuse in similar ways denial, repressed anger, self-destruction, violence or criminal behaviour. The connection between 'madness' and abuse figures strongly in the play, as does the use of humour or comedy (stylistically by Daniels and strategically by individual characters) as a counter-offensive against pain and oppression. Despite these similarities with its predecessors, however, *Esme and Shaz*'s differences are more notable. In this play, as mentioned previously, Daniels deliberately steers clear of the 'social-work-play-for-today' genre of *Head-Rot* (and even to an extent of *Beside Herself*) and changes the focus. Rather than issues, characterisation and plot are of foremost importance in the drama. The playwright's emphasis on the narrative aspect of the piece is a notable development in her writing. No longer content to be cast amongst contemporary playwrights as a predominantly 'issue-based' writer, Daniels has admitted recently a deliberate move away from polemical theatre to one that is more story- and fantasy-based. In our final interview, she discussed the importance she has placed on the relationship between 'story' and theatre over the years

When I started writing, say, *Ripen Our Darkness*, there was an instinctive thing there about telling a story, and it's not written in such an up-front way as say *Masterpieces*. Then I moved to writing much

more 'this is what this play is about' type of writing, and now I've moved back to a more informed idea, I hope, about what a story is, and less self-consciousness about it being old-fashioned -- an actual belief in my own belief...that stories are important. [They are] the form really, and within that framework you can bring a lot of other things in. You have to engage somebody, and the way I like to do it, and the way I like to see it in theatre, is through a story well told. The bottom line is I want to find out what happens next.⁶¹

In terms of style, Daniels notes also that *Esme and Shaz* is "...a different play: I feel that it's freer and less angry."⁶² One of the most remarkable aspects of *Esme and Shaz* is that despite the presence of profound sadness and pain in its characters, it is also in many respects Daniels' most outrageously funny play. Gill Pyrah describes her surprise after viewing *Esme and Shaz*:

I went expecting to see a play about a violent, abused and abusing young woman who's released from a secure psychiatric unit into the care of an elderly Christian aunt . . . and I did see all that. . . The astonishing thing is that it's a comedy, complete with crazy car ride and the worst rendering of COUNTRY ROADS you could hope to hear.⁶³

Daniels' ability to juggle great pain with equal humour, as noted, for example, in *Beside Herself* and frequently elsewhere, is perhaps most striking here in view of the extremity of both elements. As Pyrah indicates, on the one hand we witness or hear of events of harrowing and bloody proportions (Shaz's abuse and murder of the baby), and, on the other hand, we witness near-farcical or slapstick situations (Esme's gun-wielding antics: "Howdy Dino", p. 315). With such a volatile mixture of elements, one might assume that the playwright is taking an enormous risk with her audience. But, amazingly, she succeeds (often just) with neither diminishing a character's pain nor losing a laugh. (Her success with critics, as we shall see, is another story.)

Esme and Shaz differs in certain areas not only from *Head-Rot* and *Beside Herself*, but from previous writing as well. Like *Masterpieces*, the play is a departure for Daniels: it is her first presentation of a 'love story'; it is the first play where she chose to have an all-

female cast (men do figure, but off-stage); it is the first play to have an old woman as a main protagonist; and it is the first occasion, as mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, where a lesbian relationship plays a more major role in the play. Finally, it is Daniels' first dramatisation of lesbian sexuality: Shaz and Pat openly kiss and joke about sex on stage. Because *Esme and Shaz's* gay protagonist has also killed, however, the play's lesbian dimension has raised particular concerns or questions. In Pyrah's interview with Daniels, she asked whether the fact that Shaz is gay complicated other issues and did disservice to gay women. Daniels stated:

Well that's how it complicates it for me, yes, because I would hate to think that. I think for many years the majority of my plays have had lesbian characters in them and they've always been written as rather positive images, which I feel is a weakness really. I know why I did it -- because I just feel the prejudice out there is so strong I don't want to give anybody any more leeway to say "Oh look there's another representation of a lesbian who isn't perfect" -- but in the end I didn't make a conscious choice with the character, that's how the character came out and I stand by her. She hasn't done all those things because she is a lesbian; she just happens to be one.⁶⁴

Jane Edwards points out, however, that in *Esme and Shaz* it is not just a matter of Shaz being a far from perfect but still loveable lesbian, her crime, unlike those in *Head-Rot* where the punishments were clearly out of proportion to the offences, "... is major by any standards"⁶⁵ Daniels admits that her inclusion of Shaz's crime was indeed "very brave". She adds, however, "You feel this burden of responsibility not to get it wrong, but speaking for the community doesn't really lend itself to the creative process."⁶⁶ While Daniels' 'bravery' in *Esme and Shaz* may be seen as an important step in her writing, others see it merely as a reflection of a general trend occurring in recent lesbian playwriting. Nina Rapi, for example, observes.

There is no doubt that a new phenomenon has developed in western societies of late

and that is women who kill. Since January 1993 when *Foreign Lands* by Karen Hope was successfully premiered at the Finborough, with no less than two lesbians as serial killers of children, there has been a number of plays about women who kill. Is this simply a case of mimesis, theatre reflecting reality ...? ...Or is it a cynical move by commissioning companies and theatres to cash in on a 'winning formula'? Either way, the trend is happening and is a curious one. Two of the plays with the above theme are written by lesbians: Sarah Daniels and Phyllis Nagy. ...It appears that while straight women write of women killing men, lesbians write of women killing women. A strange irony this.⁶⁷

Although Rapi rightly identifies a recent proliferation of plays by women about women who kill,⁶⁸ she fails to take into account two important factors with regard to Daniels. First, *Esme and Shaz* arose not from the playwright's desire to jump on any thematic bandwagon, but, as we know, from her previous research in *Specials for Head-Rot*. Second, the 'trend' that Daniels is supposedly reflecting was actually present in her writing long before any of the plays Rapi refers to. In *Penumbra*, an early unpublished play (written in 1981), one of the central events involves the killing and mutilation of a baby by a sexually abused, "mad" mother. As for her implication that lesbian killers in recent plays are *choosing* female rather than male victims, Rapi may be guilty ironically of the same academically blinkered vision as Pat, Shaz's 'well read' feminist lover, who believes that she "killed the wrong person". (p. 298)

While Shaz's killing of her baby half-sister is perhaps the most shocking element of *Esme and Shaz*, it is by no means the most significant. As stated, the play attempts not to clarify issues, but, in Daniels' words, "...just to tell a story."⁶⁹ Shaz's act of murder is presented thus as a backdrop, albeit an important one, to this story. Daniels, moreover, deliberately withholds the revelation of Shaz's "index offence" from the audience (until Scene Seven) in an effort to focus our attention first and foremost on the people at the heart of her story as opposed to their actions. When Shaz's criminal history is eventually revealed to Pat and to

Esme, we witness most crucially the *effect* of this revelation on their relationships and the subsequent development (or disintegration) of them. As Daniels has indicated, relationships, or people, are at the heart of *Esme and Shaz*.

The main events of the play's story, although not predictable, nevertheless follow a conventional course: a definite starting point (signalled by the delivery of unexpected news by a messenger), a series of meetings (Esme's and Shaz's, Pat's and Shaz's), developments (in their relationships) and crises (Shaz's 'coming out', the disclosure of her past to Pat, Shaz's and Esme's falling out), a climax (Shaz's explosive confrontation with the DSS and police and her subsequent return to custody), characters' epiphanies (the discoveries of love and mutual understanding by Esme and Shaz), a dénouement (Esme's 'rescue' plan) and, in Daniels' words, "a happy ending"⁷⁰ (their escape and new life in Greece). These events, however, occur on only one of the play's levels of action; on a deeper level, the more dynamic action occurs in the emotional territories of the two protagonists. As a 'love story', *Esme and Shaz* is above all about inner awakenings, transformations and redemption through self- and mutual love. The play's format, not surprisingly, is built around the journey, or parallel journeys, of Esme and Shaz. Since *Ripen*, we have noted, as in much contemporary feminist drama, Daniels' frequent use of the 'journey' as metaphor and format in the construction of her plays⁷¹. Here too, she not only places *Esme and Shaz's* key events as stages in the journeys of her protagonists, but uses the 'journey' (both metaphorically and literally) as a major theme unifying the play's often chaotic action and secondary characters. Pat, for example, the feminist exemplar of 'political correctness', is completing her PhD on the theme of journeys, hence her job ticket inspecting on British Rail, Esme's friend Joyce is emigrating to Canada to make a fresh start, Shaz speaks of her own "new start in life" during her train journey with Esme, both women make their 'great escape' in a hair-raising car journey, and both sail on a Mediterranean cruise liner to a new life in the final scene.

These physical journeys throughout the play underscore the more crucial inner journeys of Esme and Shaz. The play follows the development not only of the relationship between the

two, but of each on her individual journey through this relationship. Much of the play's tension (and humour) arises, however, from the unlikelihood of this amazingly disparate pair of ever forming a relationship. Daniels' delineation of the character of each woman in the first two scenes leads us to predict an improbable, or at best disastrous, union. Esme, a straight-laced yet somewhat quirky Christian, in the habit of "shooting little prayers like arrows heaven-wards" and on occasion telling "lies of necessity", is approached by Natalie, Shaz's probation officer, to see whether she might consider having her 'birth niece' stay with her upon release from the RSU and previously Broadmoor, or, as Natalie's political correctness would have it, "An establishment for those with ... challenging mental health who have ... come off worse in a confrontation with the penal system." (p. 271) After this second-hand introduction to her in Scene One, we meet the "*badly scarred*" Shaz at the beginning of the following scene: an aggressive yet insecure, foul-mouthed woman whose main hobby is watching television and 'learning Australian'. Shaz, about whom Esme previously had professed no knowledge, herself remembers mention of an aunt who had run away from home at eighteen and had never been heard of since. This piece of information, surprising as it may seem about such a 'respectable' person, nevertheless suggests some degree of possible empathy between the two relations. Both, for example, seem to have a dark and troubled past and both display the same desire to disassociate themselves from it: Esme initially denies having had a brother, and Shaz, who cannot bring herself to say the word "father", refers to him as "He, him, it." (p. 273) When the two finally meet in Scene Three, however, we, as well as the characters themselves, are dubious about their taking to each other. This scene, though, like most crucial points in the play, turns on surprise or fate -- in this case fate in the form of Esme's Christianity. Amidst Esme's attempts at exchanging pleasantries with Shaz, God, whose signal Esme had previously prayed for, gives her the 'go-ahead':

On the word 'hark' the sun comes out. It shines through the window, causing the shadow of the bars across the window to fall in the shape of a large cross on the table. Sharon doesn't even

notice this. However, for Esme it's the sign she's (sic) been looking for but secretly hoping wouldn't appear. (p. 276)

Despite Esme's acceptance of God's "sign" and subsequent agreement to take on Shaz, we are still led to expect a rough road ahead:

Esme And I have three house rules: that nobody wilfully damages me or my property, privacy in the bathroom, and that nobody blasphemes.

Shaz Very interesting. What you telling me for?

Esme Because those are the rules if you want to come and live with me.

Shaz Fucking hell. Blimey -- Do what?

Esme I know you must be used to swearing and it will be hard for you to get out of the habit but I must insist that you don't blaspheme.

Shaz What did I say? What did I say? Fucking's only swearing, isn't it? It isn't in the Bible, is it?

Esme B-l-i-m-e-y-. It means God blind me.

Shaz Blimey, does it? Shit. Jesus. Sorry, sorry. Look I'll practice. Are you sure? I mean, you don't really know a thing about me. (pp. 277-78)

The remainder of Part One charts the process of Esme and Shaz getting to know each other and, gradually, getting to know themselves. As such, it is a process of awakening and Scene Four, set aboard an inter-city train, marks the start of their journey both literally and figuratively. On this journey, amidst much confusion concerning pre-paid tickets, Shaz also meets Pat, the ticket inspector with the unfortunately placed name-badge, and the stage is set for the development of a yet another relationship, this one exploring the possibilities of romantic and sexual love for Shaz. Although this more detailed dramatisation of lesbian love is, as stated previously, a notable development in Daniels' writing, its primary function in the play is more to further Shaz's self-definition outside of her relationship with Esme than to comment on lesbianism per se. Through her time spent with Pat, for example, Shaz begins to see the value of self-reliance as opposed to emotional (and financial) dependence

on others. Although Pat wants Shaz to move in with her and play out scenarios of romantic 'partnerships' ("Let's fly together", p. 293), Shaz resists these ideals in favour of first developing self-esteem:

Pat Don't you want to?

Shaz Yeah. Yeah but I ... I want to be ...
be able to feel I've got something to offer --

Pat If I knew how to do it I'd be giving you
a very old-fashioned look.

Shaz I mean a job or something. I owe --

Pat You don't owe me or anyone else anything --

Shaz You're joking. If I became head of ICI
tomorrow, I would have to work until I was
four thousand and forty to pay back all the money
I've already had out of the state. Anyhow, I owe
it to me, I think. At least, I'm beginning to think -- (pp. 293-94)

Shaz's desire for a relationship founded on a 'healthy' as opposed to 'unhealthy' love will resurface later, as we shall see, in her relationship with Esme.

Despite the scenes devoted to Shaz and Pat in this section of the play, the main focus of Part One is on the developing relationship between Shaz and Esme. This relationship, as predicted in Scene Three, is fraught with tension and appears doomed to failure. Friction between the two crescendos gradually as both women try to adapt to each other's personality and annoying habits. Shaz, whose new-found freedom means endless baths and flicking of light switches, begins to test her aunt's endurance, while Esme's constant reprimands and attempts to teach her niece (if only piano lessons) fuel Shaz's sense of frustration and futility. Their tensions come to a head in Scene Eight where a big argument leads to new levels of understanding in their relationship, but also to a drastic turn of events in the following scene.

The crisis in their relationship, however, is preceded and, in many ways, precipitated, by the crisis in Shaz and Pat's relationship in Scene Seven. Having just 'come out' to Esme about her sexuality, Shaz undergoes an even more difficult 'coming out' to Pat about her

past. Although Pat has recently professed to Esme her "love" for her niece, this love is severely tested as she listens to Shaz's poignant detailing of her former incestuous abuse and the events that led up to her killing her half-sister. Pat's inability to understand Shaz's past outside the narrow confines of her academic feminism ("You won't find any easy answers for this in the books you've read" (p. 297), Shaz tells her), leads ultimately to her decision "...not to see **Shaz** again." (p. 297) This decision, understandably, has harsh repercussions for Shaz. Feeling sad and angry about Pat's abandonment of her in Scene Eight, she begins to attack Esme for her apparent lack of interest in her past, as she says, "You've never even asked me anything. We're from the same family and you've never even asked me --" (p. 301). When Shaz refuses to settle for Esme's feeble explanations of Christian forgiveness towards her family, Esme finally opens up about her own *past sexual abuse by her father*. Instead of a closer bond being established between the two as a result of this disclosure, however, both begin to argue, ironically, over the emotional ramifications of their abuse -- ramifications which, predictably, Esme denies and Shaz, by now an 'expert', analyses:

Esme That's the difference between men and women. They can't seem to help themselves. Or rather they do help themselves. We don't --

Shaz No, no. We only destroy ourselves instead.

Esme Who has?

Shaz Oh look at yourself, preening at being the big martyr. We've got nothing to crow about, you and I. We're pathetic, slashed to bits. Don't bloody glory in our destruction.

Esme Speak for yourself. I'm far from destroyed, thank you. I don't even smoke. And I'm surprised at you sticking up for them. Still, the Lord works in --

...

Shaz Christ! Talk about missing the fucking Godforsaken point. How many people do you know who can't fucking conduct their pitiful, miserable lives without shooting invisible arrow prayers to God the fucking father. Talk about infuckingadequate. It's you that's got the personfuckingality disorder. Jesus wept. (p. 302)

Where in *Head-Rot* the airing of such painful issues and emotional distress may have been the sole focus of the scene, here Daniels, ever mindful of the *story* of Esme and Shaz, uses the episode equally for its advancement. The playwright's sense of dramatic timing during the scene, for example, is impeccable: just as their argument boils over and Shaz is about to move out, the two are 'saved by the bell', both literally and figuratively. Natalie's impromptu visit, although we later learn of its more severe consequences for Shaz, does in the short term, ironically, 'save' their relationship. Esme, who deduces the nature of Shaz's 'index offence' from Natalie's stipulations regarding her living together with Pat, for the first time (after Natalie has left) asks Shaz about it. Convinced that her Christian aunt will be horrified at her revelation, Shaz is amazed by her response:

Esme Whose baby did you kill, yours?

Shaz His. So you see I'm beyond saving.

Esme I don't know. It has a certain Old Testament ring to it.

Shaz How can you? How can you say something like that?

Esme Like what?

Shaz Like that. Casual. Like it was just another commandment I broke.

Esme Well, I hope you haven't killed as many times as you've taken the Lord's name in vain, or we would have wasted a lot of time worrying about the population explosion. (*Laughs.*)

Shaz You're cracked --

Esme I'm beginning to think I might well be but I'm certainly not so clueless as to think they put you in one of those places for defiling God's name.

Shaz Can't you see? I'm as bad as him. Worse. Much worse. Nobody killed me.

Esme And can't you see the difference between doing something out of distress and doing something for pleasure? (p. 305)

Esme's display of compassion and, perhaps more crucially, her ability to 'laugh' at and lighten Shaz's burden of shame -- the balancing of pain with humour -- turns their relationship around. Instead of moving out, Esme persuades Shaz to stay, while Shaz, upon discovering that her aunt has been looking after her at her own expense, decides to crusade for what is rightfully owing to her from the DSS. Through pain, anger and the hand of 'fate', thus, a deeper bond between the two after all is formed.

While Esme and Shaz's argument in Scene Eight is the first serious test of their relationship, it is by no means the only nor the most trying along their journey. Despite their new-found solidarity, Shaz, always her own worst enemy, proves the seed of its (physical) dissolution in Scene Nine. Eager to prove herself at the DSS office since, as the stage directions indicate, "*This is one of the few things Shaz knows about*" (p. 307), she nevertheless overdoes it and becomes *hostile and aggressive towards Lucy*, the officer dealing with their case. Lucy, who, according to Esme, could stand some training in public relations, deals with Shaz in the worst possible manner by inferring madness in her:

Esme Listen, let's all calm down. My niece is a bit fraught. She gave up smoking yesterday.

Lucy I should think that's the least of her problems.

Shaz (*stands up*) You're well out of order, you are.

Lucy Oh and I suppose you're in full working order? Do me a favour. (p. 308)

Through this incident, Daniels attempts to show the pejorative connotations associated with 'madness' in society, especially when applied to women. The fact that Lucy uses and Shaz interprets madness as a supreme insult reflects the double burden of those battling against real mental illness. As we have seen in *Beside Herself*, the labelling of women as 'mad' is often equally if not more oppressive than actual mental distress. For Shaz, who has struggled so hard to retain her sanity 'in the bin' and throughout her abuse, Lucy's goading is a call (literally) to arms. Managing to display remarkable restraint at first, Shaz nevertheless finds herself irretrievably provoked when Lucy surreptitiously calls in a police officer. During the violent struggle that ensues, Shaz assaults the officer and is subsequently

returned to the RSU. While our sympathies throughout this episode are directed to both Shaz and Esme (Esme, for example, tries repeatedly but in vain to diffuse rising tempers), it is for Shaz in particular that we feel the tragic dimension of her 'fall from grace'. From the scene's opening to its finish, Daniels underscores the depth of this fall: Shaz, with the worthiest of intentions and attempts at patience, fails in the only arena of life (social services) in which she feels qualified to bear weight. For Esme too, as we find through her desperate attempts to establish contact with her niece in Scene Ten, Shaz's fall has tragic implications.

If Shaz brings about the major crisis or climax to their story, Esme is the agent of its resolution. The whole of Part Two focuses on this resolution and, more importantly, the inner revolution Esme undergoes to effect it. Whereas Part One highlighted developments primarily in Shaz and her relationship with Esme, Part Two places Esme's journey centre stage. Scene Eleven opens with her returning from an actual journey into London. Her monologue, another testament to Daniels' great skill at this device, uncovers not so much the physical distance but the mental mileage she has travelled on this momentous journey. Like the train that breaks down on her return trip, Esme too undergoes an emotional breakdown.

And then it happened. I didn't realise, not till
I looked down at my hands and saw they were
wet. Water was falling from my eyes and splashing
in dollops onto the back of my hands. It was awful...
How can one cry and not know about it? I shot a
little arrow into the air. 'Lord, please get me back
to Eden Park as soon as possible.' The train broke
down at Catford Bridge. (p. 313)

As if in sympathy with Shaz's 'fall from grace' in Scene Nine, Esme too finds she has been exiled from 'Eden' and, instead of her former upright, God-pleasing, virtuous character, she begins to discover her more human aspect. To underscore such biblical parallels, Daniels sets up Esme's discovery of the gun shop and the evolution of her 'rescue' plan as a latter-day temptation scene.

I bought some tissues from the news-stand next

to the phone boxes. And I looked at them all empty and thought how easy for someone, anyone to go in one and ring up that place and say 'bomb scare'. I suppose in the back of my mind, I thought Shaz could escape in the chaos. (*Laughs.*) Ridiculous.

But then the front of my mind, as it were, wouldn't let go of violent thinking. I thought about a shop in the Strand which I usually cross over to avoid because there's always bunches of tattooed yobs and Rambo types, pressed up against the window which displays crossbows, knives, guns and what have you. ...I reached for a tissue and looked up to shoot an arrow. Then there it was, on the other side of the road, staring me in the face. The Catford Gun Shop.

...

I looked in the window, checked that there weren't any customers in there and went in. By this time I was already feeling rather carried away with myself and wondered if this was the sort of thing that caused the onset of angina. (pp. 313-14)

Esme's purchase of the replica gun -- her 'biting of the apple' -- and her subsequent surreptitious and 'crazy' behaviour signal, ironically, her first steps on the road to true salvation.

Like most turning points in *Esme and Shaz*, Daniels bases Esme's salvation on the complete reversal of our expectations. In Part Two especially, irony becomes the play's chief source of dramatic energy and comic appeal. The remaining course of events, for example, hinge on a role reversal between Esme and Shaz. Whereas formerly Esme exhibited the need for no love in her life except Jesus ("I can't do anything without him", p. 280), in Scene Eleven we begin to see the depths of her longing for Shaz and the influence she has had on her -- she cries (almost inadvertently), she gets "carried away" with herself and adopts "violent thinking", she starts hearing voices in her head and acting in a 'crazy' manner -- all types of behaviour one would expect more from Shaz. While Esme's inner transformation is most apparent during the course of Part Two, the origins of this process can be traced back towards the end of Part One. After Shaz discloses the details of her crime to Esme, for example, she notes that her aunt must be "cracked", a charge which Esme confirms, and when Dena knocks for the umpteenth time about the noise from her

neighbour's piano, Esme for the first time (ever, presumably) swears, "Dena, why don't you go and fuck yourself." (p. 312) After her 'fall' in London, Esme's personality begins to shift even more in line with Shaz's. Her "violent thinking", for example, leads to violent and criminal action in the very place for which women, like Shaz, are imprisoned for such behaviour. In spite of its absurd and hilarious aspects, Esme's 'hold-up' of Julie (Scene Twelve), in its sheer desperation, mirrors in some senses Shaz's desperate cry for help and attention when she killed her half-sister. Unlike Shaz's, however, Esme's criminal action fails pathetically -- failure which, ironically, secures her goal in the end: the chance to see Shaz. Here Daniels surprises her audience again: despite Esme's humility and avowals of contrition to Julie, we see her in the next scene with a reluctant and terrified Shaz (secretly) repeating the same gun-wielding, threatening behaviour. Nor does her recklessness stop there. In perhaps the most hilarious scene of the play (Scene Fourteen), Esme, having secured a rental car through a "dodgy deal" (i.e. with no licence), takes Shaz on a journey from 'hell'. For Shaz, completely demoralised by her return to prison, Esme's rescue plan (not to mention her driving skills) feels like a recipe for certain death. Esme, on the other hand, tells Shaz "... for the first time in my life, I'm verging on feeling alive." (p. 327) In one of the play's greatest ironies, Esme's salvation is achieved not in the hereafter through a life of moral rectitude and Christian devotion, but recklessly and 'sinfully' on earth through her relationship with an emotionally and physically scarred, blaspheming lesbian.

Just as Shaz holds the key to Esme's liberation, Esme unlocks the door for Shaz's. Although less dramatic and more painful than Esme's, Shaz's transformation is nevertheless equally dependent on her (subconsciously) reversing roles with her aunt. At the beginning of Part Two, however, Shaz appears in a state of regression rather than transformation. We see her for the first time since her return to prison in a shocking condition: hiding and shaking in seclusion, hands covered in menstrual blood (tampons being kept from her, we discover from Julie, "for [her] own protection", p. 324) Unlike the person who boasted in Scene Four that the only reason for her survival in Broadmoor was that "despite everything they never broke my spirit" (p. 283), Shaz in this scene appears defeated. Her loss of

dignity and sense of shame, moreover, make Esme's unexpected visit particularly distressing. Esme, though shocked at Shaz's appearance, misreads her niece's distress for unhappiness at being reincarcerated. She also, as we see in the following exchange, misjudges the true nature of the trial she has to face in rescuing Shaz:

Esme ...Don't worry we'll soon get you out of here.

Shaz I love you.

Esme *takes a step back.*

Shaz I don't mean like that. I don't mean nothing sexual or nothing. I mean --

Esme I don't think I've ever loved anybody.

Shaz Yes, yes you have.

Esme No.

Shaz Jesus. What about Jesus?

Esme Jesus?

Shaz Yes, Jesus.

Esme Oh Jesus.

Shaz Me?

Esme You? I don't know.

Shaz You took me to live with you, you must have seen something good in me?

Esme No, that was because of a sign from God. (*Laughs.*)

Shaz Then you cared for me.

Esme Duty, duty, duty.

Shaz And now you've come all the way down here and you must have kicked up a hell of a row for her to let you see me in seclusion.

Esme Actually, one could argue that I did it for me. Now when she comes back, I want you to say, spontaneously that you want to go --

...

Shaz I don't want to go.

Esme Are you demented?

Shaz And I don't want to see you again unless it's only because you love me.

Pause.

Esme If love is the longing for the half of ourselves we have lost, then all right.

Shaz Oh. (*Then.*) No, no I don't want to be the part of you that's raging and railing. I don't want to be the fucking nutter part, the anger you're too ashamed to feel. I don't want to be like that. I hate it. I'm totally out of control. I want to mean more --

Esme (*takes the gun out of the handbag*) If you don't shut up being so ungrateful, I'll kill you. (*Arrow.*) It was a necessity of breaking a promise. (pp. 323-24)

This episode, perhaps the most important thematically in the play, is remarkable as well for its dramatic tension. As we saw with Natalie's fateful visit in Scene Eight, here too Daniels pits the airing of profound emotion against bad timing. Esme, desperate to convince Shaz to come away with her before Julie re-enters the room, is forced by her niece at that moment to face up to the single most difficult emotion for her in life: love. While Esme's drawing her gun (comically) redirects the tension of the episode, the main import of their exchange is not lost. Like Shaz's longing for a relationship founded on 'healthy' love with Pat, her confrontation of Esme stems from a similar desire. Despite Esme's denials of love and admission of selfish motives ("one could argue that I did it for me"), it is clear that her plans for liberation include and, in fact, are dependent on Shaz. Shaz's rejection of Esme's "raging and railing" type of love and her insistence on a relationship founded on mutual real love, although temporarily overridden by Esme's shock tactics, form the basis for what we are led to believe will be a lasting and happy alliance as they sail to Greece.

During the sequence of extraordinary events that lead up to this final scene (all part of the 'rescue' plan), Daniels juxtaposes Esme's startling turns of character with similar but opposite changes in Shaz. As her aunt careers down the motor way, for example, Shaz

assumes the role of reprimander and implores Esme to drive more responsibly. By the end of the scene, Shaz is now the one, ironically, who turns to Jesus:

Shaz *reclines in her seat and shuts her eyes.*

Esme What are you doing?

Shaz Praying. (p. 328)

Shaz's longing for the safety and security of the RSU she has left behind contrasts sharply with Esme's risk-taking behaviour in the following scene. Where once it was Shaz who entertained dreams of adventure and liberation, now she looks on in sober amazement as her aunt displays what was formerly considered her 'mad' behaviour. Still disoriented and confused about this strangely erratic behaviour, however, Shaz takes refuge in the bathroom and tries literally to cut out the pain inside of her. For the second time that day, Esme is forced to confront a difficult and painful situation -- for which, again, she is emotionally ill-equipped -- at the worst possible moment. Daniels' skill at juggling intense pain with absurd humour is vividly demonstrated in this episode.

Esme What are you doing? We're cutting it very fine *(Sees the blood seeping underneath the hand. Silence)* I know. I know you're in a lot of pain I don't know how to make it better. But true to form I'm trying to do my best.

Shaz *starts to cry. Esme goes to make a move towards her but cannot touch her. Shaz looks around her.*

Shaz I don't even know where I am. I don't remember --

Esme This isn't my flat. It's Dena's. I thought you needed a wash and brush up. She doesn't know we're here.

Shaz But that's your piano.

Esme I gave it to her. I sold my flat. All my -- our worldly goods are in the car. Come on now before someone breaks into it --

Shaz I can't --

Esme How deep is that?

Dena *comes in.*

Dena What? What, what are you doing in my flat?
Esme, Esme? How could you?

Esme I came to return your key. Then I realised it was
Friday and you'd be at work.

...
I thought it was such a shame that Shaz hadn't seen
your new hall.

Dena You? My? -- (*Sees Shaz.*) Get your arm away
from that dado rail. It hasn't been varnished yet. My
carpet! What's she done? (pp. 329-30)

Like Esme's pulling her gun in the midst of Shaz's outburst in Scene Thirteen, Dena's timely entrance and outrageous exclamations divert the tragic implications of the scene into a humorous vein. We are left, along with Shaz, to find out literally 'what happens next' in the remainder of this now comic adventure story. As in most stories of this kind, Daniels entertains us with all the trappings: the ill-timed visit of a police officer just as the 'bandits' are about to make their 'getaway', their mad antics to thwart the officer's suspicions (the Country sing-along), all worldly possessions in bundles of notes in a plastic carrier bag, and a fortuitous escape in a (recently discovered) stolen vehicle.

Scene Sixteen, set aboard a cruise liner bound for Limnos, signals both an ending and a new beginning to Esme's and Shaz's journey together. At the start of the scene, however, Shaz, reeling from her recent efforts to escape, is unaware of the significance and finality of their new journey. Still fearful that they will get caught, she once again displays her newly acquired moral impulse towards her wayward aunt: "It's not some light-hearted prank or nothing. It's terrible. This is terrible. What we've done is terrible." (p. 336) Esme, on the other hand, completely at ease in her recently liberated rebellious self, explains to her disbelieving niece the full extent of her 'rescue' plan: a new home, a new profession, a new life "on the island next to the one where [Sappho] was born." (p. 337) The significance of this destination, though temporarily lost on Shaz (who thinks Sappho must be Greece's

answer to Madonna), does not go unnoticed by the audience: not only does it point to Esme's new-found acceptance of Shaz's sexuality, but, on a more symbolic level, it is also the gateway to a distinctly female counter-world. Having escaped the hell of incest and its legacy through the help of each other, Esme and Shaz finally find redemption on their way to what Daniels portrays as the closest place to the feminist 'heaven' envisioned back in *Ripen*. The play's final few moments celebrate the triumph of their love over fear, as well as their movement towards compromise and self-acceptance: Shaz persuades Esme to take off her bra (a bone of contention between them from the start), and Esme persuades a reluctant Shaz to roll back her sleeves and let her "battle scars" breathe. Most importantly, Esme is able to express her emotions to Shaz and, for the first time, actually to touch her:

Esme Lots of people think battle scars are something to be proud of.

Shaz But I ain't done nothing to be proud of.

Esme I'm proud of you.

Shaz Are yer?

Esme Yes.

Shaz But they're so ugly.

Esme (*starts to roll up one of Shaz's shirt sleeves*)
How will they ever heal otherwise?

Shaz (*starts to roll up the other one*) Come on then,
let's go mad. (p. 338)

Like the numerous ironies we have seen elsewhere, Daniels concludes her play with perhaps the biggest reversal of all the affirmation of 'madness' as a positive force. In the face of all its usual associations with psychological torment, misrepresentation and social derision depicted throughout this trio of plays, finally towards the end of *Esme and Shaz* madness is turned on its head and transformed, through sheer defiance, into something liberating and life-giving for women. Although we are aware at all times that the play's "happy ending" is deliberately constructed as such, Daniels nevertheless manages to convince her audience on an emotional level that her protagonists could quite possibly live 'happily ever after'.

Many critics have attacked *Esme and Shaz* precisely for its happy ending and other episodes which involve our suspension of disbelief. A large number, for example, disparaged the 'Shirley Valentine' mode of the final scene and, in particular, described the whole of the second part variously as "a sentimental fantasy land"⁷² or "an unpersuasive version of *Travels with My Aunt*".⁷³ The harshest line of attack, however, was reserved for what Bonnie Greer called the play's sense of being "all over the place".⁷⁴ Hardest for reviewers to assess was the form or genre of the piece. One critic, for example, saw "Comedy and tragedy, pity and anger struggle for the upper hand"⁷⁵, and another found in the play's excess of fun a necessary forfeiting of "truth".⁷⁶ Betty Caplan, appraising the general response of critics to *Esme and Shaz*, hones in on this malaise with Daniels' form:

.. critics at the Royal Court also found it difficult to understand the play's genre. Lesbian road movie? Comic caricature? Social tragedy? Personally, I would very much like to see Daniels drop the social realism and develop the surreal and grotesque elements of her work, but the pleasure for many was precisely this playing around with form.⁷⁷

Greer, whose review in *Time Out* delivered perhaps the cruellest blow of all to the play, failed to see any of the 'playfulness' that Caplan found. Not only were certain scenes "patently unbelievable" to her, but she summed up the play's more serious elements as "a fairly shapeless amalgamation of issues flying at us from every which way." While the tendency to condemn women who write apparently formlessly (i.e. in unconventional or 'unmasculine' form) is still prevalent today,⁷⁸ one cannot wholly dismiss these reviewers' concerns with Daniels' odd mixture of tragic and near farcical elements in the play. Part of the problem, I believe, lies in the fact that Daniels, for whom many of the play's serious issues are by now perhaps too familiar, does not adequately account for their presence dramatically on stage for those less familiar with them. Shaz's length of stay in Broadmoor, the use of drugs on patients there, or the issue of self-harm, for example, are all presented in such a way that invites neither exploration nor debate. As we have seen with nearly all of

her previous works and certainly in the case of this one, Daniels' tendency to 'pack too much' into a play proves to be a major source of her critical undoing. However, the denunciation by critics of *Esme and Shaz's* 'escapist' ending -- another familiar trait of the playwright -- seems unfair: from the start, the play's clear intent is to engage our imagination and to make us laugh. If the opening scene with Esme and Dena arguing over raffle tickets and "Kenny's tea" are no sign, then by the end of the second scene it should be apparent that we will not be presented with issues in the same hard-edged manner as in *Head-Rot* or *Masterpieces*. Surely the mark of a 'story well told' in the theatre involves elements that transcend the dictates of social realism, and surely, by the end of *Esme and Shaz*, our sympathies with the protagonists are sufficiently engaged as to make our suspension of disbelief 'willing'.

¹*The Female Malady: Women, Madness and English Culture, 1830 - 1980* (London: Virago, 1987), pp. 3 - 4.

²Interview with the playwright at her home, 3 October 1994. The following background information about *Beside Herself*, *Head-Rot* and *Esme and Shaz* was gathered during this interview as well.

³Clean Break Programme notes to *Head-Rot Holiday*, p. 4.

⁴*Op. cit.*, n. 2.

⁵*Ibid.*

⁶Interview with Jane Edwardes, *Time Out*, 9 - 16 February 1994.

⁷*Op. cit.*, n. 2.

⁸see, for example, in Ussher's *Women's Madness*, pp. 265 - 7.

⁹*Op. cit.*, n. 2.

¹⁰*Ibid.*

¹¹*Ibid.*

¹²Royal Court Theatre Programme notes to *The Madness of Esme and Shaz*.

¹³Although *Head-Rot* also has an all-female cast, this was not the result of Daniels' own choice but rather Clean Break's policy to work only with women.

¹⁴*Op. cit.*, n. 2

¹⁵Transcript of interview between Sarah Daniels and Gill Pyrah, *Kaleidoscope*, BBC Radio 4, 15 February 1994, p. 13.

¹⁶Lizbeth Goodman, *Contemporary Feminist Theatres*, information taken from p. 12 and p. 79.

¹⁷*Ripen*, *Neap tide*, *Manfully Fight Under His Banner* and *Bear Cat Files* have all been given rehearsed readings, although the latter two never reached the stage.

¹⁸Telephone conversation with the playwright, 8 November 1994.

¹⁹Lizbeth Goodman, who attended this reading, gives a detailed account of it in *Contemporary Feminist Theatres*, pp. 192 - 99

²⁰*Op. cit.*, n. 2.

²¹This is reflected in the Womens Playhouse Play Series edition (Methuen, 1990) which reveals differences from the later published final version (Methuen Drama, 1991).

²²*Op. cit.*, n. 3.

- ²³Talk given at the University of Sheffield, 25 February 1993.
- ²⁴*Op. cit.*, n. 2.
- ²⁵Taped lecture given by Daniels to graduate students at the University of Toronto, 8 December 1993.
- ²⁶*Beside Herself* (London: Methuen Drama, 1991), p. 3. Hereafter references to this play will be listed parenthetically in the text.
- ²⁷*The Women's History of the World* (London: HarperCollins, 1993; Paladin, 1989), p. 81.
- ²⁸*Op. cit.*, n. 2.
- ²⁹*Ibid.*
- ³⁰*Eve Was Framed: Women and British Justice* (London: Vintage Books, 1993), p. 90.
- ³¹*Op. cit.*, n. 2.
- ³²*Financial Times*, 6 April 1990.
- ³³*Observer*, 8 April 1990.
- ³⁴*Guardian*, 6 April 1990.
- ³⁵*Ibid.*
- ³⁶*Independent*, 6 April 1990.
- ³⁷*Op. cit.*, n. 16, p. 199.
- ³⁸*Op. cit.*, n. 25.
- ³⁹*The Times*, 5 April 1990.
- ⁴⁰*Sunday Times Magazine*, 1 April 1990.
- ⁴¹*Op. cit.*, n. 33.
- ⁴²*City Limits*, 11 April 1990.
- ⁴³*Op. cit.*, n. 32.
- ⁴⁴*What's On*, 11 April 1990.
- ⁴⁵*Op. cit.*, n. 42.
- ⁴⁶*Plays: Two* (London: Methuen Drama, 1994), p. 193. All references to *Head-Rot* and to *Esme and Shaz* are taken from this edition and will be listed parenthetically in the text.
- ⁴⁷*Op. cit.*, n. 23.
- ⁴⁸*Ibid.*
- ⁴⁹*Op. cit.*, n. 30, p. 156.
- ⁵⁰Clean Break notes that the table, on p. 4 of the programme, is re-printed from *Justice Unbound* (Open University Press, 1987) with the permission of its author, Dr. Hilary Allen.
- ⁵¹*Women's Madness*, p. 171.
- ⁵²*Op. cit.*, n. 30, p. 19.
- ⁵³*Op. cit.*, n. 51, p. 175.
- ⁵⁴*Op. cit.*, n. 23.
- ⁵⁵*Ibid.*
- ⁵⁶*Op. cit.*, n. 30, p. 101.
- ⁵⁷*Op. cit.*, n. 23.
- ⁵⁸Clean Break includes in its Programme notes citations from various audiences across England and Scotland during the play's six-week tour in February and March 1993, p. 7.
- ⁵⁹*Op. cit.*, n. 23.
- ⁶⁰*Op. cit.*, n. 2.
- ⁶¹Interview with the playwright at her home, 1 June 1995.
- ⁶²*Op. cit.*, n. 6.
- ⁶³*Op. cit.*, n. 15.
- ⁶⁴*Ibid.*
- ⁶⁵*Op. cit.*, n. 6.
- ⁶⁶*Ibid.*
- ⁶⁷*GLINT (Gays and Lesbians in Theatre) Journal*, 2 (1994), p. 1.
- ⁶⁸Other examples Rapi cites are Caryl Churchill's *Skriker*, Phyllis Nagy's *Butterfly Kiss*, Anna Reynolds' *Jordan*, *Wild Things* and *Red*, all produced in the past five years (1990 - 95).
- ⁶⁹*Op. cit.*, n. 2.
- ⁷⁰*Op. cit.*, n. 25.
- ⁷¹In much contemporary feminist drama, the metaphoric or literal journey of a protagonist has proven a useful device for playwrights to denote the distance women must travel from places of (patriarchal)

oppression to social, sexual or personal liberation. In Marsha Norman's *Getting Out* ('78), for example, the focus is on a woman's literal and psychological journey from prison to the 'outside', and the journey of her fragmented two selves towards self-integration (reminiscent of Eve/Evelyn). In *New Anatomies* ('81), Timberlake Wertenbaker charts the journey of Isabelle Eberhardt, a nineteenth-century traveller, who, adopting a male Arabic persona through cross-dressing, abandons European 'normality' and its constrictions of women's lives in pursuit of absolute freedom in the deserts of Algeria. And a journey towards a specifically sexual liberation can be found, for example, in Catherine Kilcoyne's *Julie* ('85), where a young woman finds her lesbian identity.

In Daniels' work, most of the journeys undertaken by women are towards a personal liberation that involves a simultaneous raising of feminist and/or political consciousness. As well, their journeys are most often dependent on support or encouragement from female companions.

⁷²Nicholas De Jongh, *Evening Standard*, 16 February 1994.

⁷³Paul Taylor, *Independent*, 17 February 1994.

⁷⁴*Time Out*, 23 February -- 2 March 1994.

⁷⁵Robert Hewison, *Sunday Times*, 20 February 1994.

⁷⁶Kate Kellaway, *Observer*, 20 February 1994.

⁷⁷*New Statesman & Society*, 29 April 1994, p. 34.

⁷⁸Other women writers who have been criticised for the 'formlessness' of their plays are, for example, Bryony Lavery, whose work has been labelled 'disorganised' (similar to Daniels' work being called 'all over the place'); Ntozake Shange for her experimentations with form (such as her incorporation of poetry, music and dance); and Deborah Levy who also incorporates in her plays unconventional elements such as performance art and form-breaking language, and whose work has been accused of having a 'weak narrative'. Once asked if she were a poet or a playwright, Levy commented: "They never asked Shakespeare if he was a poet or a playwright." (in 'An Alphabet of Apocrypha' in *British and Irish Women Dramatists*, pp 146 - 7).

The suspicion of writers such as these who break new ground in their construction of theatre leads to the necessity today of examining the possible existence of a female morphology of playwriting. In their uses of multiple plots or 'unlinear' narratives, multiple protagonists, alienation devices and performance art, or in their subversions of traditional comedy, history and mythology, or mixing of genres and 'playing with form', Daniels and many other contemporary female playwrights are setting new criteria with which critics and scholars must now assess not just women's theatre, but the possible impact it has made on modern theatre generally. Howard Brenton's admiration of Daniels' theatre and more recently Jonathan Harvey's salute to Daniels in his Afterword to *Beautiful Thing* (*Gay Plays* 5, London: Methuen, 1994, p. 210), for example, counter the commonly held assumption that feminist theatre is of interest and importance only to women.

AFTERWORD

The vilification by critics of *Esme and Shaz* made no impact, surprisingly, on audience figures. Not only did the production play to a full house nearly every evening, but its original run was extended due to 'popular demand'. While Daniels recognizes that a bad review (like the one, for example, that *Esme and Shaz* received in *Time Out*) can kill an audience at the Theatre Upstairs, she attributes the play's popularity to what she regards as 'loyal followers': "people who come to see my plays because they always have, though they may like some better than others."¹

Despite its audience appeal, Daniels still regards *Esme and Shaz* as a low point in her career. Disheartened more than usual by the onslaught of negative reviews that have plagued her not just for this play, but for nearly every work since *Ma's Flesh*, she spoke out recently against what she (understatedly) terms the "unfairness" of critics over the years:

I think with *Esme and Shaz* most of the reviewers, with the exception of people like Lyn Gardner and Claire Armitstead, thought I was writing the same play as *Masterpieces* -- I think they were trying to review that all over again.

...there is a certain amount of unfairness in the way I've been criticised, and I think that's rather contagious -- I seem to be the person that many people think it's quite all right to have a go at.²

With characteristic resilience, Daniels has since *Esme and Shaz* got 'back on track' with her following play, *Blow Your House Down* (1995). Commissioned by Newcastle's Live Theatre in the autumn of 1994, Daniels' adaptation of Pat Barker's novel (for which she was granted full artistic freedom) was, in her words, "one of my most challenging, and exhilarating writing experiences to date."³ Working again with director Teddy Kiendl, Daniels transformed the novel about a serial killer stalking a Tyneside community of prostitutes and the measures they take to survive and exact revenge into a play that not only encapsulated all the tragic horror of such a plot, but that added to the novel an element of

black humour and verbal brilliance that was particularly effective on stage. With two runs at Live Theatre, the production also toured around the North and drew consistent praise from reviewers ("A triumph of true grit"; "Humour, pathos and a stark sense of reality make *Blow Your House Down* stand out from the crowd"; "a very layered piece, involving dreams and delusions within a fantasy...very real and authentic").⁴

Soon after this Newcastle production, Daniels received another commission from the head of BBC Radio Drama, Caroline Raphael, to write an 'issue-based' play on the subject of post-natal depression. *Purple Side Coasters*, aired on 16 November 1995, challenges the notion that having a baby is the best thing that can happen to a woman. It tells the story of two women who, united through their experience of puerperal psychosis, meet up years later only to find the stigma attached to their earlier period of mental instability sadly tarnishing their renewed friendship. In addition to this commission, the Royal Court Theatre and the Royal National Theatre have recently given Daniels 'open' commissions, although no specific date has been set for their productions.

Juggling these commissions with her continued television writing, Daniels is evidently still living up to the hectic pace and prolific output of writing established early on in her career. In view of this, it would be difficult as well as inappropriate to attempt any definitive conclusions about a playwright so actively engaged in new writing. As this thesis has been a developmental as well as an analytical account of her work, however, perhaps the most appropriate conclusion would be to hear the playwright's own views about the development of her career. In my final interview with her (June '95), therefore, I asked if she was satisfied with the way in which it was evolving. Her response gave rare insight into the person as well as the playwright:

I don't know quite what to say. You know I swing from day to day thinking, 'this is a really privileged existence I have to this is a really tortured existence I have!' [Pause.] I'll be honest: I'm not a very ambitious person. And I'm not very good at knocking on doors or selling ideas. And actually I'm happy with that -- I wouldn't want to be otherwise -- it's too stressful.

I suppose, though, that I could have done things to get

a higher profile. In real terms, my theatre career needs something to galvanise it after the reviews that *Esmé and Shaz* got. But having said that, I'm not unduly worried. Perhaps that has to do with the television work I do which provides a certain amount of security. I do wonder at times if that is the direction I will go in ... you know it does happen: writers have a certain success in the theatre and then they go into television. It's quite hard to maintain success in the theatre. Right now there is a sort of culture of 'young and sexy' theatre (I don't mean in what you look like) happening, and unless you are Arthur Miller ... well, you know what I mean! I can see the seduction in television -- certainly it's more financially secure.

But there's also a bit of me that thinks that whatever happens, and I might be proved wrong, I'll always write for the theatre -- that is what I want to be doing. But I don't have control over whether the theatre will always want to do my stuff. I could complete these two commissions for the National and the Royal Court and they could never go on, or they might go on and be badly reviewed and then I'd never get another commission from anywhere. Nevertheless, I do feel that theatre gives you greater control and self-expression than television. I think I always will want to write theatre -- it's not that I have a snob value about television that some people have. But I do prefer theatre.⁵

Despite Daniels' misgivings about her future place and reception in the theatre, there can be little doubt and much hope that one who has so far withstood the 'shouting from all sides' will courageously forge new stages with her bold humour, compassionate insight, and with her stories still untold.

¹Interview with the playwright at her home, 1 June 1995.

²*Ibid.*

³Programme Notes to *Blow Your House Down*, p. 6.

⁴Gordon Barr, *Evening Chronicle*, 16 February 1995; Bev Stephenson, *The Crack*, March 1995; Robin Thornber, *Guardian*, 18 February 1995.

⁵*Op. cit.*, n. 1.

APPENDIX I: A Chronology

(A) Stage Plays

YEAR	TITLE	DATE OF PRODUCTION	THEATRE	DIRECTOR	PUBLICATION HISTORY
1980 - 81	<i>Just Like a Woman</i>				Unpublished
	<i>Ma's Flesh is Grass</i>	1981 (2 Nov.)	Crucible Studio Theatre	Louise Wakefield	Unpublished
	<i>Ripen Our Darkness</i>	1981 (7 Sept.)	Royal Court Theatre Upstairs	Carole Hayman	MNT* (1986); <i>Plays: One</i> (1991)
	<i>Manfully Fight Under His Banner</i>	1981 (April - rehearsed reading only)	The Mouth and Trousers Theatre Co.	Carole Hayman	Unpublished
	<i>Penumbra</i>	1981 (1 July)	Sheffield University Theatre	Jo Henderson	Unpublished
1982	<i>Neoptide</i>	1986 (26 June)	Cottesloe, Royal National Theatre	John Burgess	MNT (1986); <i>Plays: One</i>
	<i>The Devil's Gateway</i>	1983 (24 Aug.)	Royal Court Theatre Upstairs	Annie Castledine	MNT (1986); <i>Plays: One</i>
	<i>Masterpieces</i>	1983 (31 May); (7 Oct.); 1984 (5 Jan.)	Manchester Royal Exchange Theatre; RCT Upstairs; RCT Mainstage	Jules Wright	Royal Court Writers Series (1984); MMPS** (1986); <i>Plays: One</i>

1983 - 85	<i>Byrthrite</i>	1986 (21 Nov.)	Royal Court Theatre Up- stairs	Carole Hayman	MNT (1987); <i>Plays: One</i>
1985 - 87	<i>Bear Cat Files</i>	1987 (Dec. - rehearsed reading only)	National Theatre Studio	John Burgess	Unpublished
1988	<i>The Gut Girls</i>	1988 (2 Nov.)	The Albany Empire, Deptford	Teddy Kiendl	MNT (1989); Samuel French, Inc. (1993); <i>Plays: Two</i> (1994)
1989 - 90	<i>Beside Herself</i>	1990 (29 March)	Royal Court Theatre	Jules Wright	Women's Playhouse Play (1990); MMPS (1991); <i>Plays: Two</i>
1992	<i>Head-Rot Holiday</i>	1992 (13 Oct.)	Battersea Arts Centre; on tour with Clean Break Theatre Co.	Paulette Randall	<i>Plays: Two</i>
1993	<i>The Madness of Esme and Shaz</i>	1994 (10 Feb.)	Royal Court Theatre Up- stairs	Jessica Dromgoole	<i>Plays: Two</i>
1994	<i>Blow Your House Down</i>	1995 (14 Feb.)	Live Theatre, Newcastle; on tour with the company	Teddy Kiendl	Unpublished

*Methuen New Theatrescript

**Methuen Modern Play Series

(B) Radio Plays

BBC RADIO FIVE:

Annie on My Mind - 12 September 1992*Friends* - [n.d.] November 1992*Stars* - 8 April 1992 (episode 1); 9 April (episode 2); 23 April (episode 9); 24 April (episode 10); 8 May (episode 17); 9 May (episode 18).

BBC RADIO FOUR:

Purple Side Coasters - 16 November 1995**(C) Television**

BBC TELEVISION:

Eastenders (4 episodes)*Grange Hill* (currently)

GRANADA:

Medics (3 episodes)

APPENDIX II: Professional Productions and Awards

(A) Professional Productions*

MASTERPIECES

Manchester Young Exchange, June '83
 Mercury Theatre, New Zealand, August '84
 Leeds Playhouse, October '84
 Belvoir Street Theatre, Australia, '85
 Deutsche Erstaufführung Heilbronn, Germany, April '86
 Zootango, Australia, June '86
 Project Arts Centre, Dublin, Spring '87
 Trademark Production Co., Dublin, April '87
 Derby Playhouse, February '88
 Stage Left Theatre, Chicago, August '88
 Rock Players, Australia, '89
 Theatre Daikanyama, Tokyo, '89
 Potomac Theatre Project, Washington D.C., Summer '90
 Vienna, '90
 Abacus Arts Theatre, '93
 Jean Jean Arts Theatre, Japan
 University of Toronto Alumnae Theatre, December '93.

NEAPTIDE

Suzunari Studio, Tokyo, '89
 Beit Zvi School for the Performing Arts, Israel, November '90
 Half Moon Theatre, Tokyo, '92

THE GUT GIRLS

Banden Odense, Denmark, November '89
 University of Winnipeg, February '92
 The Cucharacha, New York, June '93
 Half Moon Theatre, Tokyo, '93
 Theatre Asylum, Toronto, '94
 Catalan language production scheduled for '94/95 in Spain

THE MADNESS OF ESME AND SHAZ

Reading at the Audrey Skirball-Kenis Theatre, Los Angeles, October '93
 Reading at the Lincoln Centre, New York, June '94
 Reading at the Traverse Theatre, Edinburgh, November '95

(B) Awards

1982 George Devine Award for the Most Promising Playwright (for *Neoptide*).

1983 *Plays and Players* Most Promising Playwright Award (for *Masterpieces*).

1983 Most Promising Playwright London Theatre Critics Award.

- Has been an Associate of the Royal Court Theatre as well as Writer-in-Residence in 1984.
- Visiting Lecturer at Guelph University (Ontario, Canada), summer 1990.
- Invited speaker at the 1991 International Women Playwrights Conference in Canada.
- Recipient of M. Thelma McAndless Distinguished Professor Chair in the Humanities at Eastern Michigan University, winter semester 1996.

*I have only included professional productions subsequent to the plays' original productions. Numerous amateur productions are staged every year. This information was supplied courtesy of Ms. Daniels' agent in London (name withheld upon request).

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Primary Sources:

(A) PLAY TEXTS

Daniels, Sarah. *Ripen Our Darkness*, in *Plays: One* (London: Methuen Drama, 1991).

- *The Devil's Gateway* (1983), same collection.
- *Masterpieces* (1983), same collection.
- *Neptune* (1986), same collection.
- *Byrthrite* (1986), same collection.
- *The Gut Girls* (London: Methuen Drama, 1989).
- *Beside Herself* (London: Women's Playhouse Plays, Methuen Drama, 1990).
- *Beside Herself* (London: Methuen Drama, 1991).
- *Head-Rot Holiday*, in *Plays: Two* (London: Methuen Drama, 1994).
- *The Madness of Esme and Shaz* (1994), same collection.

(B) MANUSCRIPTS (UNPUBLISHED)

Daniels, Sarah. *Bear Cat Files* (1985 - 87, date uncertain).

- *Beside Herself* (early draft, 1988).
- *Blow Your House Down* (1995).
- *Just Like a Woman* (1980 - 81, date uncertain).
- *Manfully Fight Under His Banner* (1981).
- *Ma's Flesh is Grass* (1981).
- *Penumbra* (1981).

(C) INTERVIEWS (UNPUBLISHED)

Daniels, Sarah. Interviewed by Pamela Bakker, Royal National Theatre, 9 November 1993.

- same location, 4 April 1994.

- Daniels' home, 3 October 1994.

- same location, 1 June 1995.

Shepherd, Elizabeth. Interviewed by Pamela Bakker, Metro Hall, Toronto, 9 December 1993.

Wright, Jules. Interviewed by Pamela Bakker, offices of the Women's Playhouse Trust, London, 5 September 1993.

(D) RECORDED MATERIAL

Daniels, Sarah. Talk given at the University of Sheffield, 25 February 1993.

- Talk given at York University, Toronto, 6 December 1993.

- Talk given at the University of Toronto, 8 December 1993.

Secondary Sources:

Armitstead, Claire. 'Male Order Catalogue', *Guardian*, 22 November 1995.

- 'Nostalgia for the Future: Can Women's Theatre Regain the High-ground?', *Guardian*, 22 February 1994.

Aston, Elaine. *An Introduction to Feminism and Theatre* (London: Routledge, 1995).

- 'Daniels in the Lion's Den: Sarah Daniels and the British Backlash', *Theatre Journal*, 47 (1995), 393 - 403.

Austin, Gayle. *Feminist Theories for Dramatic Criticism* (Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 1990).

- 'The Madwoman in the Spotlight: Plays of Maria Irene Fornes', in *Making a Spectacle: Feminist Essays on Contemporary Women's Theatre*, ed. by Lynda Hart (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1989), 76 - 85.

Banks, Morwenna, and Amanda Swift. *The Joke's On Us: Women in Comedy from Music Hall to the Present Day* (London: Pandora Press, 1987).

Barker, Clive. 'Alternative Theatre/Political Theatre', in *The Politics of Theatre and Drama*, ed. by Graham Holderness (Hampshire: Macmillan, 1992), 18 - 43.

Barker, Pat. *Blow Your House Down* (London: Virago, 1984).

Barnes, Philip. *A Companion to Post-War British Theatre* (London: Croom Helm, 1986).

Barreca, Regina, ed. *Last Laughs: Perspectives on Women and Comedy* (New York: Gordon and Breach, 1988).

Bassnett, Susan. *Feminist Experiences: The Women's Movement in Four Cultures* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1986).

Belsey, Catherine, and Jane Moore, eds. *The Feminist Reader: Essays in Gender and the Politics of Literary Criticism* (London: Macmillan, 1989).

Betsko, Kathleen, and Rachel Koenig. *Interviews with Contemporary Women Playwrights* (New York: Beech Tree Books, 1987).

Bolen, Jean Shinoda. *Goddesses in Everywoman: A New Psychology of Women* (London: Harper & Row, 1984).

Bonner, Frances, and others, eds. *Imagining Women: Cultural Representations and Gender* (Oxford: Polity Press, 1992).

Brenton, Howard, interviewed by Tony Mitchell. 'The Red Theatre Under the Bed', *New Theatre Quarterly*, 3 (1987), 195 - 201.

Bull, John. *New British Political Dramatists* (London: Macmillan, 1984).

Burk, Juli Thompson. 'In the I of the Storm: The Problems with Pluralism', *Journal of Dramatic Theory and Criticism*, 7 (1993), 119 - 31.

Butler, Judith. 'Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory', in *Performing Feminisms: Feminist Critical Theory and Theatre*, ed. by Sue-Ellen Case (Maryland: Johns Hopkins Press, 1990), 270 - 282.

Cameron, Deborah, ed. *The Feminist Critique of Language: A Reader* (London: Routledge, 1990).

Caplan, Betty. 'Shocking Men in the Stalls', *New Statesman & Society*, 29 April 1994.

Carlson, Susan. 'Process and Product: Contemporary British Theatre and its Communities of Women', *Theatre Research International*, 13 (1988), 249 - 63.

- 'Self and Sexuality: Contemporary Women Playwrights and the Problem of Sexual Identity', *Journal of Dramatic Theory and Criticism*, 3 (1989), 157 - 78.

- *Women and Comedy: Rewriting the British Theatrical Tradition* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1991).

Case, Sue-Ellen. *Feminism and Theatre* (London: Macmillan, 1988).

- 'The Power of Sex: English Plays by Women, 1958 - 1988', *New Theatre Quarterly*, 7 (1991), 238 - 45.

- 'Toward a Butch-Femme Aesthetic', in *Making a Spectacle: Feminist Essays on Contemporary Women's Theatre*, ed. by Lynda Hart (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1989), 282 - 99.
- ed. *Performing Feminisms: Feminist Critical Theory and Theatre* (Maryland: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990).
- Chesler, Phylliss. *Women and Madness* (New York: Doubleday, 1972; London: Allen Lane, 1974).
- Coates, Jennifer. *Women, Men and Language* (New York: Longman, 1986).
- Cody, Gabrielle. 'Ngarnna Taikurra in the Land of the Dreamtime: The 3rd International Women Playwrights Conference', *Drama Review*, 39 (1995), 62 - 74.
- Cousin, Geraldine. *Churchill: The Playwright* (London: Methuen Drama, 1989).
- Coward, Rosalind. 'Sexual Violence and Sexuality', in *Sexuality: A Reader*, ed. by Feminist Review (London: Virago, 1987), 307 - 25.
- Craig, Sandy, ed. *Dreams and Deconstructions: Alternative Theatre in Britain* (Derbyshire: Amber Lane Press, 1980).
- Davis, Jill, ed. *Lesbian Plays* (London: Methuen, 1987).
- ed. *Lesbian Plays: Volume Two* (London: Methuen, 1989).
- Davis, Tracy C. 'Extremities and Masterpieces: A Feminist Paradigm of Art and Politics', *Modern Drama*, 32 (1989), 89 - 103.
- De Lauretis, Teresa. 'Sexual Indifference and Lesbian Representation', in *Performing Feminisms: Feminist Critical Theory and Theatre*, ed. by Sue-Ellen Case (Maryland: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990), 17 - 39.
- Diamond, Elin. 'Brechtian Theory/Feminist Theory: Toward a Gestic Feminist Criticism', *Drama Review*, 32 (1988), 82 - 94.
- 'Refusing the Romanticism of Identity: Narrative Interventions in Churchill, Benmussa, Duras', in *Performing Feminisms: Feminist Critical Theory and Theatre*, ed. by Sue-Ellen Case (Maryland: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990), 92 - 105.
- Dolan, Jill. 'Bending Gender to Fit the Canon: The Politics of Production', in *Making a Spectacle: Feminist Essays on Contemporary Women's Theatre*, ed. by Lynda Hart (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1989), 318 - 44.
- 'The Dynamics of Desire: Sexuality and Gender in Pornography and Performance', *Theatre Journal*, 39 (1987), 156 - 74.

- *The Feminist Spectator as Critic* (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1988).
- 'In Defense of the Discourse: Materialist Feminism, Postmodernism, Poststructuralism ...and Theory', *Drama Review*, 33 (1989), 58 - 71.
- ' "Lesbian" Subjectivity in Realism: Dragging at the Margins of Structure and Ideology', in *Performing Feminisms: Feminist Critical Theory and Theatre*, ed. by Sue-Ellen Case (Maryland: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990), 40 - 53.
- 'Personal, Political, Polemical: Feminist Approaches to Politics and Theatre', in *The Politics of Theatre and Drama*, ed. by Graham Holderness (Hampshire: Macmillan, 1992), 44 - 65.

Durrant, Sabine. Interview with Sarah Daniels and Jules Wright: 'Beside Themselves', *Independent*, 4 April 1990.

Dworkin, Andrea. *Letters from a War Zone* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1988; New York: Lawrence Hill, 1993).

- *Pornography: Men Possessing Women* (London: Women's Press, 1981).

Edwardes, Jane. Interview with Sarah Daniels: 'Define Madness', *Time Out*, 9 - 16 February 1994.

Ehrenreich, Barbara, and Deirdre English. *Witches, Midwives and Healers: A History of Women Healers* (London: Writers and Readers Publishing Cooperative, 1973).

Elam, Keir. *The Semiotics of Theatre and Drama* (London: Methuen, 1980).

Esslin, Martin. *The Field of Drama* (London: Methuen Drama, 1987).

Ferris, Lesley. *Acting Women: Images of Women in Theatre* (London: Macmillan, 1990).

Frame, Janet. *Faces in the Water* (London: Women's Press, 1961; 1980).

Fraser, Sylvia. *My Father's House* (New York: Tickner & Fields, 1988).

Freedman, Barbara. 'Frame-Up: Feminism, Psychoanalysis, Theatre', in *Performing Feminisms: Feminist Critical Theory and Theatre*, ed. by Sue-Ellen Case (Maryland: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990), 54 - 76.

Freud, Sigmund. *Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious*, trans. by James Strachey (New York: Penguin, 1976).

Gilman, Charlotte Perkins. *The Yellow Wallpaper* (London: Virago, 1981).

Goodman, Lizbeth. 'Comic Subversions: Comedy as Strategy in Feminist Theatre', in

- Imagining Women: Cultural Representations and Gender*, ed. by Frances Bonner, and others (Oxford: Polity Press, 1992), 301 - 20.
- *Contemporary Feminist Theatres: To Each Her Own* (London: Routledge, 1993).
 - 'Gender and Humour', in *Imagining Women*, 286 - 300.
 - 'Theatres of Choice and the Case of "He's Having Her Baby"', *New Theatre Quarterly*, 9 (1993), 357 - 66.
- Goward, Barbara. 'What's the Difference Between a Love Story and a Dirty Book?', *Guardian*, 5 October 1983.
- Gray, Frances. *Women and Laughter* (London: Macmillan, 1994).
- ed. *Second Wave Plays* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1990).
- Greene, Gayle, and Coppelia Kahn, eds. *Making a Difference: Feminist Literary Criticism* (London: Routledge, 1985).
- Griffin, Susan. *Pornography and Silence: Culture's Revenge Against Nature* (London: Women's Press, 1981).
- Griffiths, Trevor R. 'Waving Not Drowning: The Mainstream, 1979 - 88', in *British and Irish Women Dramatists Since 1958: A Critical Handbook*, ed. by Trevor R. Griffiths and Margaret Llewellyn-Jones (Buckingham, Philadelphia: Open University Press, 1993), 47 - 76.
- Griffiths, Trevor R., and Carole Woddis. *Bloomsbury Theatre Guide* (London: Bloomsbury, 1988).
- Griffiths, Trevor R., and Margaret Llewellyn-Jones, eds. *British and Irish Women Dramatists Since 1958: A Critical Handbook* (Buckingham, Philadelphia: Open University Press, 1993).
- Haedicke, Susan C. "'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*, 8 (1994), 77 - 88.
- Harford, Barbara, and Sarah Hopkins, eds. *Greenham Common: Women at the Wire* (London: Women's Press, 1984).
- Hart, Lynda, ed. *Making a Spectacle: Feminist Essays on Contemporary Women's Theatre* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1989).
- 'Performing Feminism', in *Making a Spectacle*, 1 - 21.
- Harwood, Kate, ed. *First Run: New Plays by New Writers* (London: Nick Hearn Books,

1989).

Hayman, Carole. Interview on *Byrthrite* in *What's On and Where To Go*, 4 December 1986.

Herrman, Anne. 'Travesty and Transgression: Transvestism in Shakespeare, Brecht and Churchill', in *Performing Feminisms: Feminist Critical Theory and Theatre*, ed. by Sue-Ellen Case (Maryland: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990), 294 - 315.

Hill, Christopher. *The English Revolution 1640* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1940).

Holderness, Graham, ed. *The Politics of Theatre and Drama* (Hampshire: Macmillan, 1992).

Humm, Maggie, ed. *Feminisms: A Reader* (Hertfordshire: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1992).

Hunt, Hugh, Kenneth Richards, and John Russel Taylor. *The Revels History of Drama in English: Volume VII, 1880 to the Present Day* (London: Methuen, 1978).

Itzin, Catherine. *Stages in the Revolution: Political Theatre in Britain Since 1968* (London: Methuen, 1980).

Jagger, Alison M. *Feminist Politics and Human Nature* (Sussex: Harvester, 1983).

Kaplan, Jon. 'Masterpieces Faces Human Costs of Pornography's Growing Influence', *Now Magazine* (Toronto), 5 December 1993.

Kaplan, Sydney Janet. 'Varieties of Feminist Criticism', in *Making a Difference: Feminist Literary Criticism*, ed. by Gayle Greene and Coppelia Kahn (London: Routledge, 1985), 37 - 58.

Kellaway, Kate. 'Kate Millet's Twinkle that Became a Fiery Star', meeting Jules Wright of the Women's Playhouse Trust, *Observer*, [n.d.] June 1991.

Kennedy, Helena. *Eve Was Framed: Women and British Justice* (London: Vintage Books, 1993).

Keyssar, Helene. *Feminist Theatre* (London: Macmillan, 1984).

Kilgore, Emilie S., ed. *Landmarks of Contemporary Women's Drama* (London: Methuen, 1992).

Klaver, Mary R. 'The Play(s) of Sarah Daniels: Performing Feminisms' (Masters thesis, University of Calgary, 1993).

Koppen, Randi S. "'The Furtive Event": Theorizing Feminist Spectatorship', *Modern Drama*, 35 (1992), 378 - 94.

- Landsberg, Michele. 'Play Poses Tough Questions on Pornography', *Toronto Star*, 7 December 1993.
- Langton, Robert Gore. 'Wright and Wrongs', *Sunday Times Magazine*, 1 April 1990.
- Llewellyn-Jones, Margaret. 'Claiming a Space: 1969 - 78', in *British and Irish Women Dramatists Since 1958: A Critical Handbook*, ed. by Trevor R. Griffiths and Margaret Llewellyn-Jones (Buckingham, Philadelphia: Open University Press, 1993), 26 - 46.
- Lumley, Frederick. *New Trends in 20th Century Drama* (London: Barrie and Rockliff, 1967).
- Lustig, Vera. Discussion of *Neaptide* and the place of women at the National Theatre: 'Rising Tide', *Women's Review*, 11 (1986), 34 - 35.
- Macfarlane, Alan. *Witchcraft in Tudor and Stuart England* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1970).
- McCullough, Christopher J. 'From Brecht to Brechtian', in *The Politics of Theatre and Drama*, ed. by Graham Holderness (Hampshire: Macmillan, 1992), 120 - 33.
- McDonald, Jan. 'New Women in the New Drama', *New Theatre Quarterly*, 6 (1990), 31 - 42.
- McGrath, John. *The Bone Won't Break: On Theatre and Hope in Hard Times* (London: Methuen Drama, 1990).
- *A Good Night Out* (London: Macmillan, 1981).
- McGuigan, Carol. Discussion of *Blow Your House Down: 'Natural Born Killers'*, *The Crack*, [n.d.] February 1995.
- McNamara, Brooks, ed. *Plays from the Contemporary American Theatre* (New York: Mentor, 1988).
- Miles, Rosalind. *The Women's History of the World* (London: Paladin, 1989; Harper Collins, 1993).
- Minwalla, Framji. 'Sarah Daniels: A Woman in the Moon', *Theatre Yale*, 21 (1990), 26 - 29.
- Mitchell, Juliet. *Psychoanalysis and Feminism* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1975).
- Morrissy, Julie. 'Materialist-Feminist Criticism and Selected Plays of Sarah Daniels, Liz Lochhead, and Claire Dowie' (doctoral thesis, University of Sheffield, 1994).
- Mulvey, Laura. 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema', *Screen*, 16 (1975), 6 - 18.

- Olsen, Tillie. *Mother to Daughter, Daughter to Mother: A Reader and Diary* (London: Virago, 1985).
- Ostriker, Alicia Suskin. *Stealing the Language: The Emergence of Women's Poetry in America* (London: Women's Press, 1987).
- O'Sullivan, Sue. 'Passionate Beginnings: Ideological Politics 1969 - 72', in *Sexuality: A Reader*, ed. by Feminist Review (London: Virago, 1987), 40 - 62.
- Padel, Una, and Prue Stevenson. *Insiders: Women's Experience of Prison* (London: Virago, 1988).
- Phelan, Peggy. 'Feminist Theory, Poststructuralism, and Performance', *Drama Review*, 32 (1988), 107 - 27.
- Pickering, David, ed. *Dictionary of Theatre* (London: Sphere Books, 1988).
- Pyrah, Gill. Interview with Sarah Daniels, BBC Radio 4 *Kaleidoscope* transcript, 15 February 1994.
- Rapi, Nina. Editorial in *GLINT Journal*, 2 (1994), 1.
- 'Hide and Seek: The Search for a Lesbian Theatre Aesthetic', *New Theatre Quarterly*, 9 (1993), 147 - 58.
- Reinelt, Janelle. 'Beyond Brecht: Britain's New Feminist Drama', in *Performing Feminisms: Feminist Critical Theory and Theatre*, ed. by Sue-Ellen Case (Maryland: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990), 150 - 59.
- Remnant, Mary, ed. *Plays by Women: Volume Five* (London: Methuen, 1986).
- ed. *Plays by Women: Volume Six* (London: Methuen, 1987).
- ed. *Plays by Women: Volume Seven* (London: Methuen, 1988).
- Rhodes, Dusty, and Sandra McNeill, eds., *Women Against Violence Against Women* (London: Onlywomen Press, 1985).
- Rich, Adrienne. 'Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence', in *Blood, Bread and Poetry* (London: Virago, 1987), 23 - 75.
- *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution* (London: Virago, 1977).
- Rich, B. Ruby. 'Anti-Porn: Soft Issue, Hard World', in *Sexuality: A Reader*, ed. by Feminist Review (London: Virago, 1987), 340 - 54.
- Robson, Cheryl, ed. *Seven Plays by Women* (London: Aurora Metro, 1991).

Rodgerson, Gillian, and Linda Semple, 'Who Watches the Watchwomen?: Feminists Against Censorship', in *Imagining Women: Cultural Representations and Gender*, ed. by Frances Bonner and others (Oxford: Polity Press, 1992), 268 - 73.

Rose, Helen. Interview with Sarah Daniels: 'Death in the Doll's House', *New Statesman & Society*, March 1990.

Rowbotham, Sheila. *Dreams and Dilemmas* (London: Virago, 1983).

- *Hidden from History* (London: Pluto Press, 1973).

- 'Search and Subject, Threading Circumstance', in *Dreams and Dilemmas*, 166 - 89.

- 'The Trouble with Patriarchy', in *Dreams and Dilemmas*, 207 - 14.

- 'Women, Power and Consciousness: Discussions in the Women's Liberation Movement in Britain 1969 - 1981', in *Dreams and Dilemmas*, 136 - 60.

Running-Johnson, Cynthia. 'Examining Critical History Through Theatre: Feminist Scholarship of the 1980s and Beyond', *Journal of Dramatic Theory and Criticism*, 9 (1994), 87 - 104.

Russell, Denise. *Women, Madness & Medicine* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1995).

Schroeder, Patricia R. 'American Drama, Feminist Discourse, and Dramatic Form: In Defense of Critical Pluralism', *Journal of Dramatic Theory and Criticism*, 7 (1993), 103 - 18.

Sellers, Susan. *Language and Sexual Difference: Feminist Writing in France* (London: Macmillan, 1991).

Sexuality: A Reader, ed. by Feminist Review (London: Virago, 1987).

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

Simmonds, Diana. Interview with Sarah Daniels: 'Play to Win', *City Limits*, 7 - 13 October 1983.

Steinam, Gloria. 'Erotica vs. Pornography', in *Outrageous Acts and Everyday Rebellions* (New York: Signet, 1986), 247 - 60.

Stewart, Ian. Discussion of Daniels' awards and plays: 'The Miniaturist and the Mockerer', *Country Life*, 17 July 1986.

Sweet, Fay. Interview with Sarah Daniels: 'Breaking Down the Barriers of Male Authority', *Stage*, [n.d.] 1986.

- Taylor, Lib. 'Early Stages: Women Dramatists 1958 - 68', in *British and Irish Women Dramatists Since 1958: A Critical Handbook*, ed. by Trevor R. Griffiths and Margaret Llewellyn-Jones (Buckingham, Philadelphia: Open University Press, 1993), 9 - 25.
- Todd, Janet. *Feminist Literary History* (New York: Routledge, 1988).
- Ussher, Jane. *Women's Madness: Misogyny or Mental Illness?* (Hertfordshire: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1991).
- Varty, Anne. 'From Queens to Convicts: Status, Sex and Language in Contemporary British Women's Drama', *Essays and Studies* 47 (1994): 65 - 89.
- Walker, Nancy. 'Do Feminists Ever Laugh?: Women's Humour and Women's Rights', *International Journal of Women's Studies*, 4 (1981), 1 - 9.
- Wandor, Michelene. *Carry On, Understudies: Theatre and Sexual Politics* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1986).
- *Drama Today: A Critical Guide to British Drama* (London: Longman, 1993).
 - *Five Plays by Michelene Wandor* (London: Journeyman Press, 1984).
 - *Look Back in Gender* (London: Methuen, 1987).
 - ed. *Plays by Women: Volume One* (London: Methuen, 1982).
 - ed. *Plays by Women: Volume Two* (London: Methuen, 1983).
 - ed. *Plays by Women: Volume Three* (London: Methuen, 1984).
 - ed. *Plays by Women: Volume Four* (London: Methuen, 1985).
 - ed. *Strike While the Iron is Hot* (London: Journeyman Press, 1980).
- Warner, Marina. Interview with Sarah Daniels: 'The Witch Report on Women', *Independent*, 24 November 1986.
- Whetstone, David. Discussion of *Blow Your House Down: 'The Dead of Night'*, *Journal*, 13 February 1995.
- Wilcox, Michael, ed. *Gay Plays: Five* (London: Methuen, 1994).
- Wyland, Francie. *Motherhood, Lesbianism and Child Custody* (Toronto: Wages Due Lesbians and Falling Wall Press, 1977).

NEWSPAPER AND MAGAZINE REVIEWS*

Ma's Flesh is Grass:

- Brown, Tim. 'Ma's Flesh is Grass', *Morning Telegraph*, 27 November 1981.
- Dear, Nick. 'Upsetting the Critics', *Leveller*, 27 November 1981.
- McManus, Irene. 'Ma's Flesh is Grass', *Guardian*, 27 November 1981.
- Morgan, Gaynor. 'Carole's Role in Play Shocker', *The Star*, 30 November 1981).

Ripen Our Darkness:

- Billington, Michael. 'Ripen Our Darkness', *Guardian*, 8 September 1981.
- Coveney, Michael. 'Ripen Our Darkness', *Financial Times*, 8 September 1981.
- Radin, Victoria. 'Mary's Road to Paradise', *Observer*, 13 September 1981.
- Shulman, Milton. 'Angrier than the Male', *London Standard*, 8 September 1981.
- Wardle, Irving. 'Ripen Our Darkness', *The Times*, 8 September 1981.

The Devil's Gateway:

- Billington, Michael. 'The Devil's Gateway', *Guardian*, 27 August 1983.
- Shulman, Milton. 'Sisters of Revenge', *London Standard*, 30 August 1983.
- Wardle, Irving. 'Feminism Over the Top', *The Times*, 27 August 1983.

Neptide:

- Allen, Edgar. 'Neptide', *London Weekly Diary*, 20 July 1986.
- Asquith, Ros. 'Marginal Progress', *Listener*, 10 July 1986.
- Barber, John. 'Lacking a Certain Courage', *Daily Telegraph*, 3 July 1986.
- Billington, Michael. 'Hard Lessons in Love', *Guardian*, 4 July 1986.
- Coveney, Michael. 'Neptide/Cottesloe', *Financial Times*, 3 July 1986.
- Devlin, Graham. 'Neptide', *Time Out*, 9 - 15 July 1986.
- Fisher, Jacqueline. 'Claire's Needs and Danton's Secrets', [n. pub.], 12 September 1986.
- Gristwood, Sarah. 'The Tide is High', *Ms. London*, 7 July 1986.
- Hepple, Peter. 'Feminist Soap Turns Men into Wimps', *Stage*, 10 July 1986.

- Shulman, Milton. 'Men -- It's All Your Fault...', *London Standard*, 3 July 1986.
- Vaughan, Tom. 'Neaptide', *Morning Star*, 9 July 1986.
- Wandor, Michelene. 'Neaptide', *Plays and Players*, September 1986.
- Wardle, Irving. 'Anger From the Head not the Gut', *The Times*, 3 July 1986.
- Wheen, Francis. Theatre Review, *Today*, 6 July 1986.
- Woddis, Carole. 'Neaptide', *City Limits*, 10 July 1986.
- Young, Adam. 'Neaptide', *Greek Review*, 26 July 1986.

Masterpieces:

- Allen, Paul. 'Teaching Aid', *New Statesman*, 21 October 1983.
- Billington, Michael. 'Masterpieces', *Guardian*, 12 October 1983.
- Coveney, Michael. 'Masterpieces', *Financial Times*, 12 October 1983.
- Hewison, Robert. 'Sexual Politics Take the Stage', *Sunday Times*, 16 October 1983.
- King, Francis. 'It's a Plant', *Sunday Telegraph*, 16 October 1983.
- McManus, Irene. 'Masterpieces', *Guardian*, 2 June 1983.
- Morley, Sheridan. Theatre Review, *Punch*, 25 January 1984.
- Shulman, Milton. 'Wailing Women', *London Standard*, 12 October 1983.
- Wardle, Irving. 'Masterpieces', *The Times*, 12 October 1983.

Byrthrite:

- Armitstead, Claire. 'Byrthrite', *Financial Times*, 26 November 1986.
- Billington, Michael. 'Byrthrite', *Guardian*, 25 November 1986.
- Chand, Paul. 'Labouring Over the Birth of Daniel's Baby', *Stage*, 4 December 1986.
- Gardner, Lyn. Review of *Byrthrite*, *City Limits*, 20 November 1986.
- Harron, Mary. Review of *Byrthrite*, *Observer*, 30 November 1986.
- Lawson, Mark. 'An Argument for Burying Plays', *Independent*, 28 November 1986.
- McGrath, Andy. Review of *Byrthrite*, *London Student*, 1 December 1986.

- Peter, John. 'Where Have All Our Playwrights Gone?', *Sunday Times*, 20 November 1986.
- Shorter, Eric. 'Women's Work', *Daily Telegraph*, 26 November 1986.

The Gut Girls:

- Brown, Georgina. 'Victorian Life in the Raw', *Independent*, 14 November 1988.
- De Jongh, Nicholas. 'Sweating Blood in Deptford', *Guardian*, 11 November 1988.
- Kingston, Jeremy. 'The Gut Girls', *The Times*, 19 November 1988.

Beside Herself:

- Armitstead, Claire. 'Beside Herself', *Financial Times*, 6 April 1990.
- Billington, Michael. 'Wounded Child, Haunted Woman', *Guardian*, 6 April 1990.
- Coveney, Michael. Review of *Beside Herself*, *Observer*, 8 April 1990.
- Kingston, Jeremy. 'Trivial Lines Among the Tins', *The Times*, 5 April 1990.
- Peter, John. Review of *Beside Herself*, *Sunday Times*, 8 April 1990.
- Wearing, Catherine. 'Coming Out', *What's On*, 11 April 1990.

Head-Rot Holiday:

- Edwardes, Jane. 'Head-Rot Holiday', *Time Out*, 21 October 1992.
- Jones, Rick. 'Mental Fatigue', *Evening Standard*, 16 October 1992.
- Nightingale, Benedict. 'Are They All Hopeless Cases?', *The Times*, 19 October 1992.
- Taylor, Paul. 'Prison of the Mind', *Independent*, 16 October 1992.

The Madness of Esme and Shaz:

- De Jongh, Nicholas. 'The Bonds of Abuse', *Evening Standard*, 16 February 1994.
- Greer, Bonnie. 'The Madness of Esme and Shaz', *Time Out*, 23 - 2 February/March 1994.
- Hewison, Robert. 'The Madness of Esme and Shaz', *Sunday Times*, 20 February 1994.
- Kellaway, Kate. Review of *The Madness of Esme and Shaz*, *Observer*, 20 February 1994.
- Nightingale, Benedict. 'Victims of Sexual Warfare', *The Times*, 17 February 1994.

- St. George, Andrew. 'The Madness of Esme and Shaz', *Financial Times*, 23 February 1994.
- Taylor, Paul. 'Pat Hates', *Independent*, 17 February 1994.

Blow Your House Down:

- Barr, Gordon. 'A Triumph of True Grit', *Evening Chronicle*, 16 February 1995.
- McGuigan, Carol. 'Natural Born Killer?', *The Crack*, February 1995.
- Stephenson, Bev. 'Blow Your House Down', *The Crack*, March 1995.
- Thornber, Robin. 'Safety in Numbers', *Guardian*, 18 February 1995.
- Whetstone, David. 'The Dead of Night', *The Journal*, 13 February 1995.

*Reviews which do not indicate either author or publication have not been included.