

MATERIALIST-FEMINIST CRITICISM AND SELECTED PLAYS  
OF SARAH DANIELS, LIZ LOCHHEAD, AND CLAIRE DOWIE.

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## ABSTRACT

This thesis is an examination of the extent to which contemporary British plays written by women constitute an ideological theatre. It is based upon the premise that there is a relationship of feminist theatre practice to feminist theory, where theory is seen to have informed practice and practice has informed the theory. I argue that an ideological theatre can be understood with reference to first, playstructure and second, the place of the performer in relation to both character and spectator. The implications of these can be seen terms first, of representation and second, of the physical presence of the body of the performer on stage and are therefore seen to be to do with the representation of issues on stage and performance issues to do with the woman performer respectively. Using aspects of a materialist-feminist analysis I examine the ways in which feminist epistemology has brought about a transformation of social relations in so far as these are deployed through representation and specific processes of performance based upon the slogan "the personal is political". This involves looking at the influence of performance issues and acting, especially at power-relations as they are reproduced and represented in selected theatre exercises. Importantly, these strategies for reading are always seen in the context of modern British political theatre; the importance of this emerges through my proposition that an ideological theatre practice is one which both establishes and foregrounds a relationship or resistance to existing theatrical form or genres. This constitutes the first part of my thesis.

The second part of the thesis is comprised of three case studies. In these I draw together aspects of representation and the processes of performance established in Part One as a way of understanding selected plays constructed in relation to existing genres. In Chapter Three I look at the plays of Sarah Daniels in relation to melodrama; in Chapter Four I look at the plays of Liz Lochhead in relation to adaptation. Chapter Five is my concluding chapter in which I stress the importance of both foregrounding previous genres and questioning generic expectations by examining the interactions of theatre with stand-up comedy in the work of Claire Dowie.

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PART ONE: CHAPTER ONE:  
BRITISH WOMEN'S THEATRE AS IDEOLOGICAL PRACTICE

In this thesis I examine issues related to the problem of defining the form that an ideological theatre will take both in terms of playstructure and the place of the performer in relation to both character and spectator. I explore the ways in which selected plays from the period 1978 to 1992 constitute an ideological theatre by looking at the ideological implications of different existing theatrical forms and their interactions with feminist and contemporary women's theatre.<sup>1</sup> My discussion is based upon the relationship of feminist theatre practice to feminist theory, where theory is seen to have informed practice and practice has informed the theory. This is a relationship which has its historical genesis in the important role, both private and public, women's theatre companies played during the most active years of the Women's Movement. During this time theatre represented a suitable platform for the exploration of theoretical concerns as well as being a platform upon which the voices of women were heard. I argue however that, in part, the genesis of a contemporary women's theatre practice has involved not simply the development of new theatrical forms but a process of both establishing and foregrounding a relationship or resistance to existing theatrical forms, or as I will describe them, genres. I use the term genre as a means of indicating the prominence of specific generic expectations and in so doing, as a means of exploring the several subject positions of spectator, character and performer.

I would like to make reference here to a comparable study of the relationship between ideological theatre and genre by W.B.Worthen. Worthen describes the two aspects of theatre that of necessity must be considered in defining an ideological theatre:

A given performance identifies an individual actor with the contours of a dramatic role, the dramatic scene with the geography of a given stage, the process of acting with the play's dramatic action. The rhetoric of the play's enactment strategically "identifies" the dramatic action with and through the theatrical activities of the stage. Political *theater*, in this sense, is distinctive only insofar as it foregrounds performance *as* an ideological process.<sup>2</sup>

Two key aspects of Worthen's commentary are relevant here. These are based in the assumption that not only must we study traditional issues of dramatic action and concerns located principally within the written text, but also we must study the performance strategies and signifying systems, of acting for instance. These he describes as the configurations of an ideological process.

I would suggest that it is crucial in examining contemporary theatre to base that examination according to these two divisions, that is, between aspects of the written text and of the performance of that text. In my thesis I diverge from the premise of Worthen's work to discuss contemporary women's theatre as ideological, thus making the analysis of gender central to a discussion of ideological theatre. In the first part of the thesis, where I propose a new way of reading plays, I have divided the two chapters along these two principles. In Chapter One I consider the theoretical and epistemological conditions of recent British theatre that governed the development of an ideological or political theatre and provide the context for contemporary women's theatre. By situating women's theatre in its theatrical context and making comparisons with existing theatre and proposing cyclical developments I hope to show it not simply as a subgenre but as constituting various genres that are defined always in relation to existing ones. In Chapter Two my analysis is of staging and performance issues, an aspect of contemporary theatre criticism I suggest is crucial in understanding the epistemological concerns raised in Chapter One. Whilst I move towards integrating the two areas in the second chapter it is in Part Two of the thesis that I develop that analysis more fully by making three particular case studies.

Given that I am concerned specifically with contemporary women's theatre and the relationship between a literary and performance textual analysis I have chosen a materialist-feminist perspective. As a relatively recent focus of research, the theoretical apparatus for studying contemporary women's theatre is still in its early stages. It is my suggestion that the ideas developed over the course of this thesis are explorations of the possibilities for new reading; they are not the result of well-established methodologies, neither do they offer definitive ways of reading. Perhaps symptomatic of its early genealogy are apparent gaps in the existing descriptions of materialist-feminist criticism of contemporary women's theatre. I take these as the premise of my argument, the

starting point for offering my own readings, and as crucial pointers to questions of methodology to which I consistently return. These issues also provide a point of comparison between the analysis of performance and textual issues.

Integrating recent critical theories into performance analysis has not been an easy task; it feeds existing hostilities between the study of performance and more traditionally literary analyses of drama and heightens a residual resistance within the theatre world to the academy. Hence theatre is reputedly the last bastion of tradition, for which we may read liberal criticism and has been accordingly challenged by critics informed by poststructuralism, psychoanalysis and postmodernism.<sup>3</sup> As a result critics are only now beginning to use these models for analysis and in so doing are taking on the theoretical problems intrinsic to each. Feminist theories of feminist or women's theatre offers one perspective to this criticism.<sup>4</sup>

It is my aim not simply to work according to the developing canon of feminist theatre criticism but also to use parallel work. For instance, several of the concerns of film theory - narrative structures and the spectator - can be incorporated into the study of plays and this is especially useful in considering an ideological theatre. This is evident in Shakespearean criticism and to an extent is now under review by critics of contemporary drama. For example, Lizbeth Goodman's new book *Contemporary Feminist Theatres: To Each Her Own* (1993) includes short sections on the "gaze", a term primarily generated from feminist film theory, and it is Goodman's final point that further research into the relation of the "gaze" to theatre is needed. In addition, Gayle Austin, in her book *Feminist Theories for Dramatic Criticism* (1990) discusses the significance of the gaze and the extent to which theories from other disciplines can be incorporated into a study of women's theatre. It is Austin's contention that theories of the "gaze" are useful in studying performance and theories from literary criticism are more useful in studying playtexts.<sup>5</sup>

However, I do not find that the distinction can be so readily made and in this thesis will address issues surrounding the notion of the gaze in relation its textual context, for instance narrative structures, as a way of proposing that the gaze can be used in conjunction with other modes of analysis. Evidently, the fact that feminist theories of drama have only recently begun to take up the challenge of the gaze and the placing of

the spectator means that there are many questions still to be asked and theoretical concerns to be addressed. Hence there is an uncertainty as to the definition of theoretical terms and frameworks, and different writers have a background in diverse theoretical perspectives. It is with a view to examining the relationship of several of these issues to materialist-feminist criticism that this thesis opens.

One of feminism's concerns has been the analysis of, and challenge to the existing social relations which inform and perpetuate a male hegemony. Another has been the influence of feminist theories upon the production of contemporary theatre, and it is often the case that the contemporary feminist playwright will introduce theoretical concerns into play-form. By re-incorporating what is learned from critical theory into the play text I would suggest the playwright both addresses those social relations and reconstitutes them, thereby making the integration of theory and practice implicitly political. In order that the notion of political theatre is consonant with a position of empowerment as might be the aim of this process - for the disenfranchised for example - it seems requisite to consider new plays and new theatres in the context of previously held, and established traditions. I would argue that rather than accepting the view of a specific genre of feminist or women's theatre, for which Lizbeth Goodman cogently argues throughout her book, contemporary women's writing is always written with reference to, or within the context of, prior theatrical practice. And it is the introduction of critical theory and its revisions to social relations and how we understand them that enables us to explore this relationship further. It is also this reference to an existing theatre that shows current practice to revise it, to reflect it and thus to become political.

The three playwrights I have chosen to look at in detail in this thesis are selected because of their place with reference to previous, often demarcated as political, theatres. In Chapter Three I consider three plays by Sarah Daniels: *Masterpieces*, *Neptide* and *Beside Herself*. These I discuss as rewriting a radical feminist theatre in the terms of melodrama, particularly its broad political and domestic landscapes. In Chapter Four I consider three plays by Liz Lochhead: *Blood and Ice*, *Mary Queen of Scots Got Her Head Chopped Off* and *Dracula*. These I describe with reference to the idea of national boundaries and the practice of adaptation. Finally, in my concluding chapter, Chapter

Five I consider two plays by Claire Dowie: *Adult Child/Dead Child* and *Why is John Lennon Wearing a Skirt?* These I discuss with reference to British stand-up comedy and the ways in which Dowie integrates her experience as a stand-up comedian and therefore its generic implications into playstructures.

Each of these writers then is concerned with existing forms; rather than developing new playstructures they are expanding existing ones. Within the context of this, which I call a political theatre practice, the concerns of current theories are evident. In particular, class relations and social relations are manifest and it is through the mediation of theatre exercises and performance strategies that I hope to show that these concerns are not seen to be simply abstract theoretical points but are reworked back onto the main premise of theatre itself - the stage. Part of the practice of developing new strategies for studying drama has been the abstraction of theory away from performance practice. For instance Sharon Willis' excellent essay on Helene Cixous' play, *Portrait of Dora* is primarily text based.<sup>6</sup> And Barbara Freedman's essay "Frame up: Feminism, Psychoanalysis, Theatre" works through a metaphor of theatre as a useful tool in the dialectic of psychoanalysis and feminism but again is tangential to a material stage practice.<sup>7</sup> By examining new writers in the context of changing terminology and existing tradition I hope to establish the ways in which new political theatres are based not upon methods of aesthetic and strategic unity, that is, forming a specific feminist practice, but instead upon the idea of difference, arguing that this is the basis for a British political theatre practice.

### Materialist-feminism and theatre

The two key areas underpinning the focus of my argument concerning materialist-feminist criticism are established by Jill Dolan in her materialist-feminist informed book, *The Feminist Critic as Spectator*:

- (1) Materialist feminism deconstructs the mythic subject Woman to look at women as a class oppressed by material conditions and social relations.
- (2) The intersection of materialist feminist criticism and postmodernism emphasizes that forms cannot be productively changed without an attendant change in ideology. Deconstructing the performance apparatus in

postmodernist terms is not politically progressive unless the gender assumptions that underlie representation are also denaturalized and changed.<sup>8</sup>

The avenues opened for examination delineated by the two points are: (1) The issue of social relations which constitute "women a class in themselves" and the connected problems that such a definition elicits, for instance, the challenge to existing Marxist definitions of class relations. (2) The question of how far a political theatre necessitates the call for new theatrical forms and the related debate between form and content. It is the interrelationship of these two issues that I will suggest is mediated and deployed in the theatrical presentation of status relations and performance. First it is necessary to consider theoretical issues by exploring key aspects of materialist-feminist analysis.

Materialist-feminist criticism has its roots in the debates between Marxist-feminist, socialist-feminist and radical feminist criticism. The Marxist background of early feminist writers prominent in British theatre such as Michelene Wandor was consolidated by later critical developments. At the same time it is important to note that this British background establishes certain historical conditions that have produced a difference in writing and direction for subsequent materialist-feminist critics in Great Britain and North America. The American critic Janelle Reinelt is one of the few writers who currently espouses the kind of socialist-feminist criticism associated with early activists such as Wandor.<sup>9</sup> Otherwise there are definite discrepancies which reflect the differences in much feminist criticism between the two countries - Britain having the more overtly socialist background.

In its early stages materialist-feminist criticism was concerned with the representations of class, race and gender, each being of equal importance. The primary text was Judith Newton and Deborah Rosenfelt's introduction to their collection of critical essays *Feminist Criticism and Social Change* (1985). Their contribution is an editorial chapter proposing a theoretical model with which to draw together the work of the subsequent literary essays. None of the essays are specifically concerned with theatre yet Newton and Rosenfelt's analysis has been adopted by feminist theatre critics.<sup>10</sup> Their description reads as follows:



A materialist-feminist criticism, in short, a criticism combining feminist, socialist and anti-racist perspectives, is likely to assume that women are not universally the same, that their relations are also determined by race, class and sexual identification; that social change cannot be conceived of in terms only of women who are white and privileged; that integration into existing social structures is not likely to liberate even white middle-class women; and that unequal relations of power in general must be reconstructed, not only for women but for all the oppressed.<sup>11</sup>

The stance is informed by an analysis of the relationship between the oppressed and their oppressors, a relationship of power and subjugation, that might only be resolved by a consistently revolutionary action. This might work hypothetically at either literary or social level, and be designed not simply to invert, but also to destroy these systems of relations. Discovering the specifics of oppression as they are mapped onto the body (classed, gendered, racial), or onto the text as body, is the task of the materialist-feminist critic. Its growth in providing a way of reading began with the analysis of the representation of women. Latterly it refers to the combined study of semiotics and poststructuralism and to the study of the production of meaning especially when inscribed onto the body of the female performer. Sue-Ellen Case's book *Feminism and Theatre* (1988) describes examples of this kind of analysis.<sup>12</sup>

In so far as theatre criticism has adopted a materialist-feminist approach there is a similar account of the production of meaning. The dramatic text comes to be seen as a product of an historically and culturally specific configuration of discursive structures: of production, consumption and representation. Aiming to do more than simply remedy women's oppression by shifting the locus of power from men to women, the political effect of this criticism rests upon the necessity of breaking down the prevailing construction of gender at a microcosmic level, before the oppressive structures and state at a macrocosmic level can be removed. The distinction between different levels and mediations of power - literature, theatre, laws - is thereby blurred, making the strategy as significant at the literary as it is at the political level.

The corollary of politics and theatre is critical, in part because it challenges arbitrary arguments relating theatre to political theory and also because it identifies a specifically British Marxist background and the prominence of class issues. Sue-Ellen

Case describes materialist-feminist criticism as taking aspects from both a Marxist and a socialist perspective. Where the former seeks to identify feminism within a traditional or classical Marxist stance, socialist feminism indicates a more broad left feeling. In Britain it is a given that socialist feminism finds its roots in a strong Marxist politics, and this is a key area of divergence from North American politics. In order that I can maintain my concern to clarify the construction and description of social relations - based upon my reading of Jill Dolan's previous point - as defining what constitutes a political theatre practice, it is necessary to qualify several of the terms and distinctions upon which materialist-feminist analysis claims to be based. Later in this chapter I outline the relationship of Marxism to political theatre that has shaped events on British stages and provided the context for current women playwrights to develop their own political theatres.

Thus one aspect of materialist-feminist criticism is that pertaining to form and content. The second is that which addresses the nature of social relations. Dolan describes women as constituting a class in themselves; she also develops notions of the mythic construct of "woman". This latter term is distinguishable from the "women" for whom material conditions are crucial, and reflects the work of Monique Wittig. Monique Wittig is a French materialist-feminist writer concerned to motivate the class of women and destroy the terms upon which the mythic "woman" is constructed.<sup>13</sup> She, like her French counterpart Christine Delphy, provides an account of materialist-feminism based upon, but divergent from classical Marxism: both Wittig and Delphy use the terms but challenge the ways in which social relations are traditionally constructed. Moreover, each is concerned with the relationship between the cultural mediation of social relations and as a result of this provide interesting perspectives to which I will turn in my later case studies. What each is doing is employing existing terminology with which to address the relationship between the materiality of the body and of language. One result of establishing this relationship would be a dismissal of the notion of both women as a class in themselves and "woman" as the "privileged other".<sup>14</sup>

Rosi Braidotti, in her paper "Embodiment and Sexual Difference - is Feminist Materialism Possible?" presented at the conference on "Feminist Theory: an International

Debate" held at Glasgow University in 1990, suggested that various feminist strategies - of masquerade, of gender as performative - are important yet proposed that "before we relinquish "woman" we need to repossess it", thus maintaining some notion of the "essentialism" of which Monique Wittig speaks (that which shapes the class of women) and guaranteeing sex differences as the mechanism by which that repossession may occur.<sup>15</sup>

Two clear points emerge here: (1) That the complexities of the arrangements of "class" may feed productively into analysis of theatre where the corporeal body is in evidence and in theories of acting where notions of "self" are critical. (2) That, rather than simply dismiss the "fetters of historical materialism" as Braidotti suggests, we can turn to some analysis of them with which to address the construction of social relations as a useful mechanism in studying an ideological theatre. Hence I will make use of the terms of materialist-feminism laid out by Wittig and Delphy but expand on these with reference to psychoanalysis, a critical tool I find appropriate and useful here, especially in providing a link between performance and literary or dramatic analysis. Historically the coupling of materialist and psychoanalysis has been fraught with difficulties, and both Wittig and Delphy are resistant to what they see as its implied essentialism, yet I see it as important in approaching a discussion of the materiality of the performer's body and the materiality of the processes of theatrical production. First I will delineate the background for making parallels between contemporary women's theatre and what is nominally referred to as modern British Political theatre. I argue in the next section that the provisions for a political rhetoric within contemporary women's rhetoric are historically located.

#### Feminists and British theatre: an historical account

In this section I examine the potential rhetoric of feminist theatre in so far as it is dependent upon existing forms by refocussing upon the meaning of "political" in contemporary theatre. The term is loaded to the same degree that the term "class" is loaded and is perhaps conventionally described by being distinguished from "social" theatre. If "political" theatre addresses the underlying structures and systems of society then the symptoms and effects of these causal relations define "social" theatre.<sup>16</sup>

Micheline Wandor's book *Look Back in Anger* confirms this distinction by describing the subject of post-war drama, taking as categories the examination of: political landscapes, the family, internal and external settings, the prominence of male and female protagonists.<sup>17</sup> Invariably women's plays are seen to focus on the domestic scene. Yet the feminist playwright may examine domestic and social concerns but at the same time is interested in how far deep underlying political systems can be confronted. It has been important in defining ideological theatre to establish appropriate ways in which these underlying political systems can be represented and questioned.

A resultant blurring of the terms "political" and "social" is reflected in the nature of seventies and early eighties British political theatre. In conjunction with the transformations of critical language witnessed by the eighties there was also a discernible transition away from clear "political" theatre. Distinctions became simply fudged by "Thatcherism": a frame of mind and also a philosophy based upon the centrality of the individual reflected as both the subject of plays and the transformation of theatre styles - the move towards stand-up comedy for instance - and theatre criticism. In contrast with the rumblings of dissent and specified critique of eighties theatre, the playwrights of the late sixties and early seventies were concerned with a strident political message, and this was a clarion call that found its impetus in the events of Paris, May 1968; a mood or feeling that was to subsequently motivate arts workers in Britain. In terms of form, political playwrights found a strength by forging direct links between theatre and politics, a bond the impetus of which was founded in a belief that theatre could motivate change and above all, that social change was possible, if not through revolution, then at least through some form of confrontation.

In view of the gradual demise of our perceptions of what is "political" over the last twenty years, theatre criticism and the practice of playwrighting have been forced to revise their terms and to transform their practice. Hence, we are in a process of seeking to find metaphors and a new language with which to address the idea of a political theatre. A central metaphor has been "revolution", encapsulating shifts in theatre and society. At its most pertinent it establishes comparable experiences of early political theatres, primarily male-oriented, and a more recent feminist-oriented political theatre.

The transformation of the practice and the theory of political theatre charts the chronology of the move from direct confrontation, and in so doing, highlights the terms available for analysis. Events in 1968 provided the marker of changing attitudes and expectations in British theatre to the extent that an alternative theatre emerged which at this stage was specifically what we would call politicized.

Prior to that, key dates included 1956, the advent of a working-class theatre dominated by the image of John Osborne's Jimmy Porter in *Look Back in Anger*. Osborne brought alive, on the British, largely middle-class stage, a notorious "angry young man" who, although angry, was not motivated by any one political movement. Instead, it was the adaptation of Marxist accounts of social relations to inform playstructures that provided a form through which to channel anger like his. The enthusiasm for change which infused the post-68 period, permeating the structures of British theatre, was to inspire a directly left-wing political stance soon commonplace in the work and personal ideology of many writers, including Edward Bond, Howard Brenton and Trevor Griffiths.

Dorrian Lambley in her article "In Search of a Radical Discourse for Theatre" has recently suggested that the British perspective on events was unusual because the experience of the British playwright and practitioner was characterized by a displacement from Paris as the locus of events.<sup>18</sup> There has never been a revolution in these terms in Britain. Thus on the one hand, French workers and students were actively involved in a force of resistance. On the other hand, British conceptions of violent and factional class relations were instead been manifest through the medium of television and theatre. For instance, characters in Trevor Griffiths *The Party* have a vicarious pleasure in the events of May 1968 by watching its television coverage. However, this pleasure is shown to be inadequate because the degree of involvement the characters obtain is divorced from the control they desire. In this play Griffiths is staging the problematic issue of theatrical mimesis by showing a framed image of revolution on the television screen within the context of a "real" staged world. In so doing the play foregrounds the issue of mimicking reality and theatricalizes the relationship between the images and language based on the metaphor of revolution. In the post-revolutionary era the credentials of this play are

challenged yet there is a strange resonance in the simulation of television images of the Gulf War, purportedly a television-manufactured war. Interestingly Griffiths has chosen to a focus upon the Gulf War as a real and television-manufactured war in his recent play *The Gulf Between Us*, where he addresses the relationship between humanity and the imperialistic sentiment that was played out on the television screen.

Up to this time, that is around 1968, British theatre was characterized by an insularity of practice and themes and dominated by the medium of language which in itself was the subject of much theatre. Certainly language was privileged above social and political landscapes; it was an internal issue that playwrights began to show as being increasingly impotent. For example, Jimmy Porter's shouts of outrage and vitriol indicate a frustration with the discourse of language and the limitations of its dialogue, although the play-structure of *Look Back in Anger* is traditional. Similarly, further frustration with the limitations of language were evident in the shift away from rhetoric to ritualised incantation in Ann Jellicoe's plays and Harold Pinter development of a shadow of a language that can only be described as absurd. However, it was perhaps symptomatic of the insularity of British practice that frustrations with language were deployed using conventional play-structured; a notable contrast to European models based upon challenges to the use of language as a medium and conventional structures. Such European models pointed a way to collapsing form and content, and were in part informed by movements away from naturalism, such as the theory and practice of Antonin Artaud. These influenced practitioners such as Peter Brook who were concerned with the deconstruction of traditional theatrical boundaries and contrasted the British assessment of social breakdown through a disintegration of language worked through quite conventional play structures.

The late 1960s then, were a time of change and transition. Groups like CAST (Cartoon Archetypical Slogan Theatre), and Red Ladder put the simple and direct exposition of agit-prop centre stage, dealing largely in images. An account of this work is to be found in Catherine Itzen's survey of British political theatre, *Stages of the Revolution*, and in most plays of this time, even where form was less directly political, there was still a broadly left feeling. The complexities of political and personal

commitment, the choice of subject matter, and the choice in theatrical career effected a split in previously tightly knit groups. This split highlighted a cross-over between form and content, authorship and political vision to the extent that writers and their ideology and playwriting became indeterminate.

I have included this background material as a means of pointing to crucial similarities between the experience of male and female playwrights in establishing new political theatres. I would suggest that the extent to which aspects of the writers' own lives and beliefs, and political imperatives were collapsed was an experience that the predominantly male playwrights of the seventies had, and one that women playwrights were to subsequently experience. Certainly, by maintaining close links between personal and public ideology (and it seems that it was the commitment to a revolutionary and activist theatre combined with personal exploration that was the core of women's involvement in theatre) the metaphor of revolution was one that came full circle. In fact it is almost as if the women playwrights were re-experiencing the concerns etched by their male predecessors in regard to the relationship between form and content. Hence the metaphor describing stages of the revolution was to set a precedent for writers whose experiments with form would follow a teleology towards ever increasing "sophistication" of writing.

I wish to emphasize this point by suggesting that where we attempt to describe an ideological theatre there is a need to establish models and patterns of development through which contemporary playwrights can be related to their predecessors. For example, Lizbeth Goodman, in an interview with Louise Page has described what Goodman sees as the cyclical nature of women's experience in the theatre which she sees as connected with the absence of a strong tradition of older women playwrights sharing their knowledge with younger ones.<sup>19</sup> She suggests that women of one generation have failed successfully to pass on their knowledge to the women of the next generation, citing Charlotte Keatley's play called *My Mother Said I Never Should* as an echo of an earlier generation play by The Women's Theatre Group with the same title. Consequently experiments with form and subject material are likely to be repeated. The point is

pertinent, but at the same time I would point out a similarity in the concerns of women and male practitioners, where the experience they have of developing relationships between political efficacy and theatrical form is also cyclical, yet somehow necessary. And where critics may criticise the woman playwright for producing rather crude and obvious images, she is only doing what her male counterparts did twenty or so years previously. It is as if women go through the same motions in their theatre experience and must learn through their own experiments rather than being told, (a pattern familiar at all levels of the women's movement I would add. For instance, a 1990 *Feminist Review* includes interviews with young women who identify their own recognition of the fundamental aspects of feminism and in so doing emphasize their own need to go through comparable learning experiences of previous generations of feminists.<sup>20</sup>

These divisions, and the move towards adopting a theoretical framework into which recent critical theory is incorporated, are shown partly in the early debates between practitioners. I wish to outline the notion of a political forum or platform for discussion that shows the integration of theatre and politics in progress by first starting with a debate from which women were apparently excluded.

#### Finding a forum of debate

Post 1956 was the first time in the history of British theatre when not only did playwrights have an Oxbridge background but they also came from the working-class. This step forward in theatre reflected the same cultural growth and accessibility that Alan Sinfield has shown in other literary endeavours, including the rise of the working-class writer and the emergence of left-wing literary groups.<sup>21</sup> This notional "left" was predominantly male and writing was focussed primarily upon the "play" form. I make this distinction specifically because recent criticism shifts focus towards a collapse in the terms "theatre" and "performance" to the extent that the word "play" is seemingly redundant. For the time being I wish to retain this term because playwrights such as John McGrath, David Edgar and David Hare were writing, and the term "performance" was not in current usage. Hence, it functions as an historical indicator and also provides a convenient reference point for later writers who have a specific relationship to the "play" form. As



my subsequent case studies will show Claire Dowie integrates stand-up comedy material into playstructure, Liz Lochhead novels (through adaptation) and Sarah Daniels structures of melodrama. At this stage then, the "play" serves as an abstract and theoretical model which we can always keep in sight.

A characteristic more prominent in theatre than in any other literary field is the close association of criticism, theoretical writing and analysis with creative writing. It is this approach to drama criticism which for me questions the ways in which the playwright is associated with or responsible for her/his craft. Rather than deconstruct or reinstate the role of the "author" I would suggest that the superimposition of a theoretical model of political discourse and the frequency of forums for debate within the theatre world already dislocates and distances the author/playwright who enters into the world of debate as simply one more subject position to be considered.<sup>22</sup>

At the end of post-68 decade theatre practitioners have taken part in a retrospective debate concerning political theatre. In effect they have been involved in the re-writing of theatre history, claiming a chronicle of events from which women have been notably excluded. I would like here to offer an analogy with the notion of "framing" and theatre. To use a psychoanalytically-oriented model it is useful to reconstruct the relationship between spectator and theatre such that theatre is akin to the spectator's unconscious. I wish to explore this first with reference to male playwrights who are also theoreticians as a way of explaining the exclusion of women from the early stages of debate concerning British political theatre. Thus, this relationship between spectator and theatre will also involve a process of transference through which we are able to identify the projection of desires/analysis from spectator to stage, a process that, I would argue, must be read as an Oedipal relationship in that it is characterized by desire and mastery. If this description can be established to account for the relationship between spectator and theatre, the next stage, I would suggest, is to ask what happens when the playwright also begins to theorize his, and others, theatre? That is, how do we ascribe a similar structure onto the written debate/forum that has developed hand in hand with the rise of modern British political theatre? By seeing a similar arrangement, it appears, where the male playwright enters into a dialogue with another male playwright in that both are

playwrights but also theoreticians. Both are important in seeking some control over theatrical material through theory, analysis and exegesis, and both are important in shaping theatrical material itself. In summary, I would point out the extent to which male playwrights have been empowered imbued by this arrangement and at the same time, the extent to which women playwrights have been disempowered in so far as the woman playwright has not only been written out of the re-writing of theatre history (the dialogue being between men only), but as if, by implication, written out of the "creative" writing of theatre itself. First, I will outline how a key debate between men has been developed, and second, I will turn to what I see as a provocatively forgotten contribution.

One of the key changes made apparent in the relationship between a leftwing political framework and theatre has been the devolution of the working-class as the main vehicle of social revolution. This decentralization is also reflected in the devolution of practitioners away from a focussed and specific aim (of class-war), and splits in the individual careers of playwrights - demonstrating a critical transformation of the public and political role of the playwright. The division lay partly in the individual ambitions of the writers. For feminism similarly the division between personal aspiration and collective vision is contentious. To work within the main houses of the National Theatre, as David Hare and Howard Brenton chose to do, was to take on through confrontation the middle-class audiences they played to; to pursue a populist theatre was to maintain links with the working-class, for which John McGrath opted. This constituted one of the major splits in what is termed modern British Political Theatre.

John McGrath's book *A Good Night Out* was the first conflation of theatre and politics of its kind, following the model established by Brecht's theoretical writing. Written in 1980, *A Good Night Out* was followed by an account of the influence of what might be termed the revisionary (Thatcher) years on British political theatre, *The Bone Won't Break* published in 1990. Each book is a set of lectures given at Cambridge University, a political analysis of the arts using McGrath's Scottish company 7:84 as the main exemplar of change. With reference to 7:84 - so named because at the time seven per cent of the population owned eighty-four per cent of the wealth - McGrath explores the developments, financial and artistic, of the oppositional theatre in which he was

involved. The "forum", as aforementioned, grew in a series of articles published by the British theatre journal *Theatre Quarterly*. The significance of this journal cannot be overstated, for it also contained the two subsequent articles which were to complete the forum for provocative polemic. Volume 8, number 32, Winter 1979 included David Edgar's article "Ten Years of Political Theatre, 1968-1978". Number 35, 1980 included John McGrath's condensed version of *A Good Night Out*, "The Theory and Practice of Political Theatre".

The opposing emphasis between McGrath's attention to the existing working-class, borrowing its forms, and Edgar's shift towards an oppositional theatre within the mainstream indicates political choice and personal preference. In McGrath's 1990 text, he outlines a further shift in emphasis. This is significant for feminist issues as it involves a reconsideration of the Marxist understanding of the working-class as sole vehicle for revolutionary change. Instead he cites the pockets of what he calls "resistance" as nearest approaching the "class consciousness" he saw as being lost throughout the decade and providing some definition for a collective identity that is crucial to the formation of an ideological theatre. In an era which won elections not on political and social issues but by forging of a new consciousness and its philosophy of Thatcherism, class analysis in general has tended to give way to the analysis of power and of oppression. It is to this transition of terms that McGrath has also turned his attention. The class groups of the revolution are now women, lesbian and gay, and ethnic groups. Where this divisiveness effects a weakening of the traditional Marxist perspective and enhances a sociological and anthropological perspective, political theatre has had to adjust its practice and its terms. These groups, called the "resistance" by McGrath, constitute the social/theatrical setting from which feminist activity and group-consciousness began to form.

I would argue then that the place of women's involvement in theatre is more than simply as a minority group or resistance, that is a subgenre or genre. More accurately, viewing political theatre from a feminist perspective shows that the concerns are both constantly changing and far from conclusive. It is to this end that I would complete the forum by advocating an account of the placing of women's theatre in the context of British political theatre as part of the construction of a chronicle of staging history.

The women's movement: staging criticism

The metaphor of "revolution" draws together the experiences of those writers freshly enthused by a positive turn in British politics since 1968, and the role and experience of women at the same time. The decline of its metaphorical impact is similarly relevant, and in the demise of its current political power, its redundancy in describing the events of Eastern Europe, the changing usage of the term seems apt in describing the transition of political epistemology that was informing theatrical enterprise at this time.

The feminist critic Teresa de Lauretis has delineated a definition of history with reference to the idea of a "chronicle". This constitutes a useful analogy with which to compare the writing of theatre history and against which to register the demise of political theatre in its seventies form and the subsequent demise of the efficacy of the term "revolution". It also means that we cannot demand the implied closure of specified new forms and opens up the possibility of a variety of different subject positions. In her essay "Desire in Narrative" de Lauretis discusses the systems of law, desire and narrative that Hadyn White uses in historiography when its existing structures are seen to rely upon a distinction between the chronicle and history as a narrative.<sup>23</sup> She outlines White's discussion of modern history practice, that views itself as superior to the annal and the chronicle, by being able to fill in the gaps left at the point at which the chronicle is written, thereby consolidating a picture of history. The chronicle is shown to "fail to achieve narrative closure", an ending which commonly is associated with ideological closure, because of these conditions.

I would suggest a comparison between this description of the chronicle and the ways in which theatre critics have sought to make an account of British political theatre and the situation of women's theatre within it. The significance that forums such as the *Theatre Quarterly* debate have had follows a similar lineage. For example, the fact that I am seeking to define a theatrical history through selected texts written every ten years is sufficient to highlight a seeming lack of political and theoretical closure, a semblance of which is defined by the vagaries of temporal closure every ten years, or when publication of the debate allows, yet at the same time offers a schematic description. This account

then is written as a chronicle that is incomplete because it is ongoing. I would suggest that, in the light of this, signs of historical inaccuracy or less well known ideas may be contained within certain plays of the intervening years. Moreover, the direct expression of leftwing politics within a play has taken a shift in location, and congruent transformation, in the creation of women's theatre and its manifest connection with the women's movement. It is a legitimate task, therefore, to read plays for evidence of the changing structures of the women's movement. And although one might challenge the political accuracy of many plays, they feed the imagination and derive from the experience of the groups involved at a specific historical moment. For example, the devised theatre pieces of groups like the Women's Theatre Group that reflected a collective experience of women, are useful indicators of the experience of many women in the theatre and in other careers. An additional, yet central metaphor for women's theatre, is that of a "broken-backed" playstructure first used by Gillian Hanna of *Monstrous Regiment*.<sup>24</sup> The image reflects a parallel between a woman's working life and non-linear theatre. It would seem valid, then, to use the plays that arose at specific times, as an insight into a critical and ongoing process, punctuating certain moments with pertinent and historical themes.

Not only can women's plays be seen to function as "chronicles" of the consciousness-raising experiences of women, but this notion of a chronicle can also apply to the writing of these retrospectives in *Theatre Quarterly*. McGrath and Edgar began writing a chronicle in which, as Michelene Wandor showed, women in the British theatre had a role defined by absence; women in effect are shown in relation to this chronicle as lack. In *Theatre Quarterly*, volume nine, number 36, 1980, just four editions after McGrath, Michelene Wandor made a feminist intervention and contributed to the forum with her essay, "Sexual Politics and the Strategy of Socialist Theatre". She introduces her article with the following comments:

It is a pity that David Edgar and John McGrath end up representing polarized positions on the best strategic road towards the development of socialist theatre and its audiences - all the more sad since both of them have worked in and recognize the importance of each other's fields. I suspect that there are as many problems and contradictions within their own work as writers as there

are for the rest of us trying to weigh up the relative priorities of needing to earn a living and at the same time make choices about our work which reflect our political views (p.28).

And so the article goes on. Wandor develops her point that perhaps women's theatre is in the best position to begin a process of drawing together these rifts, *emphasizing its collaborative basis. She highlights one of the main results of this rift: that Edgar's move into mainstream theatre sets up a "high" art in playwrighting - characteristically more subtle and clever - and that McGrath's stand with, and for, the working-class is that of a "low" art that retains populist, more didactic, and more simplistic forms. Women's contribution, she argues, is the beneficial arrangement, ultimately more socialist in practice, learned through women's groups, that can overcome the fissures dividing Edgar and McGrath's perspectives.*

I have sought in my argument to maintain a parallel between the language of "revolution" coined by Catherine Itzen, and the language of the theatre. This parallel has enabled me to chart the disintegration of the labour movement and the impetus for a revolution, as being comparable to the ensuing divisions and factions of British political theatre. In both cases such terminology was becoming redundant and has been taken over by a new, more radical discourse not only of resistance, but resistance to the very structures of power which define and maintain its identity. In effect, Wandor's article at the time, constituted a rejoinder, an adjunct, a footnote, (because uninvited) to the *Theatre Quarterly* forum. This absence reflected an equal neglect of women involved in socialist politics.

Concurrent with the previously set up chronicle of metaphorical "revolution" in political theatre, was a very real historical and political manifestation of revolutionary potential, the Women's Liberation Movement. Where British theatre practitioners were adopting insurrection-style inroads into theatre, women were involved in what was manifestly a powerful movement with its own revolutionary potential. Wandor in her article hastens to point out the contribution of women in the theatre as transcending the oversimplified perspectives of Edgar and McGrath's respective positions. Whilst their debate was centred on intellectualism and the aesthetics of what she shows as a distinction between "high" and "low", feminist approaches were actively deconstructing those

oppositions and effecting a more socialist outlook. She takes her model out of the theatre into left groups and proposes it as a model to resolve the impasse that left politics had reached. This was the point of contact between the "personal" and the "political", and the demands of the public voice of the Women's Movement were designed to aid the personal lives of those it represented.

The British Women's Liberation Movement was at its greatest strength and resilience at the same time as women were becoming both more prominent and more vocal in their demands for recognition in the theatre. I would suggest that there are parallels also to be made with the women's movement and the revolution in political theatre. Where early and collective activity led to disaffection and a decline of interest in theatre politics, this was reflected in the theatre. The optimism of Wandor to enhance the theatre with the (sexual) politics of the women's movement was perhaps spoken too soon, because the women's movement was soon to see its own demise.

I shall briefly explain the shift from a shared goal and single perspective to a centrifugal action of ideas and demands. At its inception, the British Women's Movement was affiliated to the trades unions movements, thus motivating women already involved in left-wing organisations, and maintained by a socialist stronghold. Annual conferences were held and platforms opened to packed conferences allowing women to be heard for perhaps the first time in their lives. One of the chief slogans of the early Women's Liberation Movement was the now much maligned, "the personal is political". This motif offered women a means of exploring their individual position within the context of collective ideas and debate. It was something that previous left groups - and also left theatre groups - had failed to do: politics had been firmly embedded in the public domain, and the image of the revolutionary male was one unencumbered by the emotional restraints and maternal duties of women. This slogan then, was to indicate the basis of a feminist epistemology, shattering the traditionally imposed boundaries between private and public life, and ensuring the promotion of the four initial demands of the Women's Movement: abortion on demand, free contraception, twenty-four hour nurseries, and equal pay and opportunities. In short these demands represented a formidable task which in part has been achieved. In many ways it proved too much for a continuing collective

movement to uphold, and like its precursor "revolution" in the theatre, the women's movement began to fragment, and its activists moved in diverging directions. Whilst women had previously united their energies in moves for peace, for abortion on demand, and for equal opportunities, they now succumbed to the internal frictions and sectarianism that seem a condition of left politics. The last Women's Liberation Movement conference was held in 1978, around the time of the publication of Edgar and McGrath's articles on the divisions within political theatre.

The notion of the "personal as political" will be furthered explored in my next chapter where I attempt to retrace the parallels between theatre and politics by examining the "theatrically" based exercises which were very much a part of early feminist consciousness-raising groups. First I wish to develop the relationship specifically between theatrical form or genre and feminist politics by looking in more detail at the epistemological basis of materialist-feminist criticism. This rests upon a detailed analysis of the nature of the "social relations" described by materialist-feminism and incorporated into theatre analysis.

#### TRANSFORMATIONS: CLASS TO STATUS, MATERIALIST-FEMINISM AND SOCIAL RELATIONS

In this section I consider specifically the feminist project of discovering and establishing an epistemological base of social relations, with a view to exploring in more detail the notion that "women constitute a class in, and for, themselves". In so doing I am moving towards a critique of the use of "class" for feminist analysis and advocating a complementary or different term, "status". This rests upon an examination of this notion that "women constitute a social class in themselves" and implies the transformation of existing sets of social relations. It is such a transformation of social relations that I suggest contemporary women playwrights are concerned to demonstrate as possible.

I have chosen to examine this in more detail because, although materialist-feminist criticism of theatre has maintained that class, race and gender are equally important both in terms of performance and theory, there has been little detailed examination of the



implications of, and reasons for, calling women a class in themselves. In order to clarify the position and begin to outline these implications, which I suggest may be worked through in the relationship between spectator and narrative structure, I will describe how the epistemological premise has been discussed by opposing feminist critics, each of whom comes under the umbrella term "materialist-feminism".

Discussion of women's place in class relations is rooted in a debate between Marxist and radical feminists that continued throughout the seventies and into the early eighties. Both Christine Delphy and Monique Wittig have rejected the biologism of some radical feminism, preferring to work with an account of "woman" as a socially constructed category. Despite their professed materialist-feminism, and because neither Delphy or Wittig is labelled a socialist or Marxist thinker, they are invariably included under the terms of a radical feminist epistemology, notorious for emphasizing biological differences above all else and reflected in theatre by more "spiritual" and "wimmin-oriented" plays. Wittig is commonly cited in literary studies and herself writes about literature. Delphy, on the other hand, is rarely included and it is only recently that she has been cited by film studies. Peter Gidal, for instance, shows a rare interest in Delphy, both in his study of Beckett and in his structuralist/materialist approach to film.<sup>25</sup> Another point worth making about Delphy's role in the history of feminist thought is that Toril Moi's 1987 book, *French Feminist Thought: A Reader* excludes Delphy from "l'écriture féminine" and includes her with British socialism.<sup>26</sup> However, Delphy has been consistently at odds with British socialist feminists throughout the last twenty years. In turning to the expression of this conflict I will make some indication of the uncertain terms with which the "class of women" has been addressed.

Delphy's first principal work was *The Main Enemy*, first published in French in 1970, translated and published in Britain in 1974 and 1977 respectively. This work is an extensive essay in which Delphy first outlined the premises of a theoretical analysis to which she was to return, modify and develop over the next ten years. At this stage the

MLF or "Mouvement de Liberation des Femmes", of which she was a key figure, was in its early heady days and heavily embroiled in leftist politics. One clear split was from the school of psychoanalysts, "Psych et Po", with whom Delphy found herself in serious battle. This opposition between early materialism and psychoanalysis is an interesting one in that it is a familiar practice of contemporary materialist feminist criticism to incorporate psychoanalysis, especially Lacanian psychoanalysis, as a useful mechanism for study, and I see it myself as useful.<sup>27</sup>

As she makes clear in *The Main Enemy*, Delphy's intention is to make use of, rather than adhere to, traditional Marxist theory. She points out that, "Historical materialism is based on the analysis of social antagonisms in terms of classes; classes being themselves defined by their place in the system of production".<sup>28</sup> This analysis, based on the recognition of classed society, is dispensable, if necessary, Delphy believes, because, as neither Marx nor Engels considered women as a class, their method can be challenged in order to focus attention on the oppression of women.<sup>29</sup> Delphy saw it of fundamental importance to name women as a class in themselves. By adopting the methodology of the left, Delphy is able to construct her own theory whilst maintaining a critical marginal perspective.

Delphy's main analysis focusses on the family as the site of exploration. Her main insight, and that of primary interest to my thesis, is to outline the social system of relations that exist between husband and wife, comparing them with the relationship of proletariat to capitalist, as did Engels. However, Engels was concerned with what was produced in terms of goods within that relationship. He confined his focus only to working-class women, thus maintaining the class distinction that Delphy seeks to override. It is the nature of the relationship, that is, the nature of the social relationship, that concerns her most, and therefore she draws attention to the relationship itself for its descriptive possibilities rather than any goods that may be involved. She suggests that wives take the position of the proletariat, and their husbands that of the capitalist, because the relationship is power-based and ultimately exploitative. It is through her understanding of historical materialism that Delphy emphasizes the historical background of class relations, making clear that:

For me, the first foundation of materialism is that it is a theory of history, one where history is written in terms of the domination of social groups by one another. Domination has as its ultimate motive exploitation. This postulate explains and is explained by the second foundation of materialism: the postulate that the way in which life is materially produced and reproduced is the basis of the organization of all societies, hence is fundamental both at the individual level and the collective level.<sup>30</sup>

What distinguishes Delphy's analysis is that she sets up a provocative theory of housewife/husband relations where each inhabits a mutually antagonistic class position. Ultimately, she targets patriarchy as the dominant force in the relationship, contrary to other "dual-systems" writers, Heidi Hartmann, for instance, who seek to address the exploitative capacity of capitalism by drawing analogies between women's oppression and capitalist production. Delphy sets up women to be a class group in themselves, and thus provides a theoretical background for the assumption amongst some materialist-feminist critics that "women constitute a class in themselves".<sup>31</sup>

In 1979 the British journal *Feminist Review* provided the forum for an ongoing debate between Delphy and two British feminist critics, Michelle Barrett and Mary McIntosh. A brief overview of this debate, I would suggest, highlights several of the problems of adopting the stance that "women constitute a class in themselves". The form of this debate was an epistolary one, rather than an open platform. It opened with Barrett and McIntosh's article, "Christine Delphy: Towards a Materialist Feminism?" in issue Number One. Delphy replied in issue Number Four.

Barrett and McIntosh target Delphy's appropriation of Marxist theory, which they see as arbitrary and dependent upon the terminology, not of Marxism, but of sociology. Hence, her use of terms such as "status", "group", and "industrialisation" are condemned. They also point out that her analysis of social relations depends upon a binary of husband and housewife, and the assumption therefore, that all women are married. In that instance, "women" would be subsumed by the notion of "woman". They argue that Delphy's account fails to distinguish between the economic and ideological construct of the family. In contrast, Barrett and McIntosh see the family through a post-Althusserian analysis of ideology as a "series of lived relationships".<sup>32</sup> I shall examine the distinction between the economic and ideological construction of women later but first

summarize the key distinctions between the positions that allow me to offer a different approach. Hence, Delphy's attacks are predominantly on patriarchy, and theirs on capitalism; hers is a borrowing of Marxism, and theirs a development. I have drawn up a tabular representation describing the discrepancies in their respective positions:

ISSUE	DELPHY Materialist feminism	BARRETT/McINTOSH Marxist feminism
Prime Target	Patriarchy	Capitalism
Materiality of ideology	Dismisses biologism suggests a materialist psychology	Sees it as central
Class Position of Women	Women constitute a class in themselves	Women as part of existing class structures
Need for Autonomy	Absolutely necessary	Must work with working class
Adherence to Marx	Includes sociology	Faithful method

The differences point to the difficulties which the premises of a materialist-feminism still entails, even in its later stages where it adopts poststructuralist and psychoanalytic theories of difference. What I would like to draw from this debate, as part of a materialist-feminist strategy for reading drama, rests upon the use of terminology. The terms I am most interested in are "status" and "group" and where these can be adopted to deal with the pertinent criticism that Barrett and McIntosh make of Delphy, that all women are not married, and therefore, not all women can be regarded as part of existing housewife/husband relations. This point raises a complex arrangement of terms later in this thesis in my study of selected plays by Liz Lochhead. What emerges as problematic there is a situation where an unmarried pregnant woman gains entry into a social order from which she has been previously been excluded by her conventional classed position.

The notion of "status groups" derives from the German sociologist Max Weber. Weber shared some of Marx's views but rejected others. Weber substituted for class relations the notion of "status" groups, which he described as self-designated groups often

denoted by caste structures; they were thus self-perpetuating by common characteristics, styles of life, and shared assumptions. These styles of life included consumption patterns, codes of honour, educational and occupational criteria, and thus nurtured a very specific code of membership, whether chosen or not. Very crudely, a status group differs from a class group because of different bonds between members; social and cultural criteria are included in status groups, whereas, class is primarily dependent upon economic relations.

Raymond Williams, in *Keywords*, describes "status" as concerned with rank and differentiated from the other concerns of class: group or formation. He goes on to outline its lineage and usage, affirming its increased use with reference to consumer goods and locating an interesting use of the term (for this thesis at least) as being to do with "status symbols". The manifest visual expression of status - through signs, or gestural signifying systems - is appropriate to my study of the extension of status within theatre. Williams is concerned to detail this emphasis upon the "status symbol" as a marker of "the reduction of all social questions to the terms of a mobile consumer society"<sup>33</sup>, and thus diverges from the earlier definitions of the term which are most applicable here, both for my argument and relevant to the ways in which materialist-feminism has talked of the "class" of women. One particular early definition in which he cites "status as free or slave" (1865) has a particular resonance throughout this thesis where I make parallels between the so-called "slave" position of women (as a class) and the metaphorical implications of that phrase in view of class conflict.

Feminist adaptations of the term "status" are evident in recent sociological practice. Sylvia Walby, in her book *Theorising Patriarchy*, indicates how the early 1990s represented something of an impasse in feminist theorizing of women's relationship to social class. At the same time, there has been a notable shift away from class-related issues in drama criticism, partly as a reflection of the influence of poststructuralism and Foucauldian theories of power. Rather than retaining Delphy's description of the class relation of women, which in effect is to call them a status group, but at the same time maintaining her emphasis upon the shared experience of women, it is possible to outline new terms. Men and women might be seen to belong to independent status groups in that they have shared experiences. Walby cites sexual harassment as a key example. On the

other hand, husbands and housewives might be seen as class groups in that the relationship between them is based upon economic terms. A contiguous relationship can be developed: one implies biological determinism and the other imposed origins; one is given, and the other is governed by economic prerogative. Of the type of social mobility and change that feminism is concerned with, both inter- and intra- generational restrictions will be seen to depend upon the self-identifying perceptions of the group.

Whilst Delphy's analysis is primarily at the level of economics, a similar materialist-feminism is found in the work of Monique Wittig. Wittig also repudiates biologism and its implied essentialism, and has proposed that "woman" is a social construct. This process of enculturation combines language and takes heterosexuality as its norm. It is her contention that the lesbian subject forms a further class group because of a given marginal position from the norm. Hence, she advocates a lesbian "revolution" in the reclamation of the spoken "I" from which the lesbian subject has previously been disempowered, and envisages a shift in power from the centre to the margins. This would depend upon a simple inversion of power structures, according to which Wittig discusses the overthrow of patriarchal discourse and the principle that women "constitute a class in themselves".

These areas point to the difficulties involved in adopting specific terminology the complexities of which are evident when the term status group comes to mean slave group, a position for instance that questions the continuing use of class conflict and revolution by feminist theory. This problematical definition and use of class in addressing the subject and collective position of women is further explored in my subsequent chapters where I also introduce further analysis of performance strategies and performance analysis. I wish to include a quotation here from Julia Kristeva as an introduction to the cross-over from the epistemological basis of social relations to the study of the stage and performance issues. Kristeva writes that:

The Women's Movement...by its negativity, indicates to all the institutions of the right, and of the left, what it is that they repress: for example that 'class consciousness' cannot exclude the unconscious of the sexed speaker. The trap for this potential demystifying force...is one of identifying with the power principle that it believes itself countering: the hysterical saint plays her

*jouissance* against the social order, but in the name of God. A question: who is God for contemporary feminism? Man, or his replacement, Woman? Any liberation movement (feminism included) as long as it has no analysis of its relation to the instance of power, or until it has renounced all belief in its own identity, is recuperable through power and through spiritualism...it is indeed spiritualism's last chance.<sup>34</sup>

What she is describing of relevance here is the notion of class-consciousness and the extent to which it is significant in the formation of autonomous groups, and also what is problematical about a group identity which will of necessity begin to replace one monolithic power-base with another. I would argue that the notion in feminist theatre criticism to pursue a feminist aesthetic at the expense of difference is a comparable position that might, for instance, replace aspects of naturalism and the "play" with what is ostensibly its alternative, the avant-garde and performance. That Kristeva speaks of the unconscious seems to me to echo an earlier debate I described concerning performance as the unconscious and theatre as the conscious, the conclusion of which was an urge towards difference and the notion of a dialectic in which the categories were mutually contingent.<sup>35</sup> The parallel here can be continued with the notion of sex differences and the ways in which group identity is shaped by its own restrictive terminology. Moreover, Kristeva is also emphasizing the complexities involved in the extent to which group identity, in this case the group of women, is both empowering and disempowering and the significance of the unconscious. It is my concern to see where these issues of social relations are evident in theatre. For example, can status be substituted for class and if so, what is the implication for existing notions of class relations? Also, if such a substitution is to take place at a theoretical level what are the further implications of this. As I mentioned earlier Kristeva makes clear the role of the unconscious of the sexed speaker, thereby indicating the significance of sex differences. This is an issue which cannot be emphasized enough in that it draws a necessary parallel between the politicization of theatre and the consonance of women's group identity with an account of gender construction and representation.

The point I would like to raise in relation to this depends upon an understanding of the performative nature of gender, where by implication, the fact that gender is performative suggests that it can be incorporated into a politically efficacious strategy.

This is reflected, for instance, in the use of performance techniques of "camp" in much recent gay and feminist theatre.<sup>36</sup> Susan Sontag's definition of the term "camp" with reference to Jean Genet is perhaps a useful one here, in that it proposes a relationship to both authenticity and naturalism that can be revised when social relations are being transformed by the input of feminist theory:

The whole point of Camp is to dethrone the serious. Camp is playful, anti-serious. More precisely, Camp involves a new, more complex relation to "the serious".<sup>37</sup>

Judith Butler has suggested the ways in which gender is performative through the incorporation of theories of phenomenology and performance acts and public actions, where "the body becomes its gender through a series of acts which are renewed, revised, and consolidated through time".<sup>38</sup> Her point rests upon the importance of time, repetition and existing notions of gender; she argues, against what has been a critical premise of performance theory (assuming sex difference), that what she calls "embodied selves" do not "pre-exist the cultural conventions which essentially signify bodies. Actors are always already on the stage within the terms of the performance" (p.277). This suggests an active involvement in the presentation and substitutability of gender in contrast to the implied passivity of the body assumed by poststructuralism, upon which social and sexual laws are inscribed. This distinction is I think critical here in that this active/passive binary is empowering and disempowering for the performer/character; this is important in that it provides two focusses for "reading": (1) the ways in which, through representation, sexuality and social identity are constructed on stage and thus read according to the aforesaid passivity; (2) the ways in which gender and sexual identity is conceived of as performative and therefore potentially active, that is, an ongoing performance strategy. Where the performer takes on a role for performing a part there is the possibility that she is either perceived as passive or active: gender will thus be seen to depend upon the conditions of the "terms of the performance", as Butler makes clear.

These conditions I will argue as being specifically related to stage conventions such as form and genre. They may also depend upon a clarification of social relations



which disempower, for example, the maid-figures in many plays who are passively inscribed as classed and sexed subjects, yet empower others through the acceptance and recognition of the performative nature of gender within the theatrical context, based on ritual for example. These issues then will be the subject of my next chapter where I examine specifically some areas through which theatre and theory are integrated.

- <sup>1</sup> On two occasions I refer to plays written by men as a way of introducing aspects of theatrical form. These are: *The Maids* by Jean Genet and *A Doll's House* by Henrik Ibsen.
- <sup>2</sup> W.B. Worthen, "'Deciphering the British pantomime': *Poppy* and the Rhetoric of Political Theater", *Genre* (Summer, 1986), pp.173-191 (p.173).
- <sup>3</sup> Barbara Freedman makes this point in her exploratory essay, "Frame-Up: Feminism, Psychoanalysis, Theatre", in *Performing Feminisms: Feminist Critical Theory and Theatre*, edited by Sue-Ellen Case (America: The John Hopkins Press, 1990), pp.54-77.
- <sup>4</sup> The distinction between the two terms is problematic. I am using the term feminist as an indication of politically-oriented theatre concerned with feminist issues. See Susan Bassnett McGuire, "Towards a Theory of Women's Theatre", in *Linguistic and Literary Studies in Eastern Europe*, vol.10: *The Semiotics of Drama and Theatre*, edited by Herta Schmid and Aloysius Van Kesteren (Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 1984), pp.445-466, and Lizbeth Goodman, *Contemporary Feminist Theatres: To Each Her Own* (London: Routledge, 1993), for further discussion of this issue.
- <sup>5</sup> Gayle Austin, *Feminist Theories for Dramatic Criticism* (America: The University of Michigan Press, 1990), see Chapter One for a discussion of different theoretical approaches.
- <sup>6</sup> Sharon Willis, "Helene Cixous's *Portrait de Dora*: The Unseen and the Un-scene", in *Performing Feminisms: Feminist Critical Theory and Theatre*", edited by Sue-Ellen Case, pp. 77-92.
- <sup>7</sup> See note 1.
- <sup>8</sup> Jill Dolan, *The Feminist Critic as Spectator* (Michigan: UMI Research Press, Ann Arbor, 1988), p.10 and p.16.
- <sup>9</sup> Sue-Ellen Case makes this point in her introduction to *Performing Feminisms* and it is evident also in Reinelt's analysis of *Trafford Tanzi* and *Vinegar Tom* in her essay, "Beyond Brecht: Britain's New Feminist Drama" included in the same collection, pp.150-160.
- <sup>10</sup> See for instance Jill Dolan, note 8.
- <sup>11</sup> Judith Newton and Deborah Rosenfelt, *Feminist Criticism and Social Change* (London: Methuen, 1985), p.xxvii.
- <sup>12</sup> Sue-Ellen Case, *Feminism and Theatre* (Hampshire and London: Macmillan Education Ltd., 1988), Chapter 5, "Materialist Feminism and Theatre", pp.82-95.
- <sup>13</sup> Monique Wittig, "One is Not Born a Woman", *Feminist Issues* vol.1, part 2 (1981), pp.47-54.
- <sup>14</sup> Christine Delphy's main thesis is "The Main Enemy" in *Close to Home: A Materialist Analysis of Women's Oppression* (London: Hutchinson and Co., 1984), pp.57-78. It was first published in French in *Partisans* (July-October, 1970). I examine Delphy's description of materialist-feminism later in this Chapter.
- <sup>15</sup> Rosi Braidotti, "Embodiment and Sexual Difference - is Feminist Materialism Possible?", unpublished paper presented at the International Conference on Feminist Theory (July, 1991).

- <sup>16</sup> David Ian Rabey in his introduction to *British and Irish Political Drama in the Twentieth Century: Implicating the Audience* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1986), makes this distinction between "social" and "political" theatre.
- <sup>17</sup> Michelene Wandor, *Look Back in Gender: Sexuality and the Family in Post-War British Drama* (London: Methuen, 1987).
- <sup>18</sup> Dorrian Lambley, "In Search of a Radical Discourse for Theatre", *New Theatre Quarterly* vol.vii, no.29 (February 1992), pp.34-48.
- <sup>19</sup> Lizbeth Goodman interviewing Charlotte Keatley, "Art Form of Platform? On Women and Playwrighting", *New Theatre Quarterly* vol.vi, no.22 (May 1990), pp.128-141 (p.138).
- <sup>20</sup> Julia Hobsbawm and Julia MacPherson, "Younger Women and Feminism: A Kaleidoscope of Old and New", *The Feminist Review* no.31 (Spring 1989), pp.135-140.
- <sup>21</sup> Alan Sinfield, *Literature, Culture and Society in Postwar Britain*, (Oxford: Basil Blackwell Ltd., 1989).
- <sup>22</sup> Lizbeth Goodman seeks to reinstate the significant role of the "author" in women's theatre by challenging criticism influenced by poststructuralist theory, of which she cites Roland Barthes' influential essay, "The Death of the Author" in *Contemporary Feminist Theatres*, p.20. I would challenge this and place my own theoretical position with the influence of poststructuralism, given that the playwright is traditionally more marginal to their work than in many other literary genres.
- <sup>23</sup> Teresa de Lauretis, "Desire in Narrative" in *Alice Doesn't: Feminism, Semiotics and Cinema* (London: Macmillan,1984), pp.103-157 (p.127).
- <sup>24</sup> Gillian Hanna describes this notion of theatrical form being comparable to the broken structure of women's careers in "Feminism and Theatre", an interview with Peter Hulton in the *Dartington College Theatre Papers* (Devon: Dartington College, 2nd series, No.8, 1978).
- <sup>25</sup> Peter Gidal, *Materialist Film* (London: Routledge, 1989).
- <sup>26</sup> Toril Moi, *French Feminist Thought: A Reader* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell Ltd., 1987), see the introduction for her description of French and British feminist writers.
- <sup>27</sup> Despite the continued difficulties in combining materialist and psychoanalytic theory it is a practice that many critics have attempted and continues to be useful for a materialist-feminist analysis.
- <sup>28</sup> Christine Delphy, "The Main Enemy", in *Close to Home: A Materialist Analysis of Women's Oppression*, translated by Diana Leonard (London: Hutchinson & Co. Ltd., 1984), p.57.
- <sup>29</sup> See Max Engels, *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*, for an account of his theories of class and domestic relationships (Peking: Foreign Languages Press, 1978).
- <sup>30</sup> Christine Delphy, "The Main Enemy", p.159.
- <sup>31</sup> See for example Jill Dolan's account quoted on page 12 of this thesis.
- <sup>32</sup> Materialist-feminist accounts of ideology are based largely upon Althusserian theory and this can be found in his essay "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses (notes towards an investigation)" in *Lenin, Philosophy and Other Essays* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1977), pp.127-86. Further discussions of the interactions between psychoanalysis, feminism and materialism can be found in Rosalind Coward and John Ellis, *Language and Materialism: Developments in Semiology and the Theory of the*

*Subject* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1977), and Chris Weedon, *Feminist Practice and Poststructuralist Theory* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell Ltd., 1987).

<sup>33</sup> Raymond Williams, *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society* (London: Fontana Press, 1976), pp.229-301.

<sup>34</sup> Quoted by Elizabeth Grosz, *Sexual Subversions* (Australia, Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1989), p.94.

<sup>35</sup> See my discussion of this issue with reference to Josette Feral and Barbara Freedman, page of this thesis.

<sup>36</sup> Where "camp" is seen as a parodic, exaggerated and stylized performance characterized by dressing-up and a heightened relationship to existing sexual and social relations.

<sup>37</sup> Susan Sontag, "On Camp" in *Against Interpretation* (London: Andre Deutsch Limited, 1987), p.41.

<sup>38</sup> Judith Butler, "Performative Acts and Gender Construction: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory", in *Performing Feminisms*, edited by Sue-Ellen Case, p.274.

PART ONE: CHAPTER TWO  
THEATRICAL STATUS AND GENDER

In search of a feminist and political theatre

Chapter Two is a continuation of the first part of this thesis in which I explore in more detail the relationship between performance strategies and the theoretical issues represented in dramatic texts. Here, I focus on performance strategies and maintain a concern with the notion of social relations but now specifically examine in more detail the extent to which, and the mechanisms by which, social relations are deployed in the theatre. Moreover, the relationship and parallel between social relations concerned with "class consciousness" and "status" and the significance of sex differences will be developed as the means by which I introduce the place of selected feminist theatres in relation to traditional debates.

In this first section then, I turn to see how the relationship between theatrical and theoretical contexts can be best approached, bearing in mind the theoretical context of existing debates within theatre and the ways in which the following terms: "political", "aesthetic", "genre", "form and content", "classic realism", "naturalism" have been, and continue to be, revised as part of a materialist-feminist theatre criticism. In addition to foregrounding these terms as key areas of concern I also include "action" and "melodrama". I suggest that, by considering the relationship between these terms and the ways in which feminist theatres have revised the earlier meanings of these terms and reconstructed their contexts, we are able to challenge conventional readings of them by a comparison with their earlier and patriarchal usage. All this is with a view to answering the following question: to what extent is there a specifically feminist and political theatrical form in relation to existing forms, or, as I have labelled them, genres?

To begin answering this question I must return to the second of the two quotations with which I began this thesis on page 12. Jill Dolan spoke first of the "class of women" - the issue of social relations considered in chapter one - and second, of the form that a feminist or women's theatre must take. I include the second quotation again here:

The intersection of materialist feminist criticism and postmodernism emphasizes that forms cannot be productively changed without an attendant change in ideology. Deconstructing the performance apparatus in postmodernist terms is not politically progressive unless the gender assumptions that underlie representation are also denaturalized and changed.<sup>1</sup>

Dolan is addressing the choice of theatrical form as a political step and the influence that deconstruction has had on contemporary theatre practice and criticism where, as the two areas intersect, the ideological position that deconstruction seeks to break down and dramatic form are made confluent. In the conflation of theatrical form and ideology the issue remains of the empirical "reality" that the feminist practitioner, particularly of early wave theatre located in political movements, seeks to serve. Establishing a direct relationship between politics and theatre is a concern that has beset twentieth century theatre and remains a perennial problem which there is little sign of being resolved, partly as a result of the kinds of splits between practitioners I outlined in Chapter One. In brief, the problem extends into a dialectical interplay of form and content which asks: What is the political goal of the art form? How far is the practitioner or writer responsible to the women she seeks to represent or address? And how far will the choice between conventional or progressive art forms appeal to different audiences?

I wish to refer to one of the key debates of the century here for two reasons: (1) It establishes the context of issues of this thesis, especially Sarah Daniels use of naturalism and social landscapes; (2) It opens the field of traditional theatre criticism to include the terms and debates of contemporary theory. The debate in question is that played out by the Hungarian Marxist critic Georg Lukacs and Bertolt Brecht. Lukacs invested much of his political vision in the study of literature and favoured the social realism of the French realist writers, Balzac for instance, as the best expression of a Marxist form. In the realist novel form he saw the social construct "man" drawn through a specific characterization which involved "man" as a social type in the typical landscape of the social whole. The leftwing playwright David Edgar for example, has been particularly influenced by this definition, and the possibilities it affords for examining historical contingencies and landscapes.<sup>2</sup> His epic play *Maydays* is an example. In such a context the inflections of ambiguity and psychological complexity - each spurned by traditional Marxist

perspectives - are subsumed within a clear cut and defined stance that is assumed to be easily understood by the appropriate and desired audience, the working-class.<sup>3</sup>

In opposition to this stance, which would advocate the social realism that Edgar was later to propose, popular for its clarity of form and expression through language, is the alternative tradition represented by the "avant-garde", a tradition that was to come to Britain later than to North America, for example.<sup>4</sup> "Avant-garde" is a term commonly applied to experimental and radical theatre designed in antipathy to existing structures - and is often defined as "performance" in contemporary criticism.<sup>5</sup> A salient feature of the differences between the two is the absence of the language-based text characteristic of realism. Brecht himself, in contrast to the expectations of his Marxism, preferred and accepted some features of the avant-garde, seeing them as significant in moving towards an ultimate goal of realism - the search for empirical "reality". For him it was not necessary to avoid a variety of forms in conjunction with this aim and as Terry Lovell points out, for Brecht, "Realism in art is simply art which reveals the real, whatever conventions it uses, while formalism is art which systematically distorts the real".<sup>6</sup> It is the ease with which Brecht incorporated elements of the avant-garde into his theatre practice that makes this theory so readily adapt to the terms of postmodernist criticism, namely, notions of the decentred subject, history as narrative.<sup>7</sup> Moreover, it is in this insistent search for the "true-real" or "reality" that the prominence of social relations is raised, the very nature of which feminist theatres are keen to explore.

The divide between a Marxist-based clarion call for an unambiguous and clearly structured theatre and an avant-garde theatre designed to challenge what Brecht termed the "culinary" style of existing theatre can be seen as still resonant in the divisions between women involved in theatre. Ultimately the issue is rooted in the concept of mimesis and the belief that mimetic models of theatre designed to "show things as they are" provide a point of recognition for the spectator and at the same time offer the possibilities of change and transformation in process. Specifically in terms of a feminist debate the issues have re-surfaced in the form of a discussion around the use of the term "classic realism", where feminist theatre criticism depends largely upon work in film and cultural studies.

### Feminism and classic realism

Given that leftwing theatre was traditionally concerned to follow the literary realist movement by using realism/naturalism as the form for an ideological theatre it is necessary to place contemporary women's theatre in relation to that tradition. I made the observation in Chapter One that women playwrights tended to re-experience the issues faced by male political playwrights previously and this is most evident in the debate surrounding a politically effective form in theatre. The transition inevitably has been away from realism towards different forms yet its significance is critical in defining the genealogy of women's theatre; this is evident in Michelene Wandor account of its importance to seventies writing where she says the "trend is understandable and can be compared to the rise of the nineteenth century novel when it seemed that "the most political way to write about the conditions of ordinary people was to record the details...".<sup>8</sup> The debate has continued around the reproduction of reality, specifically in Colin McCabe's reading of Brecht in relation to ideology, resulting in the proposition that to represent reality through naturalism is to interpellate the subject position of the spectator as central in a process of perpetuating that ideology.<sup>9</sup>

Subsequently it has been common practice to translate the term "classic realist text" (used initially to describe certain Hollywood movies) to theatre criticism where it has gained its prominence in the debates around subjectivity, ideology and readership/spectatorship, in particular, the ways in which the reader/spectator was constructed by the text he/she was reading/watching and the representations of reality constructed there. Given that feminist and other marginal groups have notoriously been excluded from previous constructions of "reality", it is inevitable that a conflict would ensue in choosing or refusing its theatrical reconstructions. For example, should a lesbian theatre pursue an anti-mimetic model of theatre or should it work within the existing structures in order to show up the oppressed lesbian subject? This debate is seemingly impossible to resolve in that naturalism can at any one time be accused of perpetuating the prevailing ideology or shown as capable of being subverted from within.<sup>10</sup> Subsequent questions raised in response to the debate are: What constitutes a progressive



feminist theatre? Also, the question surrounding the move towards a feminist aesthetic - should it depend upon existing models of realism and naturalism, or should it develop alternative strategies? And where is the consciousness of the spectator positioned in relation to all this?

It is my contention that in order for contemporary practice to be politically efficacious playstructure will have some relation to existing forms, and the changes in theoretical terminology will result in an inevitable change in form principally because if the terms have changed the spectator's position has also been transformed. Hence I have chosen playwrights who consistently make reference to previously established genres. The significance of the debate in feminist terms is most clear in the following example where political, historical and cultural contexts are not inconsiderable determinants and the event described was potentially of absolute importance for contemporary women's theatre in that it promised new terms and new projects. The "Magdalena Project", based in Cardiff, had its inception at an International Festival of Women in Experimental Theatre. This 1986 venture was the start of a project which has continued into the 1990s, offering a unique enterprise for women performers from around the world. Its appeal at the moment is fairly small, and the 1990 week which I attended was held at the Arnolfini arts centre in Bristol, the kind of venue associated with Fringe and avant-garde performances. Susan Bassnett in her book, *Magdalena*, describes an incident at one meeting suggestive of the residual dichotomy of form and content. She cites Margaretta D'Arcy as speaking for one side of the debate:

She argued that most of the performances had set up barriers between performers and audiences, that the performer appeared onstage like a 'princess'. She also felt strongly that the tendency to emphasize the visual and not the verbal was potentially dangerous, since images can often avoid censorship, whilst a verbal text becomes a statement that, once made, has to be dealt with by the forces of authority. This view aroused considerable sympathy, especially since Margaretta's own clashes with censorship in Northern Ireland had resulted in her being held in prison, but her suggestion that much of the Polish experimental theatre work she had seen was quintessentially reactionary and anti-Marxist was more doubtful.<sup>11</sup>

Bassnett's description of the debate illustrates its complexities, especially the diversity of approaches aimed at politicizing theatre. It also demonstrates a distinction, albeit superficial, between two types of theatre - the more traditional playform and avant-garde performance. Whilst the former deals primarily with language and confrontation, the latter is concerned with the presentation of images of repression and visual representation. It is this latter style which the rejection of what is termed the "classic realist text" has been concerned with since the seventies, particularly in the Althusserian influenced study of film, and which has its expression in theatre through non-visual cues. Subsequently there has been a move towards progressive forms which in theatre has involved the rejection of traditional structure and the preference for "performance", a shift inevitably following a trajectory towards its own formalist practice.<sup>12</sup>

Having described the genesis of the relationship between naturalism and the avant-garde I would like to reconsider the implications of this debate by pointing out that in the construction of the argument away from naturalism to the avant-garde there has been an oversimplification of some definitions, to the extent that the argument cannot be extended to include all plays. First, I would agree with the argument that the avant-garde moves towards its own formalist practice because it serves to emphasize what is an endemic problem of the avant-garde. Second, I would also point out that much contemporary women's theatre is not comfortably assimilated into the trajectory of the argument because not all women's theatre is defined in search of a specific feminist 'aesthetic'. By noting how far this argument rests upon the rejection of the "classic realist text" and its role in interpellating the spectator in a specific ideological arrangement we are, by implication, accepting how it necessitates a rejection of existing forms. However, it has been pointed out by McCabe himself in a revision of his earlier work that it is not always the case that new forms generate a critique of existing social relations but, in fact, may also incorporate and celebrate them.<sup>13</sup> Implicit to this argument is the assumption that women have always rejected previous forms and also that previous forms always had a base in the "classic realist text". It is this latter point I would dispute, pointing out that aspects of a rejection of the "classic realist text" have been in evidence since the time of Brecht's debate with Lukacs and that avant-garde theatre has a different genesis from

cinema, from whose criticisms of classic Hollywood the debate surrounding classic realism first arose.

Similarly, the term the "well-made-play" has been used with reference to Aristotle and recent theatre based in naturalism, primarily as a criticism. In this sense "well-made-play" would be analogous to a classic realist text. However, it is necessary to situate the term "well-made-play" as being historically specific in that it was a term applied to late nineteenth century plays, for instance those of Oscar Wilde and Arthur Wing Pinero. It is my point that to (re) coin these phrases as part of a critical attack cannot be consistent unless the historical specificity of those terms is first established. For example, in Chapter Three I make analogies between Sarah Daniels' contemporary issue-plays and the structures of melodrama - villains, action and heroines and so on. I would argue that this analogy shows her plays to have more in common with the "well-made-play" of the nineteenth century than with the naturalistic play or "classic realist text". It is more recently that feminist film critics have begun to develop theories which do not simply reject classic realism but rather address the agency of the female spectator and consider the disruptive potential of women's experience in film, a point also developed in Chapter Three.<sup>14</sup> A position such as this might be put forward as an alternative to a total rejection of existing forms. Crediting the subject position with agency and offering the possibility that the woman's role is empowering is a perspective that revises, ultimately, the traditional systems functioning between spectator and performer. Moreover, it also is empowering for those texts otherwise made redundant by a call for a feminist genre or aesthetic. It is to a further elaboration of the intersection of these terms that I will now turn, where specifically the influence of film theory can be incorporated into the study of theatre. Moreover, as was evident in the discrepancy between visual and verbal cues specified by Susan Bassnett in her anecdote about *D'Arcy* I shall consider ways in which these terms can be reviewed. To do so I am attempting to draw an analogy between issues to do with textual analysis and representations in performance.

### The spectator and narrative structures

In this section I elaborate the ways in which I wish to make specific connections between theories of feminist spectatorship and the contingencies of narrative accompanying it and representations on the stage. Through this analysis I hope to come to a set of parallel relationships with narrative arrangements that can be found in theatre. Having described in Chapter One a comparable set-up between women's experience of political theatre with the predominantly male playwrights of the late sixties and seventies I now wish to extend the parallel to include a particular transformation of acting styles around the turn of the century. This connection will be established with a view to exploring the complexities of the debate around naturalism, into which I hope to insert my own way of reading contemporary women's plays. It is also based upon the assumption that the transformation of acting styles reflects changes in the interaction of theatre with social systems. As a result there is perhaps a parallel to be made between the need for a move away from nineteenth century melodrama to naturalism and the concern of contemporary women's theatre to move away from naturalism to new forms and acting styles - performing the body and so on. Thus I will begin this exploration with a study of Ibsen's "feminist" play *A Doll's House*, written at the end of the nineteenth century where drama was characterized by melodrama and popularized in subsequent years in conjunction with what can be nominally termed the "naturalist movement".

I have chosen to consider aspects of this play in view of its situation during a transition stage of theatre and also because the historical time provides a convenient distance for assessing the extent to which theatrical transformations re-situated spectator, characters and critics alike. The scene I am particularly concerned with is the "tarantella" scene. My reading is based upon a distinction between the incorporation of feminist film theories of spectatorship into theatre as a process of reading performance on the one hand, and the perspectives of the theatre critic or the practitioner as particular subject positions on the other hand. For instance, it may be that the critic uses theories of the male "gaze" to read plays (as I will be doing here) or it may be that the practitioner has incorporated responses to the issues of the gaze - voyeurism, narcissism, spectacle - as

part of her performance. This indicates a difference therefore between on the one hand, representation and on the other hand, the existence of bodies on the stage, where the former can be read as to do with the exploration of social relations and the latter with issues concerning the woman practitioner or performer. I made this distinction in Chapter One where I referred to Gayle Austin's account of the use of theories of spectatorship where she prefers to use literary theory to "read" the texts. Here, I will attempt to "read" the text constituted by the "tarantella" scene with reference to the three distinctions outlined in Laura Mulvey's seminal essay on the subject "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" in order to open the avenues for an approach based in theatrical structures.

Imagine then the construction of the scene to be viewed. Mulvey delineates three central positions which constitute a viewing arrangement that can on the one hand, be used to describe a frozen image, and on the other hand, be used to describe a moment as part of the construction of a narrative. The positions are: (1) The director or eye "1" of the camera, a perspective which can be extended to include the spectator; (2) An internal "look", for instance of the male central protagonist, observing his female counterpart; (3) The spectator, whether conspicuously consonant with the director or not. Women are regarded in an ambivalent relation to spectatorial perspectives in that they may view a heroine for instance with a male or a female "gaze". Laura Mulvey has suggested that this in effect resembles a "transvestite" subject position.<sup>15</sup> It was Mulvey's argument that to engage in this spectatorial arrangement is to engage in a relationship she describes as Oedipal: the male spectator/director shares the desire for and control or mastery over the woman observed. In this instance the director as a figure is absent and I am concerned specifically with the second level of viewing, that is the internal "look", as a way of both discussing how the female subject Nora is constructed and also accounting for specific social arrangements deployed through the construction of "looking" in the scene.<sup>16</sup>

Nora is simultaneously the object of various "gazes": from her husband Torvald, from the syphilitic Dr.Rank and from her friend Mrs.Linde. The series of events leading up to the scene involve the disintegration of Nora's marriage as signified in the mechanisms of the well-made-play - an incriminating letter, the woman's untold and dangerous past, threatening male figures - and at this point she is eager to distract her

husband from finding that self-same letter. Her feminine "tactic", then, is to practice the dance of the "tarantella" in preparation for an evening's entertainment; in so doing she is performing an act which shows the persuasive acts of femininity to be performative. Torvald, her husband, observes her dance as hysterical, as "too real"; Dr.Rank is enthralled and evidently voyeuristic as he both watches and encourages her display by playing the piano in accompaniment; Mrs.Linde is partially excluded from the scene and stands by the doorway, often viewed as symbolic of Nora's escape route, as if from the naturalized world. Mrs Linde is entranced. The distinction between the two men depends upon Rank being excluded from a personal involvement and this allows for the distance implicit in voyeurism, for he is neither involved in a monetary or marital contract with Nora. The position of the spectator at this point, I would suggest, depends upon the date of the performance and this should emerge more clearly as I elaborate the implications of reading Nora as an "hysteric" by referring to accounts of the play as a case study in hysteria.<sup>17</sup>

At the time of the plays' first production pschoanalysis was a subject still very much in its infancy. However, if we trace the lineage of causal relations necessary to the early naturalist theatre an account of deviancy or abnormality arises in the play dependent upon different backgrounds. For instance the influence of Darwinism upon psychiatry can be discovered in Ibsen's construction of Dr.Rank, a man whose illness is a result of the debauched life of his syphilitic father, the primary account of causal relations thus depending upon heredity. To take this through further it is perhaps the case that Nora similarly shows abnormal behaviour and can be seen as an hysteric in that she deviates from the prescriptions of duty and "normality" laid down for her by her father and her husband.<sup>18</sup> Clearly, if this were the case then the "tarantella" scene would simply be indicative of the excesses of her hysteria. About fifty years after the first productions of the play a reading depending upon the transformation of Darwinian psychiatry by Freudian psychoanalysis became common and this was to see the play as a case study of an hysteric. Again, the "tarantella" scene is a demonstration of the behaviour of an hysteric that Torvald is the first to diagnose as hysteria, for it is he who witnesses her behaviour as not normal, as "not real" and therefore beyond the strictures of naturalism or

its relation to reality.<sup>19</sup> What is interesting here is the paradox resulting from a revival of studies of so-called "madness" in literature where, for instance, a woman displaying the tendencies of hysteria is viewed as either refusing the conformity of the male-oriented world or mimicking the traits of femininity - attention seeking behaviour, coquettishness and so on. What I am interested in here is the problematic nature of Nora's behaviour in relation to naturalism that I would suggest is located with reference to genre and to playstructure.

There are two points I wish to make here that expand upon my interpretation of the relationship of Nora's hysteria to naturalism and these are both to do with class and also to do with a pattern of viewing and narrative established in this scene, where, for instance, her display could be seen as a final act in the narrative of her breakdown. The first point depends not on the male "gaze" but rather upon Nora's effect upon Mrs.Linde and the implied class difference between the two women. Mrs. Linde, unlike Nora, works to earn her living and this is shown in the play by her sewing, a controlled and repetitive gesture which functions like a Brechtian social *gestus* in comparison with Nora's wild and uncontrolled movements. Her class position thus serves to distinguish the two women; not only is Mrs.Linde removed by her class from the scene, other than as an observer entranced, but she is also excluded from the relationship between looking and narrative and dislocated from the temporal structures that enable the men to participate in the scene, for she remains passive and entranced at the doorway. Hence the imperatives of financial difficulty (those which caused problems initially for the Helmer household) are transformed into anxiety for Nora and subsequently displaced onto the rhythms of the dance and the difference between the two women is reinforced. What is interesting about the scene is that if we were to read Nora's act as a denial of the hegemony of men, that is as a feminist act away from naturalism to a realm of excess, then the lower-class woman is not included. This can be perhaps further elaborated through my second point.

This second point is related to the rhythms of the dance itself, a dance which not only echoes the frenzied dance of one bitten by the tarantula spider, but is also traditionally a working-class or peasant dance in Spain. Nora then, displays her masquerade of femininity through the appropriation of behaviour from a different class

and culture, making it an artefact. Moreover, it suggests a ritualized and repetitive movement which not only contrasts with her previous decorous gestures - at first her demise is shown through the signs of dishevelled costumes, but also a move outside of naturalism as is indicative of a conflict between her gestures and the other stage signs.

This brings me to my next section in which I argue for the introduction of specific issues in relation to theatre whenever theories of spectatorship are being used to study performance, as at the same time emphasizing the significance of generic codes in determining our reading of certain plays. Very simply this is a means of clarifying the subject positions that are critical in determining an ideological theatre.

### Revolutionary acts

Joan Templeton in a study of feminist readings of Ibsen highlights the need for a study of genre:

If Nora is abnormal, a case study, then *A Doll's House* is an example of reductive laboratory naturalism; if Nora is a self-serving egoist whose unbridled thirst for power destroys her marriage, then *A Doll's House* is melodrama, with Nora as villain, and Torvald as victim, and act three is either an incomprehensible bore or the most ponderously unsuccessful instance of dramatic irony in the history of the theater. But Nora's critics have not claimed that *A Doll's House* belongs to any inferior subgenre. Applauding it as a fine drama, they engage in side attacks on its protagonist, sniping at Nora to discredit her argument and ignoring the implications of their own.<sup>20</sup>

What is made clear by Templeton's account is the difficulty critics have found in ascribing a theatrical genre to the play. And this is precisely why I chose it to look at here, for it, like the plays I study in the second part of this thesis, has elements of more than one genre, specifically naturalism and the well-made-play. Whilst the contemporary performer playing the woman's part will find representing self a difficult task in hand, it was a similar issue for the woman playing Ibsen's Nora. Thus, the play was written not simply at a time of considerable social and theatrical change, where playstructures were being revised but of necessity so there was also a change in acting styles.

Such were the requirements of this new play that actresses were reticent in choosing to play the part of Nora because the decisions she had to make were too great.



In addition the performer would be expected to determine the intricacies of the shifts away from melodramatic styles to naturalism when those intricacies cannot even be easily isolated in the play itself. A key term is that of "action" and another is "motivation". Hence where previously the term "motivation" was to do with "action", that is providing the dynamic behind a series of events, in naturalistic drama it became associated with the terms and conditions of psychological motivation.<sup>21</sup> In the "tarantella" scene Nora's ritualized movements may be accounted for by her exclusion from the naturalistic discourse through which Torvald defines her behaviour. What is interesting here is a difference between the visual cues we have and the verbal description through which Torvald sketches her hysteria, and this too seems to have an historical genesis. The two key figures involved in early analyses of hysteria were Charcot and Freud: where Charcot's work was characterized by visual analysis and Freud's by listening and verbal analysis. I mention this because in this scene the spectator is provided with both a visual impression of Nora's wild dancing and a verbal description of it as Torvald describes her "madness". However, and this is my main point, to interpret her behaviour as hysterical is only possible if we read the entire play and this scene in particular as naturalistic, because a positive interpretation of her hysteria as anti-patriarchal assumes that behaviour as reacting against something or transgressing established codes of meaning. Yet the play and acting styles can also be read with reference to melodrama and thus there is a conflict of interpretation as a result of the over-determination of genre here. For both the performer and the critic there seems a necessary requirement concerning genre if a clear interpretation is to be reached ultimately.

If I go through the steps of this discussion here I should be able to demonstrate my concern with the ambivalences surrounding naturalism and the need to develop new modes of interpretation. First, I pointed out *A Doll's House* as moving from melodrama to naturalism. Second, I suggested that the dance could be a necessary movement beyond naturalism, specifically to make a feminist point. Third I described, this kind of movement as something needful in later women's theatre and also a movement which needs a new kind of interpretation. This I would suggest is to do with social systems (for it is according to social systems that women occupy certain positions) and also to do with genre, because

ultimately the positionality of the subject - of the performer, of the character and of the spectator - is shaped with reference to the determinants of genre. It is the relationship of narrative and subject to issues of genre and form which preoccupies much of the following analysis.

As a way of defining a point of mediation between these issues I will consider contemporary plays with reference to the theatrical term "status", specifically because "status" is concerned with power relations and at the same time the ways in which performers present and rehearse those relations. It thus provides on the one hand, a link between performance strategies and genre, and on the other, an illustration of the ways in which social relations emerge through performance and also theatrical improvisation. This is the subject of the next section where I hope to draw some parallels between the theatrical term "status" and the sociological term used to describe the class group of women.

#### THE POWER GAMES OF THEATRE: INTRODUCING "STATUS"

In Chapter One I put forward the possibility of either substituting the sociological term "status" for "class" or using the two terms in conjunction with one another. I hope to show that the latter step is useful for reading my chosen plays, especially in that by reducing the focus upon class relations the term itself (class) is divested of aspects of signification which through convention it elicits in theatre. The less loaded term "status" is free of those aspects of signification. Clearly, a more sociologically-oriented perspective on the distinctions between status and class will recognize that it presents its own difficulties, but I am adopting a feminist sociological strategy which enables me to address "woman" as a socio-economic subject and as a gendered subject. It is a move which re-establishes the ways in which women of different socio-economic classes are defined; to see them as sharing in certain ways a common ground (as a status group), is to initiate the collapse of the polarity between bourgeois and working-class subjects. "Status" here is used specifically as a dramatic device in addition to its sociological meaning as part of a

move towards establishing a strategy for reading the transformations of social relations and categories for describing them by examining status as a "discourse".

In continuing to discuss bourgeois and working-class women I am confirming the resistance of a binary opposition yet this is opened to scrutiny by the inclusion of "status" in that the polarity is not simply class-based - issues of gender become more evident. Binaries are further evident in a change in focus from analyses of representation to those of production and the theatrical construction of notions of "self". For instance, as I have previously made clear, the early Women's Movement founded its epistemological bases on binary oppositions in order to describe women as oppressed as both gendered and classed subjects. Since that time, and this is where "status" provides a useful indicator, the notion of class oppression has been subsumed by a more Foucauldian perspective, and the terms of class warfare have been transformed under the auspices of a discourse of power. Foucault points out that, "As soon as there is a relationship of power, there is a possibility of resistance. We are never trapped by power: it is always possible to modify its hold, in determined conditions and following a precise strategy".<sup>22</sup> This shift is recognized in late eighties critical perspectives on leftwing or Marxist playwrights concerned with the details of class struggle and using the language of classic Marxism.

Dorrian Lambley in her article, "In Search of a Radical Discourse for Theatre" addresses the challenge of reconstructing theatre criticism in the light of these changes and, using Edward Bond's description of the triadic relationship between "people, authority and boundary", she makes the continuing concern of leftist playwrights with the individual and humanism.<sup>23</sup> The pattern of "people, authority and boundary" is reflected in the interaction of theatrical "status" where a similar concern for the individual can be seen in the concern with the performer and her/his relation to the emergence of power relations in the idea of theatrical status interactions. I will go on to explore this more fully but first wish to consider briefly the implications of discussing status and its historical genesis.

Theatre, then, is forced to come to terms with what is clearly a humanist concern in that people are included, and to elaborate and make viable the message of (the) "resistance" by redefining the language of discourse. Hence in the shift away from the

language of class analysis to descriptions of the discourse of power I will insert "status" as a medium with which to connect class relations and power relations. Support for stressing the use of the term "status" comes from the familiarity with which people involved in British Theatre will understand the term as traditionally a critical currency with which to address power relations. In this context any status relationship is always dependent upon power differentials; a class distinction being just one of them.

A further point here is that just as class relations can never be divorced from the discourse of power so too can status relations never be removed from the narrative arrangements embedded in the text - as was evident in my analysis of *A Doll's House* - as well as the variables of communication and signification that make up theatre. The relationship therefore, between existing notions of status and the changing nature of class is at the very least an ambivalent one, specifically because the terms of reference are in a state of constant flexibility and change. In the process of exploring this relationship it may be that new terms of reference are required to consolidate the power/status structure. Therefore, what will emerge is an understanding of theatrical status as dramatic or performance infrastructure being synonymous with, or reflective of thematic concerns; status may be used to examine theatrical structure as well as thematic issues. As a point of clarification it is necessary to investigate the significance of status as part of narrative structure where it may draw together or collapse previous distinctions between the pre-performance or rehearsal "text" and the finite "text". If this is the case then the outlined correlative relationship would lead circuitously to a politicisation of the theatrical source material: traits of form recalling content and investing it with a new significance. It is this route of discovery that re-affirms the political nature of descriptions of early theatrical issues - the personal as political, the problematic of the presentation of self and so on. Before detailing the variables of the discourse of status I will examine its historical precedents and specificity by turning to consider its genesis at the Royal Court Theatre, London.

### Status at the Royal Court

This significance of the Royal Court theatre cannot be overstated in the making of modern British theatre; the innovative practices and policies for introducing new writers and writers' workshops mark were especially notable. Writers such as Edward Bond, Caryl Churchill and Timberlake Wertenbaker have been nurtured by directors and managers such as George Devine and Max-Stafford Clark and Sarah Daniels' play *Beside Herself* was first staged there. Daniels is also noted for having been awarded the George Devine award.

One of the earlier generation of practitioners was Keith Johnstone who started as a reader and later became a director. It is Johnstone who coined the term "theatrical status" to describe improvisation exercises he developed during his time at the Royal Court, around the later 1950s when other key names were Ann Jellicoe and Edward Bond. Significantly the time was historically before the political imperatives of the late sixties so status was not immediately concerned with issues surrounding class. In his book *Impro: Improvisations and the Theatre* Johnstone outlines his explorations of improvisation techniques developed with particular groups of performers at the Court. It is in this book that we have the first description of "theatrical status".

*Impro* is divided into four parts and four areas of improvisation techniques: (1) Status; (2) Spontaneity; (3) Narrative Skills; (4) Masks and Trance. Status, the area to be explored here, is defined with reference to rehearsal strategies and improvisations, and in respect to various narrative structures where it effects a textual strategy. Because I intend to evaluate and develop the term as a theoretical referent I shall use the concept of status defined by Johnstone and refer to it as "Johnstonian status".

The notion of improvisation that inspires Johnstone's work has its roots in the theatrical exercises initiated by the experimental Russian director Konstantin Stanislavski. Stanislavski developed the notion of a "system" through which various issues can be addressed, including specifically the "truth" of performance, that is, the relationship between the performer and character and text, and the realism of performance (issues shown to be of concern in Chapter One of this thesis). Stanislavski's work credited the

solitary performer with considerable importance, for it was she/he who had to explore and construct the positionalities of her/his own body, physical and psychological prowess. The emphasis that this process implies upon the performer as individual and as source of "truth", both in relation to character and to performance, is clearly a problematic issue when the notion of the unitary self is consistently challenged by critical theory.

In the view of materialist-feminist critics informed by poststructuralist analyses of the "self", performance skills may rest upon a relationship between personal and political where the personal body is inscribed by political law, and deconstructive strategies have been advanced to unveil this relationship. As a result the performer, who traditionally relied on a conceptual understanding of the interaction between "self" and "truth", will have her/his trust in that relationship undermined, for they will feel that the presentation of self has been somehow taken away from them by a passive inscription of "social codes and laws". Improvisation may provide a point of contact between the passive and active projections of "self" for it introduces the idea that the personal can be easily displaced by involving the performer in the creation of many selves whilst at the same time having a framework or context of "improvisation" where a notion of self as "truth" and self as "performed" can be maintained and governed according to a theatrical criterion. It is my suggestion that as long as material from early improvisation strategies is incorporated into the finite text, either written or performed, the performer will come to feel comfortable with this problem of a disunified self, and neither she/he, nor the critic, will restrict its production to the disjointed practice of performance art. Status improvisation thus may be seen as an interventionist force in that it provides a locus at which the personal and the political are brought together.

Johnstone's work was significant in developing parallels with the plays of the Theatre of the Absurd, in which Beckett and Ionesco, for instance, were already showing the fragmentation of the individual. Hence it was at this stage that status improvisations may be seen to have already departed from earlier conceptions of improvisation and its peculiar relation of performer to character. The term "improvisation" then perhaps needs some re-evaluation, specifically to incorporate two issues central to feminist criticism.

First, there is the feminist elaboration of the idea of "masquerade", first outlined in Joan Riviere's "Womanliness as Masquerade", as a post-Freudian analysis of projections and presentations of femininity.<sup>24</sup> Here, women are seen to adopt a mask, or masquerade, of the social/language-based construct "woman", showing a woman's behaviour to be ultimately a performative strategy for dealing with a male-dominated arena. This is a strategy that moves away from the understanding that "woman" has intrinsic meaning towards a description of "womanliness" as essentially improvisatory and theatrical. Thus improvisation may not be simply a strategy of staginess which women adopt but an integral mode of behaviour.

Second, not only is "woman" regarded as a social construct but she is also determined by and defined through male language. Contingent upon these two points is a theatrical practice whereby the woman performer, devoid of male language, takes as her starting point the female body; for this was not only how she was defined but how she might show herself. It is my contention that this centralizing of the body must be included in the structure and nature of status exercises, for to begin to privilege the body is to take part in a deconstructive process, undermining the binaries of power and submission upon which the notion of status implicitly rests.

Johnstone's work failed to include these issues yet there is evidence of these as issues in his early study. His first steps involved the development of what he called "status transactions" as a result of teaching students to reproduce "ordinary" conversations. He found that initial attempts produced conversation characterized by a lack of distinction between weak and strong motives, for without a clear definition of motives Johnstone found communicative discourse to be disfunctional and unstructured. He suggested that each participant in the exchange of dialogue took on a high or a low status position, thereby enabling them to create a mode of communication akin to the mechanisms of everyday communication. He had found that at this stage, with no conception of status relations both participants were disempowered, and communicative strategies faltered. Having pinpointed a precise area of difficulty, and going on to devise a further series of interactions, Johnstone was able to outline a taxonomy which he described as textually relayed in Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*.

The first and most familiar category was "The See-Saw", ostensibly the clearest explication of the negotiation of status interactions. Certainly it is one most familiar to British theatre audiences, and similarly to audiences of popular culture: a comedic form based upon inversion. Marked by the persistent generic conditions of comedy, the pattern of inverting high and low status has its roots in early folk rituals such as the "Feast of Fools", and constitutes a device in narrative trajectory in which the pattern of inversion results in disclosure and is followed by closure. As a subversive and potentially radical form this theory is developed in the work of Mikhail Bakhtin, where that process of inversion is said to hold the possibilities of change.<sup>25</sup> In its theatrical context there is a tradition, then, of such processes of inversion, and, moreover, the extent to which the characteristic inversion based on social and sexual transgression is also accepted, in so far as it depends upon a clear and codified status interaction. An interesting comparison at this point may be made between the possibilities of theatrical status and the processes of inversion and disruption described by poststructuralist critiques of Shakespeare, where the staging of cross-dressing is seen to be contained, and therefore effect ideological closure, by the endings of the plays, but at the same time raises questions concerning the social construction of gender that are not contained by the form.<sup>26</sup> As Johnstone indicates, "We always like it when a tramp is mistaken for the boss, or the boss for a tramp. Hence in plays like *The Inspector General*, Chaplin liked to play the person at the bottom of the hierarchy and then lower everyone..." (*Impro*, p.36).

Johnstone continues his discussion with the caution that, "I should really talk about dominance and submission, but I'd create a resistance. Students who will agree readily to raising or lowering their status may object if asked to 'dominate' or 'submit'" (p.36), an issue which under the feigned camaraderie and familiarity of comic convention is subsumed through the rhetorical gestures of laughter. Furthermore, this raises an interesting dimension to Stanislavski's focus upon the performer, where the performer's body has the insistence of a social and material body for, if in Johnstone's experience students are unwilling to use the language of power and domination, a block is constructed that may well extend through the process of forming a gendered status, distinct from the existing perception of status as uninfluenced by gender. This



unwillingness serves to illuminate the nature of existing comedic inversions as being above all staged to the point where, by means of the displacement of certain concerns, the social origins or consequences of status interactions will be mediated and modified. Moreover, the discomforts or pleasures of the performer which are manifest in rehearsal may be disguised in the finite performance, where the imposition of the written text has veiled them. By recalling and highlighting evidence of an insistent presence of a source in improvisation, specifically the issues that emerged in the rehearsal room scenario where status games were played, it may be that concerns of gender and even class differentials will constantly (re)show themselves.

I have spoken to several performers concerning the ambiguous position of gender in status relations and we discussed principally the experience of status improvisations in a drama school context. Each actor concerned neglected to refer to gender issues as though these represented an issue external to status. I would suggest that there are two possible reasons for this: one, that the students conceived of status exercises as primarily to do with class and social disposition; and two, that issues of gender and sexuality were displaced onto social issues in the form of social status. Whilst this displacement may implicate the status position the performer takes, it will remain unspoken. Significantly three of the actors interviewed were describing their experience at the Webber Douglas Academy of Performing Arts, a training centre known for its classical focus and emphasis upon the work of Stanislavski. Consequently, they might have seen partaking in these exercises as simply a preliminary stage to which their own gender and class origins were subordinate and inconsequential - concerns to be left outside of the rehearsal room. Such an assumption rests upon the supposition that the performative existence, which acting essentially is, overrides class distinctions, unless they are useful tools of the trade.

Having made the point about the lack of attention to gender in the early status games it is interesting to note Johnstone's account of the place of the details of linguistic nuances in the status transaction, especially given the focus by women playwrights on women characters' dislocation from a male-constructed and dominated language. Structures of language and verbal communication are one dimension opposed to the gestural intonation more common in comedic or melodramatic form, and these point

more clearly to the sociological and anthropological significance of status. Clearly in verbal exchanges there are factors that cannot be displaced and constitute a status of enunciation. Johnstone describes one further set of exercises:

I might then begin to insert a tentative 'er' at the beginning of each of my sentences, and ask the group if they detect any change in me. They say I look 'helpless' and 'weak' but they can't, interestingly enough, say what I'm doing that's different. I don't normally begin every sentence with 'er', so it should be very obvious. Then I move the 'er' into the middle of sentences, and they say that they perceive me as becoming a little stronger. If I make the 'er' longer, and move it back to the beginning of sentences, then they say I look more important, more confident (p.42).

Here Johnstone is showing the exercises to be based on almost imperceptible differences, specifically when dependent upon language as opposed to spatial differences that indicate status distinctions. Where several of the points raised about status transactions in this section are incorporated into the playtext is the point where I also indicate "Johnstonian status" as the source for later developments of theatrical status to include specifically issues of gender.

### Status and the playtext

Caryl Churchill's play *Cloud Nine* is significant in the growing canon of British women's contemporary writing, and relevant here in that it was first produced at the Royal Court Theatre and its content reflects the transition from a clear socialist-feminism to the incorporation of power relations. Helene Keyssar in her book *Feminist Theatre* discusses the play as being based upon the key term "transformation".<sup>27</sup> In this sense, "character" is shown on the stage to be an unstable referent through the mechanisms of cross-dressing and double-casting. This term "transformation" can be further enjoined to describe and locate the motility of gender where it is described through theatre exercises, specifically status exercises, although Keyssar makes no connection with these; or her main concern appears to be with the advantages for a feminist deconstructive theatre in dramatically reconstructing and deconstructing gender.

In the rehearsal process for *Cloud Nine* power relations were directly addressed, as were its metaphors of colonialism, sexual and racial oppression. Max-Stafford Clark,

directing this first production at the Court, wanted to develop a play based upon the possibility that "people could change their lives".<sup>28</sup> In terms of the structure of the play - to be considered as essential in delineating the narrative arrangements into which status interactions are placed - the short scenes and historical setting constitute a spatial and temporal arrangement suitable for the "transformation" of power-relations to take place. Power, then, was explored in rehearsal through a series of exercises; the most familiar was to deal out a playing card to each performer when the number would indicate the power differential and colour would denote sex. The use of colour was a secondary development to exercises based in "Johnstonian status", highlighting the importance of previously unexplored gender issues. Churchill's stated preoccupation with Foucauldian notions of power accounts for the diffusion of temporal restrictions and emergence of power relations through chronological disruption, thus giving a less apparently linear or cyclical narrative structure through which status transactions might emerge.

Geraldine Cousin in her book *Churchill The Playwright* contrasts the processes of production of *Cloud Nine* with that of the earlier play, *Light Shining in Buckinghamshire*, saying:

In the *Light Shining* workshop the group had explored the material from the outside in, learning about a distant event and then finding out how they related to it. The workshop went from the inside outwards. The group began from their own experience and shared details of their personal and sexual lives. They examined sexual stereotypes, and the relationship between gender and status.<sup>29</sup>

Interestingly Cousins identifies the fact that the performers had been specifically chosen with their individual and diverse sexual backgrounds in mind, thus reinforcing a view that it is inappropriate to break down the interaction between sexual and theatrical in this instance.

If this was the nature of the rehearsal process then, what was the textual outcome? Bearing in mind the colonial metaphor, and addressing the formation of the female and the black subject, Churchill structured Act One of the play within the spatial and temporal landscape of Victorian colonial Africa. As a result, she put moral and social issues on display, and the extended family group of white rulers includes Harry Bagley as the

intrepid adventurer eager to sleep with women and men alike, a rampant widow, the unhappily married Betty, and children clearly confused by their burgeoning sexuality. Dramatically Joint Stock Theatre Company used the techniques of cross-dressing as a way of both exposing and examining the games of sex-roles and also as a means of illustrating the failing stability of the whole social and imperialist set-up.

The second Act is set one hundred years later and twenty-five years later for the characters and gendered status is now played out through uncertain sexual liaisons in seventies London; social status has at this point been replaced by sexual status. Significantly Churchill has chosen the landscape of childhood fantasy - a playground - as the place in which gender issues are deployed. Thus, she is challenging constructions of social and sexual identity in the early years of the children's lives. By taking a playground as a critical site in the play Churchill shows it as defining the boundaries of the sense of transformation and exchange, and indicating the shifting social and sexual status of the characters, and in so doing destabilising the resistance to transformation and the challenge to a prevailing social order that is all the more evident in Act One. Here, in Act Two, transformation tends to be random and libertarian, and in a traditional sense the act fails because of this, although it is possible to read the structure of the act as being confluent with the deconstructed sexual identities being staged there. In that sexual definition is seen to be constantly shifting its focus, the act tends to move away from any conception of an historical moment, and I would suggest that this is the principal reason for gendered status remaining at a sexual level. Thus any moments of historical specificity tend to be diffused by the increased emphasis upon free sexual expression; for example, the entrance of the ghost of a soldier killed in Northern Ireland and hungry for any sexual congress simply detracts from the social issues and complexities of the situation to which his presence points.

An example of where the concerns of sexuality are rather more historically specific is perhaps apparent through the evidence of status games. Antony Sher, who was a member of Joint Stock at the time and took part in the first production of the play, has described the scene where one man picks another man up in the park as coming directly from status games played in rehearsal.<sup>30</sup> This reflects the kind of scene or incident

common to early presentations of homosexuality on the stage and smacks of an Ortonesque style, and therefore might be considered a pointer of historical time in that the scene may constitute a specific and historical representation of sexuality on the stage.<sup>31</sup> The second issue of concern relates to the construction of the unified self as an issue in plays informed by status and transformation. Elin Diamond has questioned the consistency of the final scene of the play with a deconstructionist theatre, focussing mainly upon the construction of Betty as subject<sup>32</sup>. Diamond suggests that in the scene in which Betty embraces her other self, Betty, doubt is placed upon the way in which we see the play as an exploration of the notion of the (dis)unified subject. Whereas the strength of the play had previously rested upon showing a series of subjects made incoherent by historical and sexual confusion, this scene tends to serve as a closure to what is otherwise a disruptive and radical text. In effect the colonial subject is joined with the sexually enlightened subject; Betty at this stage has rediscovered the pleasures of masturbation she first found in childhood, in a sense thereby vitiating Betty's responsibility as a white woman in colonial Africa. This seems to confirm my point about the shift away from class and imperialist politics towards simply sexual politics, a point further reinforced by the single emphasis upon the middle-classes in Act Two. It may be, then, that Betty's own self-awareness and her (re)discovery of masturbation again is a peculiarly middle-class discovery making the act of unification re-enact the coming together of a passive and an active sexuality, a desired and a desiring self, to the exclusion of other issues and tending to maintain the binaries upon which Act One was based.

Interestingly Betty's soliloquy in which she describes her experience of masturbation is frequently used as a sampler for female audition pieces; for instance it is found in the new Methuen collection of monologues. As an introduction to the speech in the Methuen collection there is an interesting perspective on these issues to be found extra-diegetically: the instructions for "reading" the part comment on it as being a voyage of discovery for Betty, she having found a point of contact between her "self" and her body. This commentary serves to indicate a residual division between theoretical analyses of the performer as being subsumed by a study of subjectivity and conventions of performance constructed on a certain basis in "self". Moreover, this reflects upon the

ways in which status transactions as deployed in single scenes or through one speech, one performer and character, can be read in conjunction with or external to an overall narrative. Certainly by isolating this scene from the overall structure a very different reading is made available. The ways in which the single scene engages with the overall narrative is the subject of the next section, where it serves as the starting point for my proposed theoretical model based upon theatrical status transactions.

#### Status: an isolated unit of exchange

Up to now I have maintained Johnstone's description of status relations as "status transactions" but now wish to propose the substitution of different terms with which to approach certain issues. This involves the substitution of "exchange" for "transaction", a substitution which I will keep as central initially before examining the notion of the "status exchange" in relation to the idea that status constitutes a theatrical "discourse". An essay that can be used to elaborate this discussion as part of a dialogue is by D.Keith Peacock, called "The Play-Text, Theatrical Dynamics and the Status Interaction".<sup>33</sup> Peacock's concern is to establish a way of using a performance technique and "applying it as a comprehensive unit of *textual* analysis which may serve to unite the various elements which are contained within the model and which may be understood to generate its theatrical momentum" (p.40). He establishes gestures, sound effects, lighting and so on as central in defining the unit to be explored and in both senses shares the same project as myself. Where Peacock's analysis differs is in his concern to use the performance analysis as a way of understanding mechanisms of motivation, pace and emotional intensity; my project is rather to focus upon the ways in which social relations are deployed in a conjunction of performance and written text. His argument relies upon the substitution of the term "interaction" for "transaction" in order to accommodate the variables of theatrical discourses;<sup>34</sup> mine rests upon the substitution of "exchange", first, because that suggests there is a degree of control and agency involved between two performers or characters and second, that it makes the unit rather more abstract, to the extent that it is not restricted to time or context but may in fact reflect a more ritualistic because repetitive action, albeit always a social construction. It also suggests that the exchange is quite rigid

and less a continuous and interactive process that might be subject to more elusive variables, such as emotions.

This unit of status exchange depends not simply upon an interaction between polar opposites, as specified forcefully by Peacock, but is also characterized by substitution and an instability dependent upon the instability of gender and also notions of gender as performative and implicitly theatrical that have come to have a prominent place in feminist theatre criticism. An example might clarify this point: if the interaction were between two classed positions, as in the traditional master/servant binary, gender as an unstable referent is not clearly addressed, yet by using the term "exchange" the relationship may be foregrounded in order for the classed subject positions to become both classed and gendered. This is in part because the use of the phrase "status exchange" indicates the social and cultural function of the interaction, in that it recalls the anthropological and linguistic work of Claude Levi-Strauss where "exchange" is a key notion in the social, political and sexual transactions of society. This is useful in emphasizing the recurrent relationship of currency between women and money that is often the subject of status exchanges in plays, for instance, as is evident in Michelene Wandor's play *Whores D'Oeuvres* that I will examine in more detail later.

Throughout twentieth century theatre theory writers have indicated the extent to which communication or the theatrical impulse rests upon a dual relationship, a dyadic coupling of spectator and performer - a relationship that Jerzy Grotowski and Bertolt Brecht have demonstrated as the core of the theatrical event. However, this simple description does not sufficiently take into account the degree to which status functions on the stage, nor does it make any clear reference to the spectator. Hence in the substitution of "exchange" for "interaction" we are able to highlight the linguistic and cultural aspect of interaction with a view to addressing relationships that are not dyadic but triadic and sometimes unstable, for instance as effected in the performative nature of gender. In Claire Dowie's staging of her own plays the issue is apparent in that the ambiguous generic labelling of the work as a play or as stand-up comedy acts to destabilize the relationship between the performer and spectator. Again that relationship can be made uncertain when it is unclear how the performer relates to several different positionalities

of a subject. And again, this is a problem that may be resolved with recourse to my emphasis in Chapter One on the importance of sex-differences, in that whilst some degree of instability may be beneficial and perceived as potentially challenging and therefore radical, it of necessity relies upon a basis against which to fight.

In Claire Dowie's *Adult Child/Dead Child* the protagonist speaks to an imaginary friend and a status relationship is set up between the two. Yet we must ask whether or not the imaginary friend is simply one part of the fragmented subject of the protagonist? Or is she an independent actant in the exchange? Or are the speeches simply a part of the ostensible dramatic monologue structure of the play?

It seems then that whilst a specificity of actants involved in an exchange is significant, at the same time, the exchange may become more complex and dynamic. This, I would suggest, may be seen as indicative of where the status exchange can be understood in relation to the notion of ritual, where ritual constitutes a "source of the meanings in terms of which people's experience is culturally organized".<sup>35</sup> In short, the notion of ritual enables social relations and anxieties to be worked through, and on a less formal level this is evident in the exchange of games and play. I would suggest that through an incorporation of the notions of status exchange into narrative structures there is an apparent concern with the ways in which social contracts and conflicts of class and gender are being explored and understood. The unit of the status exchange provides a structure through which we seek to understand these variables.

Moreover, by examining the notion of the status exchange I am able to cut across the previously maintained boundaries between the rehearsal period, in itself of a finite temporal logic, and the "definitive" performed text in order to explore issues that are important to both. This in part reflects current concerns with the distinctions between performance and theatre. The French poststructuralist critic Josette Feral in her essay "Performance and Theatricality: The Subject Demystified" considers the physical and encultured positionality of the performer her/himself as being opposed to more traditional notions of theatre. Feral makes this distinction by describing the performer's relation to or interaction with text, with the spectator and with theatrical form, arguing that theatre is subsumed by performance. To quote Feral:



That performance should reject its dependence on theatre is certainly a sign that it is not only possible, but without a doubt also legitimate, to compare theatre and performance, since no one ever insists upon his distance from something unless he is afraid of resembling it. I shall not attempt, therefore, to point out the similarities between theatre and performance, but rather show how the two modes complement each other and stress what theatre can learn from performance. Indeed, in its very stripped-down workings, its exploration of the body, and its joining of time and space, performance gives us a kind of theatricality in slow motion; the kind we find at work in today's theatre. Performance explores the under-side of that theatre, giving the audience of its inside, its reverse side, its hidden face.<sup>36</sup>

Feral's account of the distinction indicates a division which recent feminist criticism, informed by poststructuralism, has been impatient to breakdown: a blurring of those temporal and spatial boundaries of text and performance which demonstrate gender as being inscribed and have the possibility of transformation by making gender a performative strategy. This kind of generic blurring shows the performance practices traditionally associated with avant-garde forms characteristic of performance art to be opened up to incorporation into theatre.

Deborah Levy's play *Heresies* was performed by the Royal Shakespeare Company women's group in 1986. Both Levy herself and the director were concerned to present in this play a "language for the theatre that was as daring in Form as in Content", and thus introduced a combination of music to denote character, and a mixture of naturalism and more surreal concerns.<sup>37</sup> A further feature of the introduction of performance art to theatre has been the demonstration of the body as being "inscribed" or "written" and the American performance artist Rachael Rosenthal for instance, has used this as metaphor. I have described elsewhere the potential conflict between the passive inscription or writing the body and the notion that gender is performative and therefore open to choice, but here wish to stress the significance of this collapse between theatre and performance for what I am trying to do in this thesis.<sup>38</sup>

First, it constitutes a way of highlighting how issues demonstrated or explored in rehearsal surface in the previously closed world of the "play" - perhaps most easily examined through the unit of the status exchange. Second, if performance is seen to show the under-side of the theatre and to be analogous with aspects of the unconscious, then,

as Feral goes on to make clear, there is a further analogy between Lacan's distinction between the symbolic and the imaginary stage, and Kristeva's distinction between the semiotic chora and the symbolic order also. To continue the analogy performance in each case represents the time before the child completes a satisfactory entry into the symbolic order and theatre that order itself. I would suggest is that in challenging that distinction, moments and issues subsumed by theatre as such are deployed through the re-surfacing of rehearsal concerns as status exchange. This makes psychoanalytic theory a particularly useful model. In this case the performer, and the performer's body, is seen to be neither confined to one sphere or the other but is rather a signifier in both rehearsal and performance. As I have previously indicated, the status exchange is always informed by a social contract that is most apparent at the early stages of improvisation, where the performer tries out social status and gender or femininity as being performative.

Whilst I will later go on to describe the ways in which status exchange is integrated into narrative as a way of reading texts, here I will suggest that the moment at which the status exchange is reinscribed on to the performance text can be as if "decelerated" for the purpose of study. As this potentially unstable exchange is momentarily transfixed for analysis we are able to address the relationship between spectator, performer and issue. Randi S.Koppen, in a recent study of theories of female spectatorship, suggests that such a momentary freezing of the stage image involves the search for a stable signified, yet at the same time maintains that this can only be momentary.<sup>39</sup> This is to take and understand the exchange both within the performance and as access to the pre-performance period in that through the deceleration process, a step by step staged text of bodily and physical codes, gestural and linguistic, illustrates where perhaps status moves towards being characterized as ritual, when ritual indicates the ways in which society is coming to terms with cultural reality. For instance, the power relations and the possibilities of performing gender that are the subject of status improvisations may be addressed by feminist practitioners who are concerned with the transformation of social relations that has come about as a result of the interventions of feminist epistemology.

The analogies I set up previously are based upon particular analogies between theatre and psychoanalysis and rest in part upon the traditional notion of theatre being the unconscious of society, in which case considering the formation of new social rituals given the context of feminist epistemology is a logical exercise. I mentioned that the cross-over between each of the terms used (semiotic and symbolic, imaginary and symbolic and so on) involves the satisfactory transition of the child into the social order. The Lacanian description of this transition of this stage depends upon this process which all children must go through, thus making it very much a social ritual to be completed by everyone.<sup>40</sup> That it is described as a ritual in part denotes the transformation from one stage to another, these stages in themselves being discrete moments. To extend the analogy further, each of the issues I will examine as part of the status exchange deal in similar preoccupations, with sexual and significantly also social identity and it is as if the status exchange charts that ritual process, in that it has a place in both rehearsal and performed texts. What I am suggesting is that the ritual process itself relies to an extent upon those places remaining discrete - staying as aspects of rehearsal for instance that are simply being shown in the performed text - in order that the ritual has a social resonance. It is this argument that I will extend throughout the rest of this chapter where it reflects primarily a concern with the boundaries and markers which indicate genre and indicates the difficulties involved in reading "performance" as a discourse without apparent limits.

The placing of the unit of status exchange as part of performance or theatre is a concern evident in D.Keith Peacock's work on status interactions and also Susan Bassnett's work on the semiotics of reading isolated units on the stage. This concern rests in part upon the lack of a clear semiotic system to which status exchange might belong as a process, pointing out whether or not for example it has been deliberately introduced to the performed text. Caryl Churchill in the BBC Omnibus Profile of her (1988) said that she could not readily pinpoint any moments in her plays directly arising from the workshop process, even though the process (as I outlined above) was a central part of the production. I have included here the scene which Anthony Sher, also interviewed on the programme as an original member of Joint Stock Company, pointed out as arising directly out of a status improvisation in rehearsal:

Act Two, Scene Two:

*Spring. Swing, bench, pond nearby. EDWARD is gardening. GERRY sitting on a bench.*

EDWARD: I sometimes pretend we don't know each other. And you've come to the park to eat your sandwiches and look at me.

GERRY: That would be more interesting, yes. Come and sit down.

EDWARD: If the superintendent comes I'll be in trouble. It's not my dinner time yet. Where were you last night? I think you owe me an explanation. We always do tell each other everything.

GERRY: Is that a rule?

EDWARD: It's what we agreed.

GERRY: It's a habit we've got into. Look, I was drunk. I woke up at 4 o'clock on somebody's floor. I was sick. I hadn't any money for a cab. I went back to sleep.

EDWARD: You could have phoned.

GERRY: There wasn't a phone.

EDWARD: Sorry.

GERRY: There was a phone and I didn't phone you. Leave it alone, Eddy, I'm warning you.

EDWARD: What are you going to do to me, then?

GERRY: I'm going to the pub.

EDWARD: I'll join you in ten minutes.

Thus it seems that whilst Sher, as one of the performers, could mention a status improvisation directly influencing the written text, the writer herself was less able to make those connections, describing the significance of the rehearsal processes more as shaping, to use Churchill's words, "attitudes" and "values". *What is particularly interesting about the Omnibus programme is the fact that it was made ten years after the first performances of Cloud Nine, during the late eighties, when the issues explored in the play - sexual and gender identity - are more public and have roots in perceived knowledge and beliefs. The ten year gap might in part account for the ways in which the incorporation of those issues, which at the time were both exploratory and revealing to many of the performers, in the eighties were regarded as commonplace. Hence, in this instance the aspects of status exchange evident in the performed text would have been more specific contextual indicators in 1978 than in 1988 where the incorporation into the written text would be rather more smooth.*

In a sense then status exchanges may have different functions or roles when part of an overall narrative structure or as simply isolated moments of exchange. Thus, the

status exchange can be seen to be subject to historical variables and discursive structures, as part of the discourse of theatre. D.Keith Peacock is interested in the status interaction specifically as constituting a point of interaction between the synchronic and diachronic aspects of the text, a mode of analysis based upon the assumption that the spectator is in a viewing position of diachronic and synchronic "simultaneity".<sup>41</sup> The spectator in this instance would be in an historically specific position from which to view the "frozen" moment of the variables of the discourse of theatre. Keir Elam in his early study of theatre semiotics introduced the idea of the discourse of theatre with a view to distinguishing between the text as finite and fully articulated at any single juncture in the flow of time and space and the more ambiguous "theatrical discourse" of multiple variables. It is his point, with a view to maintaining some kind of distinction that: "it is legitimate to term the multilinear - but integrated - flow of information theatrical *discourse* and the resulting structure articulated in space and time a *text*".<sup>42</sup>

Status too can be seen to have gone through various incarnations, from Johnstonian status being specifically non-concerned with gender, to its re-emergence as a critical theatrical term in contemporary theatre influenced by feminism. It also provides an interesting account of the ways in which sexuality has been theatrically deployed, as is clear in the extract from *Cloud Nine* included above. My next stage is to examine evidence of the role of status exchange in contemporary women's theatre practice, sometimes under different guises, and to suggest that the significance of status improvisations was not simply of concern within early women's theatre practice or theatre concerned with sexual identity, but was also of concern for other areas of the Women's Movement involved with examining the possibilities of sexual and social identity.

#### "UNCONSCIOUSNESS RAISING": A REHEARSAL STRATEGY

One of the main reasons for examining parallels between theatrical improvisation exercises and other group exercises is based in the fact that describing a series of exercises may serve as an index of the increasing use of theatrical models of role-playing and improvisation as a means of staging female identity. Contrary to the voluntary

involvement of the performer in rehearsal improvisation exercises, here I will explore similar strategies evident in women only drama therapy groups, where the same degree of flexibility is not there but the exercises are very similar. In addition I go on to explore several strategies for improvisation developed by the South American director Augusto Boal, specifically because in both cases there is first, a process of theatrical-style improvisation for non-actors, and second, because in both cases a concern with political issues is uppermost, where the "personal is political". I would suggest that the changing meaning of the term "status" that I hope to delineate reflects the changing conditions of performance styles and therefore, of improvisation practice - the key decades are the seventies and eighties.

(i) Feminist drama therapy

For this, the condition of voluntary involvement is particularly important in that the use of games and improvisations is not simply as part of the move towards a finite text but is rather part of a move towards healing, a process in regard to which the "performer" must be willing. The key text I have selected for an account of the nature of performance strategies in women's drama therapy is a handbook of self-help group work for women edited by Sheila Ernst and Lucy Goodison, *In Our Own Hands*. Like Johnstone's book *Impro* this book was the result of a collaborative process of experimental exercises devised by a women's therapy group and written up subsequently.

The experience of drama therapy is shaped by consciousness-raising, in itself a key strategy of the early Women's Movement, where through unleashing the imagination the individual is directed to a greater understanding of her self. Clearly this resembles an exercise strategy which rests upon a mimetic model of theatre, where the experience of self is, for the individual, part of the process of projecting a social self. It is, to use Geraldine Cousins' phrase describing the rehearsal process of Caryl Churchill's plays, making theatre "from the inside to the outside".<sup>43</sup> Sheila Ernst and Lucy Goodison were invited to write *In Our Own Hands* by The Women's Press in 1977, a time, they say, when the therapy group it is based upon was beginning to fragment (as was the Women's Liberation Movement as a whole). The comparison does not end there, as Ernst and Goodison make clear in their introductory chapter, "Unconsciousness Raising", so named

because coming to terms with the idea of "woman" as a social construct meant "Recognizing that we needed to unlearn this conditioning, we started to bring to the surface some of our repressed feelings" (p.4), demonstrating the necessity to show or theatricalize aspects of one's self otherwise internalized or subsumed within the unconscious. Part of the process of demonstrating, or acting out, or improvisation, involved exploring the relationship between the personal and the political, as it shaped social institutions for instance. They make the point that:

We saw a clear link between our 'personal' feelings as women and the political structure we live in. These realisations gave us the strength to act together...women's liberation was, initially, far more therapeutic than therapy. Women involved in the movement were generally happier, more confidently active, braver and more angry. We believed that direct struggle against oppression in the home and outside it, together with solidarity with other women, would lead to rapid change (p.3).

Ernst and Goodison then go on to chart the years of the therapy group, focussing on various kinds of exercises with which women were able to come to terms with that relationship of the personal to the political, and to find their own place, or sense of 'self' within it. Although they chart the relationship of the self-help group to existing psychological theories, Gestalt for instance, Ernst and Goodison also draw on similar themes to Johnstone's own work in *Impro*. They too include both the development of personal and public narratives and have also considerable recourse to the wellsprings of "the imagination. However, in that *In Our Own Hands* is a book coming directly out of the Women's Movement there is an especial focus upon the body and women's relationship with their own bodies. For example, part of the exercise process is a discovery of self when that involves being able to "speak the body", where for instance, the individual is empowered through an exercise in which she adopts the voice of her vagina, relating and addressing its experiences perhaps for the first time. In addition, and this is where I would suggest that the exercises become status-based, she may practice her right to speak as a woman by exercising her right to say "no": repeating this at will as she crosses and recrosses the room. This denotes an exercise developed as part of a series called "Letting the Body Speak" and specifically called "Stamping", where:

People simply stamp round the room, repeating a suitable phrase like 'Shut up!', 'No!' or 'Me! 'Me!' You may leave it open for people to improvise phrases, or you may decide on one phrase which feels right to the group. People should focus on letting their weight down into the stamp and feeling the ground under their feet as they shout.

You might like to experiment with stamping and shouting 'Me! 'Me!', then seeing how the feeling and movement change if you alter the phrase to 'I! 'I!' (p.126).

This example is based primarily upon the patterns of incantation and repetition which enable the performer to learn strategies of resisting existing status or power relations. Moreover, there is for the performer a direct correspondence between the physical and linguistic, and the focus of the act changes as she transfers attention from one other actant (to whom she may have shown anger or frustration) towards a focus upon self. In a sense what she is doing by extending the initial phase of the exercise to involve a repeated phrase and further concerns is building up a narrative of which she is the central protagonist. It is this process of discovering self or learning to present self which bears most resemblance to the theatrical explorations of female identity I look at later and which constitutes a re-inactment or acting out of images of self.

(ii) Augusto Boal: politicizing the self

Augusto Boal's work derives from what is ostensibly a very different tradition of theatre, one based implicitly in the Marxist resistance to classic theatre Boal finds in Brecht's theses on theatre. However, it is related, I would suggest, not only in that his work is there as part of a public forum through which actors and non-actors alike may address particular issues, but also in the emphasis he places upon the political nature of performance gestures. It is through Brecht that the isolated gesture or mechanism is foregrounded and highlighted as a social gest and Boal incorporates this into his open platforms. Moreover, in his most recent book *Games for Actors and Non-Actors* Boal describes a series of exercises he has developed primarily in his native Latin America, which basically involve the public as practitioners along with trained performers in what are essentially public stagings of improvisations.<sup>44</sup>

In terms of the cross-overs between the rehearsal period and the finite and performed text I have been concerned to establish, Boal's work is similar, specifically in that he constructs scenarios which may or may not develop as independent narratives



around the work of people he describes as "lay-performers". (I am here using the term "performer" simply with reference to acting, and not to include the idea of "performing" the construct of woman or femininity).

Boal's work has a further resonance in that he is constantly seeking to retain the class bias which I will later demonstrate as having an important place in recent women's theatre. Transactions between sex and money were evident concerns in plays around the late seventies, for instance Michelene Wandor's play *Whores D'Oeuvres* deals with that relationship by examining the social identities of two women prostitutes. As Boal's work makes clear, again through his readings of Brecht, class is still of central concern and he develops his account of gestures by exploring them with reference to Brecht's theory of alienation. However, this is seen not simply to be a theatrical issue because Boal's work extends beyond conventional theatre boundaries, taking aspects of everyday life as the basis of a theatrical exploration. For example, he makes clear a connection between the physical language pertaining to job related postures in the same way that Reich did: just as an office worker is alienated through the work process, so will there be a physical alienation between the upper and lower bodily parts. Two points are worth considering here: one, that the work-related gesture is characterized by repetition and not simply an idiosyncratic or transitory gesture and two, that traditional distinctions between male and female labour will have resulted in a division between sex/class systems.<sup>45</sup>

In order to stage this process of acting out personal scenarios publicly Boal chose public places in which to stage his semi-improvised theatre - a tube station, a town square and so on. This he describes as "Forum Theatre". Each programme of improvisation he has developed is seen to be dependent upon the class background of its participants. For example, one improvisation involved setting up a scenario in which a man left his wife in one country for another woman in a different country (Boal, p.145). The extent to which his actions were condoned by the spectators was very much dependent upon the financial security of his wife, and ultimately Boal was introducing a class-analysis as a premise for organizing his improvisations.

A useful distinction he goes on to make is that between "games" and "exercises":

The goal of the exercises is a better awareness of the body and its mechanisms, its atrophies and hypertrophies, its capacities for recuperation, restructuring, reharmonisation. Each exercise is a 'physical reflection' on oneself. A monologue. An introversion. The games, on the other hand, deal with the expressivity of the body as emitter and receiver of messages. The games are a dialogue, they require an interlocutor. They are extroversion.<sup>46</sup>

What Boal is elaborating here is the assumption that the performer's body constitutes a site of exploration. Rather than that body, being simply inscribed by a semiotic system, he is drawing attention to the performer's own search for their own 'self', given that the performer is established in a kind of dialogue. Thus he has established the exercise as a kind of inner exploration, to do with the performer specifically, and the game as a mechanism through which the performer develops an exchange with external conditions and frameworks. In the latter, the notion of the game always identifies the performer in relation to another person or persons, and also to the assumptions of a "reality" principle. In the extent to which women performers are always seen to have to come to terms with an understanding of themselves in relation to the performative nature of femininity, it might be the case that the distinction between the exercise and the game is not so easily made, and any exploration of self implies a social dialogue given the terms of extroversion, as opposed to introversion, that Boal distinguishes.

The problematical distinction between games and exercises, introversion and extroversion, that Boal's terms highlight for the female performer is developed in my next \*section where I include an example of a specific feminist use of status exchange.

### (iii) Feminist strategies

Helene Keyssar in her essay "Staging the Feminist Classroom: A Theatrical Model" describes her own exploration of the relationship between feminism and pedagogy using theatre strategies.<sup>47</sup> In part she works with material gleaned from the introduction, by the playwright, to Caryl Churchill's *Cloud Nine* in which there is a description of the kinds of theatrical exercises and improvisations we know as status exchanges. Keyssar herself has not named them as such.

The process of production Keyssar was engaged with was the move towards a production based upon extensive improvisation work, beginning with simple trust exercises. Like Boal, she was working with actors and non-actors alike. After the initial

exercises she began an exercise - which I would call a status exchange - in which: "The class divided in half so that one group was 'audience', the other performers; they repeatedly alternated in these roles. Each performer received a playing-card whose number identified her/his quantity of power..." (p.111). She later extended the game so that the card indicated gender in addition to power. In her assessment of the resulting improvisations, Keyssar points out the extent to which the demarcation of gender/status in the exercises consistently showed women taking a lower position than men, even when their power was the same:

In the first trials of this exercise, stereotypical gestures of voice, physical aggression, manipulation, or choice of words tended to dominate the expression of power. Once one group had witnessed another's performance, however, that group would try for more subtle and varied expressions of power or weakness: silence became a key weapon, as did wit and the placing of the body in more or less vulnerable positions (p.112).

That Keyssar makes a point of noting different strategies that the performers developed in order to deal with status differences (of both power and gender) illustrates various ways in which feminist theatre companies have demonstrated the subject positionalities of women - through silence, through entry into male discourse by 'wit' and so on. Clearly, her work led to an increased emphasis on gender and the ways in which it interacts with power to produce positions related to strength and vulnerability. In this sense Keyssar was moving on from the earlier examinations of sex/power status exchanges by Max Stafford-Clark for *Cloud Nine* where the relationship was more to do with sexual preferences and statements.

I have looked so far at three performance contexts in which theatrical strategies have been associated with and incorporated into what are ostensibly non-theatrical arenas: the nurturing environment of the therapy group meeting-place; the public platforms of the "Forum Theatre"; the classroom. In a sense, then, these have been based upon the assumption that there is an interaction between theatres and non-theatres based upon recognizably similar processes of improvisation. In a sense, each of these have been more akin to rehearsal strategies, in which issues to do with class and gender are first aired, than

to do with the written text. I would suggest that they emerge in the written text also, where the playwright makes use of "games" or exchanges as a means of specifically exploring the interaction of class and gender and, by implication, the ways in which social relations are deployed. I will explore this through examination of isolated moments within selected plays, where the status exchange is perceived as if a transfixed or frozen moment.

### The single unit and the playtext

I have previously described the status exchange as denoting what are essentially performance strategies. Given that it is the premise in contemporary theatre criticism to read the dramatic text in conjunction with performance strategies, I am suggesting that by isolating a single scene from a play, these two can be read at the same time. I have included extracts from two of Liz Lochhead's plays where, I would suggest, a semiotic system is constructed to include both the dramatic and the performed text, that specifically points to a relationship beyond the theatrical text to specific historical concerns. At the very least, these examples rely on the assumed knowledge of the spectator whose task it is to read the configuration of stage signs.

First, I would like to turn to an account of contemporary uses of the term *mise-en-scene* as a tool in exploring the isolated moment, and in particular, Patrice Pavis' description of the term. In his book *Theatre at the Crossroads of Culture* Pavis describes how responsibility for reading *mise-en-scene* lies with the spectator (of film and theatre alike) and makes a short apology to theatre directors who, according to this system, are excluded from constructing a stage picture of which they previously had been a critical part. His point is that,

*Mise-en-scene* uses stage actions to 'question' the dramatic text. *Mise-en-scene* is always a parable on the impossible exchange between the verbal and non-verbal: the non-verbal (ie. staging and the choice of a situation of enunciation) makes the verbal text speak, reduplicating its utterance, as if the dramatic text, by being uttered on the stage, were able to comment on itself, by giving prominence to what is said and what is shown.<sup>48</sup>

Although he describes it as an "impossible exchange" Pavis is, in fact, locating a kind of dialogue, or dialectic even, between the dramatic text and the performed text so that the interaction between the two can be seen to have an ideological function. It is with reference to this notion of an exchange that I will now consider two examples of staged scenes.

The first is the final scene of Liz Lochhead's *Mary Queen of Scots Got Her Head Chopped Off*. In this scene the spectator is witness to a reworking of characters and themes from the previous scenes in the play through a process of making the material contemporary through a reconstruction of the re-surfacing of history through childhood games and songs. We see several children, all of whom are doubled from previous parts, where they played adults, goading one small child and singing a song about the decapitation of Mary. In effect, the idea of the performer as a continuous subject has been split and we return to a childhood scene with which, as Ilona S. Koren-Deutsch points out in her essay "Feminist Nationalism in Scotland: *Mary Queen of Scots Got Her Head Chopped Off*", most Scottish audiences will be familiar.<sup>49</sup> The scene moves, according to the rhythms of the song, towards its final image in which the children reach for an imaginary crown. At this point the scene is constituted by a tableau and its tropes can be seen to register a move away from the song itself back to the subject of the play and its historical precedents, for this is no child being tormented but instead a queen being tortured. Here, it is as if there is a momentary discrepancy between linguistic signs and gestural images.

The second scene I have chosen also relies on a semiotic system of which issues external to the stage world are central in shaping the position of the spectator in viewing. It is a scene taken from Lochhead's adaptation of Bram Stoker's *Dracula*, and one which I would suggest can be read with reference to Fredric Jameson's distinction between "parody" and "pastiche" in which a text establishes a relationship with a previous text for example.<sup>50</sup> The relationship of the former is based upon an implicitly political gesture, and the latter is regarded as essentially non-political, and in fact may be the result of a nostalgic desire to incorporate an existing text into a new one. I would suggest that in Lochhead's adaptation, the distinction is not always clear-cut and the assumed fixity of the

spectator, reading what she/he will almost certainly assume to be a feminist re-working of Stoker's text, will be challenged by a process of adaptation that at times is constructed as part of the dramatic text, and at other times, constructed as part of the performed text.

The example I have chosen is located at the point where Jonathan Harker is seduced by Dracula's vampire brides:

*(JONATHAN lying back in thrall. VAMPIRE 3 (LUCY) advances and bends over him until he can 'feel the movement of her breath upon [him], sweet, honey-sweet [send] the same tingling through the nerves as her voice but with a bitter underlying the sweet, a bitter offensiveness as one smells in blood'. JONATHAN is 'afraid to raise his eyelids but looks out and sees perfectly under the lashes'. VAMPIRE 3 'goes down on her knees and bends over him, fairly gloating. There is a deliberate voluptuousness which is both thrilling and repulsive and as she arches her neck she actually licks her kips like an animal till he can see in the moonlight the moisture shining on the scarlet lips and on the red tongue as it laps the white sharp teeth.'... (p.100).*

What Lochhead has done here is use Stoker's written text as constituting extra-diegetic information for her own performance text, that is, providing information for the performers as to how they should re-enact this scene as a parody of Stoker's own evident anxiety about a threatening female sexuality. What must be remembered, however, is that actually this whole paragraph is, in effect, extra-diegetic, that is, additional to the narrative, and therefore the spectator will have no access to the prescribed text being parodied other than through the performance itself. And how can the parody of Stoker's text always be assured?

I will examine the passage a little more closely in order to explore the problematical relationship between the dramatic and the performed text. In it, there is a clear connection between "woman" and animal sexuality. For Jonathan especially, the women are both "thrilling and repulsive" and "send a tingling through the nerve" and at this point there is no distinction between the woman/animal. Thus the women are seen as threatening both as a kind of sexual overcoming and as causing a rift between an unambiguous and patriarchal definition of woman as something to be contained, and at the same time as "woman" as something Other. This is further evident in the slippage between metaphor and reality we perceive in the line, the "bitter offensiveness as one smells in blood", and at this point the women are most clearly abject. An inversion which

the intertextual reference evokes is that between the passive and active roles in seduction; Jonathan does not seduce by his passivity, as women are invariably seen to do, but is simply the object of these womens' seductive strategies.

What Lochhead is doing here is demonstrating for a contemporary audience the ways in which Stoker's preoccupation with images of woman as whore, as temptress and abject emerge through the constructions of a fantasy. However, I would suggest that the scene may elicit ambivalent readings, depending largely on the extent to which the spectator has access to the extra-diegetic (and written text) on the one hand, and the degree to which the scene is performed parodically on the other. It is through this potential difficulty that the terms pastiche and parody are most useful. For example, the performer playing Lucy, playing a vampire, is involved in re-enacting Stoker's text as extra-diegetic, and in making his text part of the staging instructions is demonstrating a relationship to it, or reading of it - thus the scene can be read as parodic and in keeping with the whole play. The role of the performer, I would argue, is foregrounded in this case. If, alternatively the spectator has not placed this reconstruction within the context of a feminist revisionary practice, it may be indeed the case that there is a deferral to *mise-en-scene*. If this were so, then the performer's role would be virtually subsumed, and the parodic nature of the incorporation of Stoker's text as extra-diegetic would reflect instead the apolitical pastiche. Or, indeed, it may not be in evidence at all.

I would suggest that I have here pointed out one of the potential difficulties to be found in the relationship between the dramatic text and the performed text, or dramatic action. In Lochhead's adaptation it is not simply the case that the spectator reads both simultaneously but also that she/he must read the performative strategies as not only closely linked but following up features of the dramatic text. To an extent this suggests the inherent difficulties in foregrounding or isolating a single scene or *mise-en-scene* and also seems to affirm reading each scene always with reference to the overall narrative arrangement. I would suggest that this is partly true, and will later turn to examine the place of the isolated image or performative strategy as critical in defining narrative, but first will turn to consider a few examples where status-like exchanges are foregrounded in

another of Liz Lochhead's plays, *Blood and Ice*, where a notion of games as working through some kind of social anxiety is prevalent.

I have mentioned the notion of games several times already, and in this instance the game can be seen as a direct reference to the incorporation of status exercises as part of a playtext that Johnstone noted in Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*. However, given the feminist conceptualization of many of these revisionary-type plays, the game in itself may not simply be seen to resemble the facile exchange of Beckett's characters, but instead can be seen to illustrate central preoccupations of feminism, specifically a relationship between constructions of social and sexual identity. For example, in Lochhead's *Blood and Ice* we witness a performed game of blind man's bluff in which Mary Shelley, Shelley and Claire Clairmont on one level are simply playing a game, and on another level, through a series of reversals and mutual blindness, demonstrate an excess of meaning through which sexual tensions and the menage-a-trois is clearly apparent.<sup>51</sup> First, the game seems to provide a structure of exchange for which reference to the subject of the whole play, and its literary premise, is necessary. Second, in itself the scene functions almost like a pastiche of pre-performance exercises (status), as if it is here that the pre-textual issues are transcribed to the performance text itself. This recalls Pavis' description of the *mise-en-scene* showing the performed text to make a comment on the dramatic text. Moreover, that there is this relationship between the resonance of pre-performance exercises and performed text games in itself pays testament to the notion that women always perform femininity. It is worth making clear at this stage that I am not simply describing a specifically feminist practice but instead a textual arrangement that lends itself to a feminist reading or treatment.

My second example of the use made of games is also taken from Lochhead's *Blood and Ice*, and is based upon a proposition made in Chapter One that theatre implicitly deals with what Edward Bond has called a triadic relationship between "people, boundary and authority".<sup>52</sup> This triadic relationship is worked through as part of the process of constructing the game whose participants include the three Romantic figures described earlier and also Lord Byron and Mary's maid, Elise. The scene depends upon a kind of homosocial bonding in which Byron discusses Godwin through Mary as a



mediator; this reflects Shelley's own interest in Mary that came indirectly as a result of his friendship with her father. It is entirely naturalistic and the game emerges as Byron goads Mary for wearing her "...mother round her neck and her father on her sleeve" (Act one, scene one, p.94). She is described as wearing a pendent containing her mother's picture and this functions as an insignia. Mary, who is at all times seen to have a certain intellectual prowess is taunted by Byron and enters into a debate concerning her father's philosophy that soon turns to a mock experiment into which Byron brings the maid, purely through a social compulsion. Elise is obviously an unwilling participant in the exchange and this is compounded by Byron collapsing her sexual and material identity as he asks, "For a livelihood, Elise. Who are you?". There is one moment in the scene where Elise challenges his expectations of her/her social identity by telling him that she can read, and yet the moment passes as he refigures her as simply an extension of Shelley's unusual antics, that is, educating the lower-classes.

The exchange that follows constitutes a dramatization or acting-out of Godwin's fable of the philosopher and the fire, a debate shown in his novel *Caleb Williams*, that is, for Byron, merely a game. The issue is this: in the case of a fire, who should be saved - the philosopher or the servant? Godwin poses the following analysis:

Supposing the chambermaid had been my wife, my mother or my benefactor. This would not alter the truth of the proposition. The life of Fenelon would still be more valuable than that of the chambermaid; and justice, pure, unadulterated justice, would still have preferred that which was most valuable. Justice would have taught me to save the life of Fenelon at the expense of the other. What magic is there in the pronoun 'my', to overturn the decisions of everlasting truth? My wife or my mother may be a fool or a prostitute, malicious, living or dishonest. If they be, of what consequence is it that they are mine ?<sup>53</sup>

Given that this is the premise of Mary's argument, Byron places Elise in the position of a chambermaid who must make a decision as to whose life was more important in this instance - her own or her master's. Naturally she says that she would save her own life. Lochhead has here used the game motif to demonstrate not only class differences but a situation in which not only Elise is disempowered by her class but Mary also, for she has in a sense been vitiated of her class identity and villified for her position as woman. Given

that the scene is worked into a predominantly naturalistic text it perhaps elicits an ambiguous response to Mary's position, for the spectator reads her as both bourgeois and as a vulnerable woman. Moreover, the motif of the game is seen to be a useful mechanism for demonstrating ideas central to the historical context of the play, at the same time constituting an analysis of the material conditions of the women's lives. As such, its occasion as game has been considerably transformed, for it stands both as simply that and also as an index of issues that may have been explored in the pre-performance period. That is, issues that are critical in shaping a materialist-feminist understanding of the play.

I have so far considered status exchange in relation to the isolated scene for various reasons. First, the isolated unit of exchange demonstrates a frozen image of the gendered status position of the subject which acts as a memory trace or sign of issues from the pre-performance period. Second, it serves to illustrate the interaction of games and issues of gendered status in so far as they are inflections of the relationship between the performed and the dramatic text. As my third proposition I would suggest now considering the status exchange or isolated unit as part of the narrative arrangement of a play, in which it might constitute a narrative device such as suspense or repetition where each is designed to interrupt the narrative flow, either to disturb its seeming linearity or to take the spectator's perceptions away from the narrative to a consideration of the social relations being deployed there.

The next stage in this chapter is to examine the relationship of the status exchange to narrative by first delineating a specifically feminist performance strategy that can be seen to be part of the pre-performance period but also can be seen as incorporated into that narrative itself. This feminist strategy is called "impersonation".

### Staging impersonations

A little butch, a little femme, a little childhood ambition (tutus, anyone?), a little cross-species dressing ( a detachable fur tail, for instance, gives one quite a lovely feeling); mix and match; stalk and slink, strut and flutter; get the timing down, and take it on the road. To find the splendid, appropriate mask,

try on the entire dazzling array of masks. But really try them. Talking about it doesn't count.<sup>54</sup>

I am now going to describe "impersonation" as a performance strategy that is especially useful in reading contemporary women's theatre. The key essay I refer to is an account of theatre work by Monique Wittig in conjunction with the radical feminist practitioner Sande Zeig, in the United States. Sande Zeig's essay "The Actor as Activator, Deconstructing Gender Through Gesture" was first presented as a paper at the American Theatre Association Convention in 1984, and has been subsequently published in the American Journal *Women and Performance* in 1985. I would suggest reading Zeig's theory of the parallels between deconstructing gesture and language bearing in mind Keith Johnstone's description of status transactions. Consequently, Zeig's work can be seen to add a gendered perspective, specifically in this case to do with a lesbian theatre, although I have chosen to take a broader reading of the sexual position of the performer/subject involved in the exercises.

In the paper Zeig elaborates the processes that arose as part of a course she and Wittig had put together. The course, the "Dynamics of Language and the Semiotics of Gesture" was not specifically for actors, rather, it was for "social actors, performing gender" and therefore resembles analogies between performance and the presentation of self that I have made earlier.<sup>55</sup> The aim of the exercises was to enable this performer to begin to break down the systems of gestures with which she was familiar and which previously had seemed to be fixed. Zeig makes the parallel with deconstructing language as follows:

If we refer to gestures as a language, a socially constructed physical language, then it is evident that we can control its production. Theatre as a language is composed of elements that constitute other languages. The language of gestures has never been considered as rigorously as other the languages, say that of lighting or scenery. And yet from a lesbian perspective, it must be considered rigorously because nothing is more important than the body of the actor. Without the body of the actor, there is no theatre. By controlling the production of our gestures, we radically alter our theatre from the start. (p.13).

Zeig here is concerned primarily with what can be termed the class group of women. And she, like Johnstone, is also concerned to find strategies for demonstrating the power relations inherent to, and worked through, theatre. Both combine what constitutes a system of exercises and a pull of the imagination that can work with, and outside of that system.

This brings me to the main strategy I am interested in here, that is, the creation of the "impersonator". This "impersonator" was a construct Zeig saw as being built from a process of improvisations around the notion of gestures. These involved the performer creating an antithetical figure based upon observations of someone of the opposite sex, using perhaps photographs or simple empirical observation. Having done this she would construct for herself an impersonator when that figure was indeed herself but as if she were of the opposite sex. The metaphor has been extended by other feminist writers to include developing a semiotic system of performing self based upon dressing-up in different clothes.<sup>56</sup> Moreover, a distinction between the external presentation of self, through costume for instance, and the internal exploration of "archetypes" of male and female, has led to subsequent performance strategies. Paines Plough, for example, a British company supporting new writers, have recently invested energy into the idea of building archetypal male and female figures as an exercise for new playwrights.

One of the key strategies in exploring this presentation of self was the use of photographs that I mentioned earlier. This is a point worth considering a little further I think, specifically with reference to the idea that the framed image constitutes the gendered gesture as still. In a sense this is not entirely appropriate for the performer unless we talk in terms of tableaux or framed images, at which point we must read the images as more cinematic than photographic. Stephen Heath in discussing the relationship between framing and ideology has explained the etymology of the word as including the notion of "enlargement".<sup>57</sup> In this instance the framed image must be seen as part of a narrative or system, where we assume it to be continued in some way beyond the frame itself. And whilst he contrasts cinema with theatre, saying that theatre has wings and so in a sense there is nothing beyond the frame, in relating this idea to the systems of gestures, the notion of the cinematic and "enlarged" frame of reference is particularly useful. It is

this system to which one might refer in discussing the "sex/class system" of which Zeig goes on to speak by referring to the American sociologist and anthropologist Erving Goffman. Goffman bases his system of communication according to a hermeneutics of social commerce and intersubjectivity and uses a metaphor of theatre to describe the theatricality of life. In a sense what he is doing is maintaining an understanding of theatre based upon the notions of illusion, spectacle, and conceivably the proscenium arch which separates spectator from performer, that throughout twentieth century theatre have been consistently challenged. As Clive Barker has said, the theatre of late twentieth century capitalist society is as much to do with "performance" and thus cannot rest upon its prior distinctions.<sup>58</sup> It is my suggestion that the kinds of analogies that a practitioner such as Zeig is working with enable us to make those kinds of parallels by actually foregrounding the systems upon which they are based.

We can move between theatre, performance and the pre-performance by having some recourse to specific binaries that implicate the transition as being fundamentally political. Zeig herself works with a sex/class system dependent upon a binary of men and women in which men are aligned with oppression and women with slavery. Although there are obvious differences between a class system and one based in slavery, her distinction reflects the status/class dialogue set-up in Chapter One with reference to the work of Christine Delphy. Delphy too saw a parallel between sex/class systems.

I would argue for the notion of the "impersonator" as providing two ways of reading contemporary women's theatre. First, that it is a strategy incorporated into plays as a device the women characters must take in order to enter into an alternative set of social relations. Second, it provides a connection with pre-performance issues in so far as it provides a way of highlighting certain social relations based upon sex/class. Recent feminist theory has made clear connections between gestural systems and constructions of femininity based upon establishing women with regard to imitative practices, for example those of the hysteric imitating and exaggerating feminine behaviour.<sup>59</sup> Here, I would like to examine these ideas further by locating the presentation of sex/class systems on stage within its historical context.

In the absence of an early textual analysis of gendered gestures, I would suggest that, sex/class systems were staged by British playwrights in the light of Brecht's theory of "gestus", when gestus signified a theatre practice in which all meaning and emotion was demonstrated or shown externally, specifically through the isolation of one habitual movement or gesture, thus making it stylized. It was, above all else, a means of creating a system of expression fundamentally social. This is perhaps clear in Clare Luckham's play, *Trafford Tanzi*, where the protagonist, Tanzi, enters into the world of wrestling of which her husband had been previously a part, with a view to learning to fight and to beat him at his own game. The play basically charts a process of consciousness raising through a comparison with a gestural system in which her increasing physical prowess reflects her move away from the strictures of her early social position as a wife. Interestingly, the play has been received differently by two critics. Janelle Reinelt sees it as a play based upon the correlation of sex and class as a way of achieving equality.<sup>60</sup> Michelene Wandor sees it as purporting an essentially bourgeois feminist ethic in which women compete with men using male, and patriarchal, ways.<sup>61</sup> In a sense then this play, and the mixed responses to it might support this view, can be seen as an early women's play attempting to demonstrate the relationship between physical gesture and the exploration of gender roles. At this stage, that is, around the late seventies/early eighties, plays were wholly concerned with representation and issues to do with the physical body of the performer on stage were still very much the domain of performance art.

A play that I would like to look at in more detail here is one of Michelene Wandor's own plays, *Whores D'Oeuvres*, written in 1978.<sup>62</sup> I have chosen this play in part because of its historical location (it was written at the time feminism was testing out the interactions of feminism and socialism). In addition, I have chosen it because it uses the idea of impersonation as a way of exploring the relationship between discrepancies of a sex/class system which show women to be of a shared status group and potentially of slave status. Since that time, there has been an increased "sophistication" in modes of representation, to the extent that the confrontational and candid style of Wandor's play seems one already historicized. In a sense then, it fills an historical gap between the improvised exercises of the rehearsal period and the later integration of exercises into the

playtext. This is done through a style of simulated semi-improvisations and little sense of narrative cohesion, which the spectator may impose, unless she sees the play as an exploration of different manifestations of social relations.

The play is characterized by its simplicity. Lighting and staging (as found extra-diegetically) are minimal, and spatially the play is designed to enclose a space into which the two characters play out what is essentially a framed dyadic communication. This is the scene of simulated improvisation. On the one hand, the play is largely surrealistic, and this is evident in the incongruity of the characters' situation: a freak flood has left them floating down the Thames on an hotel awning with nothing other than lots of dressing-up material and a number of kitschy items, for example a glitzy telephone. In juxtaposition with this perfect setting for improvisation are several naturalistic exchanges and the gritty realism of the story of these women's lives. Both of them are prostitutes, and whilst one is militant and preoccupied with campaigning for prostitutes' rights, the other is more concerned with everyday living. Given that the context is 1978, when discussions within the Women's Movement were centred on the analyses of sex and class, prostitution conveys a particular topical concern and is therefore more than a metaphorical collapsing of sexual and social issues.

Throughout the naturalistic scenes the spectator sees Pat and Tina discuss their fears and anxieties, and also demonstrate mutual antagonisms. Within this unusual situation in which they are placed the material conditions of their lives depend upon a relationship of economic contingency and to this end, class and status categories are seemingly collapsed, for the women are defined by their work. In this instance there is a direct transition from the particular to the general according to the personal/political binary.

In addition to this, the surreal and semi-improvised scenes show specific transformations to be not simply defined by class relations but by power relations, as if reflecting the shift from status exchange as purely power-based to that power being informed also by gender. The women are on the Thames for four days and three nights: the night scenes provide the moment of transformation and dreams, and the daytime scenes illustrate a social and naturalistic discourse. At night we see an exploration of kerb-

crawling, rape and sexual intimidation as the women adopt or impersonate men and use a physical language defined by violence and oppression. However, these improvised scenes do not only show clear demarcations of power but also examine the distancing that fantasy entails and the erotics of power. So, one example is that of a brutal infliction of pain as a simulated rape scene which concludes with the impersonated man penetrating the woman using money (Scene Four, Night - Dream, Episode Two):

*PAT flings TINA down on her back, legs spreadeagled (no nudity in this play, remember). PAT stands over her, taking money out of her pocket.*  
 PAT: Hungry, darling? Want your dinner? Fish and chips? Nice bit of fish for pussy? How would you like it? Fivers? Ten bob notes? Oh, I forgot, we don't have them no more, do we, it'll have to be 50p pieces, won't it, nice straight edges, you can have it all in 50p pieces, right where you want it.  
 PAT *simulates shoving money up TINA's cunt. TINA at first reacts as though this is just another gig, but it becomes painful, and she writhes in agony. She simulates as though her arms and legs are tied spread-eagled, though PAT hasn't literally tied her.*  
 ...  
 PAT *stands quite still while TINA simulates being raped. She screams and then lies there still and silent. PAT throws a five-pound note on her and then we move into - (p.81).*

This scene reconstructs the exchange between money and sex as it moves inexorably towards the act of rape as final closure - an image both disarming and shocking. It is shocking in its simulation of rape and disarming in that the physical simulation is achieved by a solitary performer rather than through a continuation of the dyadic status exchange in which the woman is subordinate to the "man". It is as if this violation is transformed to an act of total domination that transgresses the existing rules of inversion of status exchange to achieve an ultimate annihilation of the subordinate figure of the woman. In many ways this scene resembles the action of the single character of Franca Rame's monologues, *Woman's Parts*, who also simulates sexual congress as a solitary performer. That the perpetrator of the crime against the woman is either absent or peripheral indicates the scene as not only anti-mimetic in the theatrical sense but also as contrary to the naturalized social relations commonly figured through mimetic theatre. Wandor therefore is exploring a move away from naturalism towards aspects of the eroticism of power and fantasy.



This, I would suggest, functions to demonstrate the exploration of alternative social relation and sex/class systems. In "Three: Day - Morning" the witty banter of Pat and Tina is played out as an exchange between schoolmistress and pupil (p.77). It soon shifts to being between mistress and servant and as the mistress reprimands her servant for a sexual misdemeanour there is an implicit class/power relation that becomes sado-masochistic. At this stage, Pat, playing the servant flagellates herself before her mistress is able to, and finally both Pat and Tina collapse on the stage together in a fit of giggles. In this case the hint at a female masochism is left unspoken, a visual image which remains on the retina long after it has been voiced through fantasy. This contrasts with the previous scene I looked at, where there is a direct frame in the power relations of naturalistic reference.

What I hope to have pointed out in this last section is the extent to which certain power relations as they are represented on stage as implicitly theatrical have been adopted by women playwrights. And also, to what end. In my analysis of Wandor's *Whores D'Oeuvres* I included two scenes: the first, to do with power as a means of perpetuating power over the class of women, and the second, to do with the erotic potential of power relations between women, and in that case between two traditionally conceived class groups. Play then might be regarded as either a way of verifying existing power relations or as a way of establishing new sets of social relations between women. In the latter instance a new way of reading is of perforce necessary.

In the next, and final section of this chapter, I consider this problematic with reference to two plays - one an overtly feminist play - where the status exchange has been incorporated as part of the overall narrative structure of the play, and on the surface seems to be to do with relationships between women.

#### FEMINIST STRATEGIES OF STATUS EXCHANGE

The overall aim of the three case studies that constitute the second part of this thesis is to discover the ways in which social systems are addressed as different in

women's plays and also as requiring different interpretative strategies. Each of the playwrights, and each of the plays studied, will be shown to have a particular relationship with existing playstructures, specifically to do with form, or has I have continued to refer to it, genre. I have argued for the centrality of a relationship between notions of ritual, games and play as the mechanisms by which social relations are deployed, especially in so far as they reflect improvisatory and status-like exchanges.

This section I would describe as a preface to those case studies in that in it I examine the relationship between aspects of the two plays, dealing with the same source material, in order to illustrate the ways in which a feminist epistemology alters our readings of the interaction of social relations and playstructure. In part this depends upon the assumption that new plays may make interventions and transformations of existing ideas and involve modernist preoccupations and strategies of revision. The two plays I have selected are *The Maids* by Jean Genet, first produced in Britain in French in 1953, and *My Sister in this House* by Wendy Kesselman, performed in the United States in 1981 and toured by Monstrous Regiment in Britain in 1987. Both plays are concerned with the infamous case of the Papin sisters, two maids who, in a French provincial town, murdered their employers.

The contrast between the two plays depends primarily upon the relationship of each to existing theatre: Genet's to the Theatre of the Absurd and Kesselman's to feminist strategies concerned to establish possible causal relations for the events of the play. In a sense then Kesselman's play can be seen to have some relation to what is commonly referred to as the "classic realist text". Both plays deviate from this to the extent that they cannot be charged with the usual indictments levelled against classic realism - perpetuating an existing ideology through the mechanisms of naturalism, interpellating the spectator and so on - and it is significant perhaps that the case itself and these subsequent theatrical renderings of it have merited not inconsiderable critical attention. These especially have concerned the application of psychoanalysis and discussions of hysteria, both issues which contribute to a debate on stage naturalism. By situating *The Maids* within the context of Absurdist theatre I am pointing out its role in undermining the implied closure and linear trajectory that the "classic realist text" is assumed to take. I

would suggest that given this, the point at which the structure of each play differs from classic realism is through a conflation of ritual, games and play, specifically where they centre on an exchange and transaction of either social or theatrical status; this provides an alternative account of the playstructure to an analysis in which Kesselman's play is described as cyclical as opposed to linear in its trajectory.<sup>63</sup> In Genet's play especially, social and theatrical roles are synonymous. These aspects, common inversions and exchanges in Absurdist theatre, I would suggest, can constitute moments of clarity for feminist interventions also.

Whereas Genet's play is simply constructed as a constant interchange of status and ritual, the feminist revision of Kesselman's play uses status and ritual as part of a naturalistic narrative so that the moments can be almost framed and read as a feminist transformation of or reflection on social relations (I will come to strategies for interpreting these later). In addition, these moments can be regarded as a denial of narrative, for if the analogy with sexual psychology, deviance and perversity is maintained (it emerges as central to the story of the play) and foregrounded, the marginality of this position is no longer contained as such and the reference to a naturalistic discourse, in which perverse sexualities are always marginalized, will be questioned.

There are two aspects of the plays that I wish to focus on here as a way of introducing issues that will re-emerge later as part of the three case studies. First, there is a parallel with issues of sexuality and those of narrative, to the extent that I will continue to make analogies between the two, for instance that "repetition" characterizes narrative and also the ways in which sexuality is expressed. Second, I will focus upon maid figures. All women in the plays are determined as classed and gendered subjects in relation to structure; the maid is seen as both sexual and social subject and one who is also able to step outside of existing definitions of naturalism - because she is by definition marginalized. Conceptually then, the maid provides a locus at which class and sex are located historically and her body, or indeed the maid as body, indicates the site at which her gender and class are both collapsed and thus inscribed. I have previously noted the alternative to this poststructuralist inscription of the woman's body as being that of gender as performative. However, this is a privileged position to which, I would suggest, that the

maid has no access, meaning that as a social subject she is always inscribed and therefore passive. The moments at which she can possibly escape this seem to arise as existing naturalized social relations are transformed, especially in her relationship to other women, that is, through transformations within the status group of women. I would suggest that before this becomes a possibility the maid is simply a material embodiment of a sex/class system, whose sequestered body is never her own and always defined in relation to a dominant other. There is a comparison here with the lesbian subject who is seen to be marginal to heterosexual relations. In Genet and Kesselman's plays there is a strong implication that the two maid figures are involved in an incestuous and lesbian relationship.

*The Maids*, on the one hand, is contrived as incestuous couplings and sado-masochistic ritual which in turn constitute a cyclical structure up until the point at which there is a final act of suicide of one sister dressed as Madame. In this case the play is seen to have a linear and conclusive narrative. This works both structurally and thematically and the notion of the maid is useful in that she, as a culturally decentred subject, is malleable in Genet's transformations of the theatrical. *My Sister in This House*, on the other hand, is rather a feminist realignment of causal relations which socioeconomically and psychologically indite the circumstances leading up to the murder. Kesselman locates sex/class relations in which patriarchal institutions are criticized through the use of two central tableaux. The first shows the two sisters framed in a photograph, a staged and socially binding image, and the second is that constituted within the courtroom scene, an image that conversely frames the judicial system that will decide, according to naturalised relations, their impending internment. It is an interesting device of Kesselman's which recalls Walter Benjamin's speculations on the framing implicit to photography - similarly referring to a still image - that guilt is captured always within that frame.<sup>64</sup> Given that this is an association we might make with a framed image, that is, that the subject within it is not only there to be scrutinized but also implicated as already somehow guilty, the nuances of meaning linked with these tableaux are multifarious. In a sense it is necessary to consider what actually then is being indicted and of what the women are guilty: is it their marginal social and sexual position or is it the charge of a criminal offence?

In Kesselman's play class inequality is defined as one of the causes leading to the final act of murder. Patricia R. Schroeder in her essay "Locked Behind the Proscenium: Feminist Strategies in *Getting Out* and *My Sister in This House*" has identified class relations in the play as if the two maids represent the traditional working-class in a classical Marxist divide, although I would add that complications of status relations alter that divide to some extent.<sup>65</sup> One of the ways in which the maids are seen to be distinct from their bourgeois counterparts is in the spatial divisions of the household - the maids are upstairs in an attic room to which their mistresses are allowed access at any time if they so wish. In addition to the potential spatial boundaries that we see infringed as Madame Dansard, their mistress does enter into the maids' room, there is an infringement of class relations that also precipitates the trajectory of the plot. This occurs as the younger maid Lea develops an intimacy with Mademoiselle Dansard and suddenly the rigidity of the existing pairings (between mother and daughter and between the two maids) is threatened. Moreover, the relationships that had previously been demonstrated in both mimed and non-naturalistic scenes are moved more into the naturalistic scenes as the character of Lea can not simply be explained. In a sense then, what had previously been scenes of ritual and status exchange characteristic of an alternative to the linear trajectory, and therefore somehow distinguishable from naturalism, begin to be less rigid and codified as the maids step over the boundaries to the naturalistic world - including its implied naturalistic ideology - and become involved in it.

That the primary relationship shown in status exchange is an exchange of power is very clear in both Genet's play and Kesselman's. And that power soon becomes eroticized. It is Kesselman's aim to explore the relationship between those moments of eroticised power and the prevailing order by showing areas at which the boundaries between the two become blurred. This provides a stark contrast to Genet's blending of masquerade, ritual and role-playing, where we are always aware of the distance between the performer and the character, for it is his intention to show the performer playing at role playing playing at role playing. What Kesselman is doing is actually risking making indeterminate the eroticisation of ritual and the eroticization of the naturalised relations, a difference I illustrated in my analysis of Michelene Wandor's *Whores D'Oeuvres*, by an

insistent naturalism informed by the standard cause and effect strategy significantly characteristic of the patriarchal structures she wishes to indite. As a result of this transformation, what is seemingly natural becomes ultimately threatenning and Kesselman can be described as using the mechanisms of naturalism yet subverting them through different social relations, in which for instance maids are not simply defined in relation to their mistresses. The acts which transgress boundaries demonstrate the possibilities that status exchanges entail.

I would suggest that it is specifically in the characterization of Lea that the text changes its focus. Lea is an ostensibly passive figure who acts as a seducer, by very means of that passivity, of other figures in the play: she seduces the photographer, her young mistress and Sister Veronica in the convent where she spent her early years. Lea's sexuality traverses the boundaries sanctified in the carefully closeted ritual of Genet's maids, to the world of naturalized relationships, where ritual is no longer a game. Thematically this is shown by the sadomasochistic ritual of the maid-sisters private life encroaching upon the daylight world of classed relations and work. It is almost a disingenuous invitation on Lea's part to realize or actualize a narrative defined as if by sadism. This invitation in turn goes against the resistance to a linear narrative we have previously witnessed through the processes of ritual in so far as they are withheld by suspense.

The parameters of the two worlds which Lea inhabits are interestingly revealed through clothing rituals. For example, she forgets to change out of the bright pink jumper she wears in her and Christine's cloistered world to go about the housework. At this stage the relationship is becoming exhausting and self-destructive and is compelled to show itself publicly. As they play their games, act out their ritual, the sisters begin to lose sleep and their work is shoddily done. As they indulge the sensual fantasy of dressing Lea in beautiful antique lingerie, she soils the garments and her manner changes. The denouement of the class narrative - that might also be the classic realist narrative at a purely structural level - is the final murder, swiftly reached following the acts of transgression; and yet annexed to this is the courtroom scene where Kesselman leaves questions unspoken and unanswered.

In this final scene of potential closure we are returned to the cyclical narrative of ritual, ironically through the disembodied voices of the patriarchal establishment. The finality and release of catharsis which the denouement might have brought about is re-opened by the affirmation of ritual as sado-masochistic, and therefore the focus shifts between the suspense and fantasy of masochism and the teleology of sadism. The following words record the murder:

JUDGE. (*voice over*). Is this the pewter pitcher with which you struck them down?

LEA looks up.

MEDICAL EXAMINER. (*voice over*). Madame Danzard's body lay face up. Mademoiselle Danzard's body face down, the coat pulled up, the skirt pulled up, the underpants pulled down, revealing deep wounds on the buttocks and multiple slashes on the calves. Madame Danzard's eyes had been torn out of their sockets.

JUDGE. (*voice over*). The carving knife with which you slashed them?

CHRISTINE *looks up*. They are silent.<sup>66</sup>

This is an extraordinary detailed description of a murder made callous in its retelling. Now the act of homicide is barely reconcilable with an expression of factional class violence when the only action of the disenfranchised is an act of violent defence. Indeed Lea, for it is she who attacks the daughter Isabelle, effects in true slasher-style, a fetishistic attack on the buttocks, an attack we would consider, through such associations, as perpetrated by a man against a woman. This time the attack is against a different class group despite the two women being linked as women and therefore of the same status group. I would argue that this scene in particular enforces the necessity of including a new strategy of interpretation.

For this I have maintained the analogy with playstructure and sexual perversity and turned to Parveen Adams' essay "On Female Bondage" where she discusses the ways in which naturalised relations can be revised by feminist strategies of reading specifically in relation to definitions of perversity. In this essay Adams cites the buttocks as a primary site of the clinical fetishist's attention, making clear how fetishism is defined by fantasy and suspense much as the moments of ritual in these plays are. The clinical fetishist, she says, is defined by a tendency to reduce "the game of castration to beaten buttocks and

bodily constriction", thereby avoiding the "reality of sexual difference".<sup>67</sup> An alternative reading she makes available is that focussing on the debate around lesbian sadomasochism where women are seen to enjoy the pleasures of a changeable and non-fixed sexuality. This is defined not by the pathological impulses of the clinical fetishist but instead is seen to operate outside of the boundaries of phallic control and signification. Remember there are indications in both Kesselman's play and the newspaper reports most likely used as source material, of incestuous couplings between the women. In the play this is an impulse made grotesque by factional class violence in that Christine and Lea's love affair is infringed by Madame Danzard, their bourgeois employer. Having established that the action of the play illuminates the uses of narrative itself it is interesting to consider an aspect of masochism as being suspense that is consonant with fantasy. Both shape the notion of ritual established in the play.

However we read this final act; coming to us second hand in the clinical report and dramatically recalled as a detail filled in and acted out in the interim period between the staged murder scene and postmortem reports, the emphasis upon repetition and ritual identifies the action as sexually "perverse". The emphasis of the text, therefore, is relocated and made inseparable from a simple narrative of class action combined with sexual perversity. Genet's text, with its metatheatrical characters, is already in this position but the rituals enacted by his characters are deployed simply as theatrical inversion and through status exchange. Consequently Kesselman's play can be seen as more radical in that it does not stop at this kind of theatrical inversion and challenges the safety of the confined ritual in actually describing the physical and psychological horror of the murder that the ritual leads to, therefore re-entering naturalistic discourse. In this case the spectator is challenged in so far as she/he might see the processes of ritual and a cyclical narrative as somehow appealing; the potential eroticism of the role-playing must be viewed differently when it is seen in relation to naturalism. I would suggest that the full implication of using Adams demonstrates this in that she makes a parallel with lesbian behaviour and the obsessive behaviour traditionally associated with clinical psychology in order to demonstrate that the former implies new social relations that cannot simply be read with reference to the latter. That is, neither lesbian sadomasochism or the sisters'



love affair are perverse. As such, patterns such as repetition and suspense, previously associated with the clinical fetishist unable to determine sex differences, must be read with a sense of irony or knowing when associated with the chosen and deliberate acts of lesbian sexuality, making the acknowledgement of sex differences crucial but not determining of gendered behaviour.

I have previously outlined an analogy between the marginal position of the lesbian subject and that of the maid figure with reference to the woman/slave relationship. I wish to stress the implications of this relationship to form more specifically by pointing out the extent to which poststructuralist theory accounts for the woman's body as being inscribed by gender codes and social laws. As I have already suggested, the body of the maid figure is inscribed and made material by a collapsing of gender and social identity, and therefore, within the naturalized world, or in the case of theatre, through naturalistic representation, is invariably designated by her passivity both as a woman and as a sexual subject.

However, in both Genet's and Kesselman's plays the maids become active and sexualized figures, therefore denying that passivity. They do this primarily through the adoption of roles, through ritual and through re-enactment, emulation or a rehearsal of the naturalized world. It is precisely this kind of role-playing that empowers them and to an extent allows them entry into the naturalised world - where Lea extends her behaviour beyond the confines of the attic - where their behaviour is no longer a rehearsal of power relations endemic to that world but governed by them. Ultimately this ends in destruction for the two sisters and illustrates the ways in which theatrical form reflects the relationship of the maids to the naturalized world, for the women are confined by the patriarchal order which in turn acts as a closure to the play.

Catherine Clement has called the Papin sisters (the historical account) "a single massacre, definitive, a feast day without an anniversary, " as opposed to the repetitive structure of hysteria".<sup>68</sup> I include this quotation here as an indication of the structural features characterizing the womens' social identity and behaviour, specifically her point reflects what can be referred to as the distinction between naturalism and the cyclical and ritualistic structure of Genet's play, the latter signifying the repetitive structures of hysteria. What is interesting here I think is the extent to which hysteria indicates an

alternative mode to naturalism, and one which is implicitly connected to it and defined in relation to it - through revolt and difference. I would argue that this is precisely the case with Genet's play: that its theatrical form is shaped with reference to previous forms and Kesselman's feminist text is somehow different.

Patrice Pavis, in his analysis of the relationship of postmodernist theatre criticism to traditional modes of analysis makes this observation by quoting Adorno:

Even so-called absurd literature - in the work of its best representatives - has a stake in the dialectic: that there is no meaning and that negating meaning maintains nonetheless the category of meaning; that is what allows for and demands interpretation.<sup>69</sup>

The point is that Absurdist theatre is defined always in relation to existing theatre, specifically with reference to the assumptions and conditions of epistemology that it wishes to re-define or challenge. I would argue that the feminist epistemology according to which Kesselman's play is based is attempting to redefine existing social relations - the subject position of lesbian identity - and therefore, as it adopts the practice of naturalism, is doing so from a new perspective, because before women's playwrighting began to emerge as a genre, women playwrights had never been in a privileged position to respond to existing forms as had male playwrights.

This notion of the comparison of contemporary women's theatre to existing theatres, through an analysis of the interactions between the ways in which feminist epistemology seeks to demonstrate the transformation of social relations and theatrical form, is the premise of the second part of this thesis. In each of the three following chapters I will examine selected plays from three contemporary women playwrights in relation to previously established theatrical forms. In so far as my analysis rests upon an exploration of the relationship between spectator, character and performer - a premise based in the early motif of the "personal as political" - I will continue my textual analysis with reference to the notion of the status exchange as providing links between the pre-performance period and the performed text, and the ways in which these exchanges exist in relation to certain narrative arrangements.

- <sup>1</sup> Jill Dolan, *The Feminist Critic As Spectator* (Michigan, UMI Research Press, Ann Arbor, 1988), p.16. Dolan's project leads her specifically talking about American plays and performance.
- <sup>2</sup> I have included reference to Edgar here in that his early preoccupation with social landscapes and social types is similar to Sarah Daniels' plays, although the social relations she seeks to represent are significantly different.
- <sup>3</sup> See for instance C.W.E. Bigsby who argues that ambiguity makes meaning and thus a political imperative opaque, *Contemporary English Drama* (London: Edward Arnold Ltd., 1981), p.23.
- <sup>4</sup> The distinction emphasizes the centrality of leftist politics in British theatre. This can be located historically in the mid-fifties when for instance the Berliner Ensemble came to London and British practitioners became concerned with the expression of working-class voices and politics; at the same time in the States the avant-garde was taking a strong hold in new theatres.
- <sup>5</sup> Thus posing an alternative tradition to traditional play structures and the implied boundaries of "theatre". Subsequently this is a term which must be revised and I will later use "performance" as a means of defining specific theoretical approaches.
- <sup>6</sup> Terry Lovell, *Pictures of Reality: Aesthetics, Politics and Pleasure* (London: British Film Institute, 1980, 1983), p.77.
- <sup>7</sup> As Elizabeth Wright has described in her book, *Postmodern Brecht: A Re-Presentation* (London: Routledge, 1989).
- <sup>8</sup> Comment and quotation from Janelle Reinelt, "Wandor: Artist and Ideologue", in *Making a Spectacle: Feminist Essays on Contemporary Women's Theatre*, edited by Linda Hart (University of Michigan Press, Ann Arbor, 1989), p.247.
- <sup>9</sup> Colin McCabe, "Realism and the Cinema: Notes on some Brechtian Theses", in *Popular Television and Film*, edited by Tony Bennett, Susan Boyd-Bowman and others (London: British Film Institute, 1981), pp.216-236.
- <sup>10</sup> See Teresa de Lauretis for example on this issue, "Sexual Indifference and Lesbian Representation", in *Performing Feminism: Feminist Critical Theory and Theatre*, edited by Sue-Ellen Case (London: The John Hopkins Press, 1990), pp.17-40. The debate has been similarly reflected in film studies where some critics have conceded that to refute realism is not a simple solution in that it fails to take account of varying audiences and different subject positions.
- <sup>11</sup> Susan Bassnett, *Magdalena: International Women's Experimental Theatre* (Oxford: Berg Publishers, 1989), p.67.
- <sup>12</sup> Sue-Ellen Case describes how early claims for an anti-mimetic and anti-realist theatre resulted in theatre influenced by aspects of performance art, characterized by a deconstructed structure and challenges to the notion of character; it is the consistency of this new practice that has led to its own formalism. See "From Formalism to Feminism", *Theater*, vol.16, no.2 (Spring 1985), pp.65-67.
- <sup>13</sup> A point made by Terry Lovell in *Pictures of Reality*, p.86.
- <sup>14</sup> See Laura Mulvey for the key discussion of using psychoanalysis to read narrative and the subject position of the spectator, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema", *Screen* no.16 (Autumn 1975), pp.6-18.

<sup>15</sup> Laura Mulvey on the subject position as that as a "transvestite". Mulvey reconsidered her early commentary in view of the criticism levelled at her work that she did not sufficiently address the possibility of a female spectator. See "Afterthoughts on "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" Inspired by *Duel in the Sun*", in *Psychoanalysis and Cinema*, edited by E. Ann Kaplan (London: Routledge, 1990), pp.24-36.

<sup>16</sup> I describe this later as significant with recent descriptions of *mise-en-scene* where the playwright is an absent figure.

<sup>17</sup> Elizabeth Wright describes the transformation of psychoanalytic definitions of the "hysteric" from Charcot and Freud as a "psychic" disease with physiological symptoms to Lacan. She points out that "In a more general sense, Lacan saw the hysteric as embodying the quintessence of the human subject because she speaks, as agent, from the lack and gaps in knowledge, language and being. In her 'being' she reveals the incapacity of any human subject to satisfy the ideals of Symbolic identifications", *Feminism and Psychoanalysis: A Critical Dictionary* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell Ltd., 1992), p.164.

<sup>18</sup> Elaine Showalter in *The Female Malady: Women, Madness and English Culture, 1830-1980* (London: The Virago Press, 1987), p.122 shows the influence of Darwinism on psychiatry.

<sup>19</sup> Herbert Blau in a footnote indicates that Elin Diamond is currently researching constructions of the hysteric with reference to Ibsen. See *To all Appearances: Ideology and Performance* (London: Routledge, 1992), p.207. She discusses four of Ibsen's plays (but not *A Doll's House*) in "Realism and Hysteria: Towards a Feminist Mimesis", *Discourse*, 13:1 (Fall - Winter, 1990-1991), pp.59-92, where she focusses primarily in contemporary gendered responses to the plays. These she argued involved a transference of hysteria. My point is that although there is an interesting relationship between hysteria and naturalism, worth pursuing in considerable detail, at this juncture I am concerned with both specifically in relation to genre, generic expectation and class differences.

<sup>20</sup> Joan Templeton, "The *Doll House* Backlash: Criticism, Feminism, and Ibsen", *PMLA* (Winter 1988), pp.28-40, (p.33).

<sup>21</sup> See Elaine Aston and George Savona for further details of this distinction, *Theatre as Sign-System: A Semiotics of Text and Performance* (London: Routledge, 1992), pp.118-119.

<sup>22</sup> Quoted by Elizabeth Wright, *Psychoanalytic Criticism: Theory in Practice* (London: New Accents series Methuen & Co. 1984), p.171.

<sup>23</sup> Dorrian Lambley, "In Search of a Radical Discourse for Theatre", *New Theatre Quarterly*, vol.V111, no.29 (February 1992), p.40.

<sup>24</sup> Joan Riviere, "Womanliness as Masquerade" in *Formations of Fantasy*, ed. by Victor Burgin, James Donald, Cora Kaplan (London: Methuen & Co.Ltd., 1986), pp.35-45.

<sup>25</sup> See the introduction to Bakhtin's study of *Rabelais* for details of this.

<sup>26</sup> See for instance Catherine Belsey's reading of *As You Like It*, "Disrupting Sexual Difference: Meaning and Gender in the Comedies", in *Alternative Shakespeares*, edited by John Drakakis (London: Methuen, 1985), pp.166-191.

<sup>27</sup> Helene Keyssar, *Feminist Theatre* (London: Macmillan Education Ltd., 1984), p.11.

<sup>28</sup> Quoted by Geraldine Cousin, *Churchill The Playwright* (London: Methuen, 1989), p.38.

<sup>29</sup> Geraldine Cousin, also p.38.

- <sup>30</sup> Antony Sher quoted in the *The Joint Stock Book*, edited and introduced by Rob Ritchie (London: Methuen, 1987), pp.138-142.
- <sup>31</sup> This kind of analysis of the reproduction of accurate descriptions of homosexual behaviour is evident in Nicholas de Jongh's book, *Not in Front of the Audience: Homosexuality on Stage* (London: Routledge, 1992), p.100.
- <sup>32</sup> Elin Diamond, "Refusing the Romanticism of Identity", in *Performing Feminisms*, p.98.
- <sup>33</sup> D.Keith Peacock, "The Play-Text, Theatrical Dynamics and the Status Interaction", *Theatre Research International*, vol.9, no.1 (Spring 1984), pp.39-49.
- <sup>34</sup> A description of the semiotics of theatre found in Keir Elam's book, *The Semiotics of Theatre and Drama* (London: Methuen & Co. Ltd., 1980), where Elam refers to Patrice Pavis' use of the word "discourse", p.23.
- <sup>35</sup> F.Allan Hanson, "The Semiotics of Ritual", *Semiotica*, vol.33, no.1/2 (1981), pp.169-178, p.169.
- <sup>36</sup> Josette Feral, "Performance and Theatricality: The Subject Demystified", *Modern Drama* vol.xxv, no.1 (March 1982), pp.171-181, p.176.
- <sup>37</sup> Introductory note to the Methuen play edition of *Heresies* (London: Methuen, 1987).
- <sup>38</sup> I have discussed Judith Butler's related essay "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory" elsewhere.
- <sup>39</sup> Randi S.Koppen, "'The Furtive Event': Theorizing Feminist Spectatorship", *Modern Drama* vol.35 (1992), pp.378-394.
- <sup>40</sup> Anne McClintock describes the Lacanian mirror-stage in relation to the idea of ritual in "The Return of Female Fetishism and The Fiction of the Phallus", *Perversity* no.19 (Spring 1993), pp.1-21.
- <sup>41</sup> D.Keith Peacock, "The Play-Text, Theatrical Dynamics and the Status Interaction", p.40.
- <sup>42</sup> Keir Elam, *The Semiotics of Theatre and Drama*, p.44.
- <sup>43</sup> Geraldine Cousins, *Churchill The Playwright*, p.38.
- <sup>44</sup> Augusto Boal, *Games for Actors and Non-Actors* (London: Routledge, 1992).
- <sup>45</sup> Sande Zeig has developed feminist improvisations exercises along a similar theme and makes reference to Boal. Her work is dealt with later in this chapter.
- <sup>46</sup> Augusto Boal, *Games for Actors and Non-Actors*, p.60.
- <sup>47</sup> Helene Keyssar, "Staging the Feminist Classroom: A Theatrical Model", in *Gendered Subjects: The Dynamics of Feminist Teaching*, edited by Margo Culley and Catherine Portuges (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1985), pp.108-125.
- <sup>48</sup> Patrice Pavis, *Theatre at the Crossroads of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1992) p.31.
- <sup>49</sup> Ilona Koren-Deutsch, *Feminist Nationalism in Scotland: Mary Queen of Scots Got Her Head Chopped Off*, *Modern Drama* vol.xxxv, no.3 (September 1992), pp.424-431.
- <sup>50</sup> Fredric Jameson, "Postmodernism and Consumer Society", in *Postmodern Culture*, edited by Hal Foster (Pluto Press, 1985).
- <sup>51</sup> Liz Lochhead, *Blood and Ice*, in *Plays by Women, Volume Four*, selected and introduced by Michelene Wandor (London: Methuen, 1985). Throughout the thesis I am using this published version of the play.
- <sup>52</sup> Quoted by Dorrian Lambley, see note 23 for details.

<sup>53</sup> Quoted by William St Clair, *The Godwins and the Shelleys* (London: Faber and Faber, 1989), p.75.

<sup>54</sup> Harriet Ellenberger, "The Dream is the Bridge: in Search of Lesbian Theatre", *Trivia*, vol.16 (Fall 1984), p.32-33. This was written in response to Sande Zeig's analogy between performing femininity and clothing metaphors.

<sup>55</sup> Sande Zeig, "The Actor as Activator: Deconstructing Gender Through Gesture", *Women and Performance*, vol.2, no.2 (1985), pp.12-17.

<sup>56</sup> See for example, Jill Dolan, "Women's Theatre Program ATA: Creating a Feminist Forum", *Women and Performance*, vol.1, part 2 (1985), pp.5-13.

<sup>57</sup> Stephen Heath, "On screen, in frame: film and ideology", in *Popular Fictions: Technology, Ideology, Production, Reading*, edited by Tony Bennett (London: Routledge, 1990), p.28.

<sup>58</sup> Clive Barker, "Games in Education and Theatre: the Function of Play, and the Dangers of Institutionalization", *New Theatre Quarterly*, vol.v, no.19 (August 1989), pp.227-236.

<sup>59</sup> Elaine Showalter, *The Female Malady: Women, Madness and English Culture, 1830-1980* (London: Virago Press Ltd., 1987). Showalter describes how nineteenth century actresses visited asylums in order to emulate the gestures of women designated as hysterics (p.90) and also the ways in which one of Charcot's case studies emulated and exaggerated depictions of femininity, pp.152-154.

<sup>60</sup> Janelle Reinelt, "Beyond Brecht: Britain's New Feminist Drama", in *Performing Feminisms* edited by Sue-Ellen Case, pp.150-160.

<sup>61</sup> Michelene Wandor, "The Fifth Column: Feminism and Theatre", *Drama*, no.152 (1984), pp.5-9.

<sup>62</sup> Michelene Wandor, *Whores D'Oeuvres*, in *Five Plays by Michelene Wandor* (London: The Journeyman Press Ltd., 1984).

<sup>63</sup> Patricia R.Schroeder offers this as a description of the play as anti-naturalistic and therefore patriarchal, thus indicating a particular stage of feminist theatre criticism in which playstructure provided a clear pointer of one might be termed feminist and patriarchal theatres in "Locked Behind the Proscenium: Feminist Strategies in *Getting Out* and *My Sister in This House*", *Modern Drama*, vol.xxx11, no.1 (March 1989), pp.104-114. She describes Kesselman's play as having features of a non-linear and therefore "feminine" style.

<sup>64</sup> Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction", in *Illuminations*, edited by Hannah Arendt and translated by Harry Zohn (London: Jonathan Cape Ltd., 1970) pp.219-253.

<sup>65</sup> Patricia R.Schroeder, see note 63 for details.

<sup>66</sup> *My Sister in This House in Monstrous Regiment: A Collective Celebration* (London: Nick Hern Books, 1991), p.143.

<sup>67</sup> Quoted by Parveen Adams, "Of Female Bondage" in *Between Feminism and Psychoanalysis*, edited by Teresa Brennan (London: Routledge, 1989), p.259.

<sup>68</sup> Quoted by Linda Hart, "'They Don't Even Look Like Maids Anymore': Wendy Kesselman's *My Sister in This House*", in *Making a Spectacle: Feminist Essays on Contemporary Women's Theatre*, edited by Linda Hart (University of Michigan Press, Ann Arbor, 1989), p.141.

<sup>69</sup> Adorno quoted by Patrice Pavis in *Theatre at the Crossroads of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1992), p.56.

CHAPTER THREE: THE IMPULSE TO ACT OUT:  
SARAH DANIELS' PLAYS AS MELODRAMA

In this chapter I look at the ways in which the materialist-feminist framework developed in Part One can be applied to the study of a contemporary playwright - Sarah Daniels. This is the first of the three case studies of this thesis. The application of the theory I have developed so far and the construction of a framework for reading Daniels' plays takes me in two directions. First, I consider Daniels with reference to the debate between form and content, specifically the ways in which feminist contexts have determined a transformation in the rhetoric of political theatre. The deliberate transformation of theatrical form in the light of revised social relations and feminist epistemology has resulted, since the seventies, in a new relationship between the representation of social relations and theatrical form. Attention to the relationship of form in Daniels' plays to preceding plays, specifically plays concerned with social issues and landscapes using forms of social realism and naturalism (David Edgar example) is critical in this project where notions of generic categories are transformed by social relations as much as by dramatic innovation. Second, I consider the ways in which the transformation of social relations - which I will suggest can be read as melodrama - is deployed in the arrangement of performer, character and status interaction.

Sarah Daniels figures as a well established playwright on the British alternative theatre scene. She achieved her first successes in the early 1980s with *Ripen Our Darkness* (1981) at the Royal Court, *Ma's Flesh is Grass* (1981) at the Crucible Studio, Sheffield, and *The Devil's Gateway* (1983) at the Royal Court, thus demonstrating the extent to which Daniels' work is not simply London-based but has been based also in provincial theatres.<sup>1</sup> It is Daniels' commitment to feminist theory which identifies her with the kind of feminist theatre generally described as second wave. Thus she is a playwright of fairly well-established stature and as such an apposite choice in the application of a new way of reading. There is further reason for Daniels' plays to be considered here and that is precisely her identification with what is known as "issue-based" theatre. This is directly linked with the opprobrium her work has elicited in some



reviewers, for instance, Peter Hepple, who has described the plays as having little clarity of structure and using a variety of theatrical forms to no particular avail.<sup>2</sup> This is largely a criticism of Daniels' use of theatrical form but in addition *Masterpieces*, first produced at the Manchester Royal Exchange in 1983, has been polemical as much in subject as in form. *Masterpieces* has come to be seen as a paradigm of feminist "political" theatre, taking pornography as its subject and exploring the effect of pornography on women's lives both publicly and in the domestic scene. Daniels uses the play as a structure to show the oppressiveness of pornography by identifying a dominant patriarchal ideology as the source of oppression at various levels in society, both private and public.

Evidently, the centrality of the pornography debate in feminism over the last twenty years indicates it as being both polemical and divisive; it also suggests the play - and the playwright - will take one standpoint on the debate. To this end we might read the play as principally concerned with the issue in question where characters are both incidental and illustrative. In addition, the close correlation of debates within feminism and the theatrical representation of them assumes some relation to reality. As a result, it is important to consider this relationship as part of a study of ideology, the construction of the subject in relation to ideology and is therefore concerned with the reconstructions of ideology through and in naturalism. It is also identifiable within the tradition of political theatre that takes as its focus either a "political" or "social" concern, the intricacies of which were discussed in Chapter One. Daniels' place in this tradition depends also upon the influence of feminism and feminist theory, which I would suggest, in turn have informed new ways of defining and describing the relationship between the visual and verbal, that is an issue and the theatrical representation of it, that can be used in discussing contemporary "issue" plays.

Daniels is not simply concerned with "issue" plays and, for instance, has countered this label with the point that women playing Monopoly (a scene in *Ripen Our Darkness*) does not constitute polemic.<sup>3</sup> However, for the time being it is simply a way of keeping the reference in mind as a point of contact between "reality" and her plays; it suggests a mode rather than a prescriptive category. It is by labelling Daniels' as a radical feminist with regard to the subject matter and direct confrontational style of her early plays, that I

am able to draw upon a radical feminist epistemology as providing the broad basis for making the connection between form and content. To call her a radical feminist is in itself problematic, for it points to the being definitive sub-categories within contemporary women's theatre and the genealogy and diversity of feminist theatre criticism makes clear that even if this were the case in early eighties criticism it has since been questioned as a way of grouping writers. At this stage, however, I would suggest not simply that Daniels is as a radical feminist playwright, but that her plays are informed by aspects related to a radical feminist epistemology. This indirectly situates her as a marginal writer concerned with lesbian and feminist issues, and to an extent, and in terms of some academic debates, as being empowered by that position where she is by definition conceived as consistently iconoclastic. Thus, her role as a "political" writer is given credence and accepted as critical in reading her plays.

#### Re-defining social realism

The chronology of Daniels' work reflects a shift from an early concern with clear social issues, such as pornography in *Masterpieces* (1983) and lesbian custody in *Neaptide* (1986). These were precisely issues that involved social institutions and public debates and the concern with lesbian parenting is similarly introduced in Gay Sweatshop's earlier seventies play, *Care and Control*. Since that time Daniels has turned her attention to exploring a representation of the effects of wide social relations at an individual level, that is, the effects of which the legal system depicted in the earlier plays might have had the jurisdiction to change. Such effects are shown for instance through the more internal and domestic concern of familial child abuse in *Beside Herself* (1990) and the ritual physical and psychological abuse of women held in psychiatric prisons in *Head Rot Holiday* (1992).

This shift shows a changing concern with the ways in which ideology is constructed and social relations deployed. Moreover, it demonstrates a transformation of our understanding of naturalism given the context of naturalistic theatre in the seventies. I would suggest that feminist epistemology shows this premise and opens the way for a re-evaluation of Daniels' naturalism and will develop this point further, using *Neaptide* as an

example of the extent to which a new way of reading is necessary, through which a relation with previous theatrical genres will be evident. I will base this comparison upon the term "melodrama".

*Neptune* was first performed at the National Theatre. The issue of the play, lesbian parenting, was a particular concern of the women's movement during the early eighties.<sup>4</sup> In order to approach the issue Daniels takes as her context a naturalistic framework, locates her characters within the middle-classes and appropriates the teaching profession as background to the debate, in so doing targeting not simply one social institution (teaching) but invoking a further one through the development of the plot which results in a legal battle for the custody of a child whose mother is gay. There is a consistency in the material Daniels uses, the judiciary and other state institutions, with the issue plays of the seventies - both are concerned with the ways in which power is mediated by, in Althusserian terms, ideological state apparatuses. Where naturalism as a theatrical form is shown - like the targeted institutions - to be inflexible and reflective of an existing ideology, Daniels takes steps to move beyond it. Whilst using it sometimes, she demonstrates the extent to which naturalism is limiting and unsatisfactory, specifically by including surreal and mythic dimensions to her plays.<sup>5</sup> This, I would suggest, revises the terms of naturalism with which she predominantly works, highlights its limitations, and above all, shifts the focus of criticism away from a language-based analysis to reinforce the significance of the relationship between visual and verbal aspects of the text.

I will now turn to the term "melodrama" as a medium through which those visual and verbal elements are embraced and through which, I would suggest, the issues of performance and of representation are explored. Given that the term has a long and complex genesis I intend to isolate one aspect of it that is relevant here and that is to do with the relationship of melodrama to social issues. I am basing this exploration, which I will develop throughout this chapter, in reaction to the association of "melodrama" with excessive representation of issues. This response refers in part to the assumption that Daniels herself has made in the introduction to the Methuen One collection of her plays, where she refers to it as the dreaded "M". It is safe to assume that Daniels' understanding of the term reflects its common perjorative use, and in addition confirms the playwright's

fear of being "labelled". It is this negative perception that I will challenge through a re-consideration of the term "melodrama" as being understood with reference to the influential work on the area by the American scholar Peter Brooks, who described it as a "mode" or "aesthetic".<sup>6</sup> His work is particularly useful here in that, like the feminist film theory I have referred to, he draws analogies between psychoanalytic theory and narrative as a way of reading. Therefore, for studying Daniels' plays the term "melodrama" is appropriate, in both accounting for mechanisms of structure and narrative development and to do with the ways in which the spectator responds. Daniels has indicated to me in a semi-structured interview that part of her understanding of the term is the association with "action", where that is concerned simply with the linear development of events in a play, that is, the means by which the plot moves from a to b.<sup>7</sup> It is significantly a term that I discussed in Chapter One where it denoted the early performance definition of "motivation", a term that was also to be revised in the light of turn-of-the-century naturalism and the shift towards psychological motivation. In this transformation there was a move away from the identification of specific gestures with dramatic action, where one gesture prompted the next stage in the play, towards a division between acting, for instance, as one of the processes of performance, and form or dramatic structure. The discrepancy between melodramatic and naturalistic styles is one worth bearing in mind when considering Daniels' feminist revision of naturalism.

Obvious naturalistic elements in *Neptune* include a mode of characterization that can be traced through David Edgar back to Lukacs.<sup>8</sup> This involves her development of a panoply of social "types" constructed in compliance with rather crude distinctions of social class and sexual category: the lesbian middle-class headteacher, the young and healthy lesbian gym instructor are just two of them. Daniels demonstrates the presence of each type in scenes throughout the play and against this "slice of life" with its social types the story is unravelled.

The events of the play are based upon the rivalry between a heterosexual father and now-lesbian mother for the custody of their child, Poppy. With the support of a female network Claire, the child's mother, contravenes the expectation of defeat at the hands of the father (and therefore patriarchy) by stealing her child away to America and going

against the decision of the law to grant custody of the child to the father. It is the complicity of Claire with her own mother Joyce, previously resistant to her daughter's sexuality, that enables their Utopian escape, moving the events almost beyond naturalism to an ending that is rather more filmic, and certainly suggestive of the escape sequences of melodrama, than theatrical. Quite simply, it is the traditional revelatory letter which shows them to have left for America. Similarly, a moment where our emotions are raised is a scene in *Ripen Our Darkness* consisting of Rene's one line: "Your father's choked to death on a scone." The improbability of both this line and the ending of *Neoptide* is provocative in the sense that it would be difficult to theatricalize; it in fact suggests that Daniels has chosen non-naturalistic devices because of the implausibility of such moments in a naturalistic and mimetic theatre.

The use of the plot mechanisms of melodrama most specifically depends upon a relationship between male oppressor and female victim: the women are consistently victims of male rule, recalling a fairly conventional and stark contrast between black and white, good and evil in the language of melodrama. Melodrama conventionally extends the opposition to include a third party, making the exchange always between heroine/villain/hero, and dependent upon a series of shifts in power between villain and hero, and illustrating a shift in focus from class-based analysis in drama to the exploration of the personal and domestic. Christine Gledhill, in her important feminist reading of melodrama, *Home is Where the Heart Is: Studies in Melodrama and the Woman's Film*, makes the point that:

sentimentalism, stress on the individual, appeals to the personal, all supported the shift in the social terrain of bourgeois fictions and drama from feudal and aristocratic hierarchies to the 'democratic' bourgeois family - arena of personal, moral and social conflict, and support of the triad, heroine/villain/hero, which became a dominant dramatic structure from thereon.<sup>9</sup>

It is this change in dramatic structure that Daniels is free to play with and invert, based upon a different account of class. Because the triad shows women as the target or victim of male oppression, any class analysis of the naturalistic world is

inconceivable because the only class depicted in *Neaptide* is the middle-class, despite it being an issue-based play, which the assumption of radical feminism that all women constitute a class in themselves would suggest is aimed at and accessible to all women. In fact, this seems to suggest that a class analysis is insufficient to deal with the issues and that women must be read as a status group - always oppressed because of an ambivalent relation to patriarchy, making traditional descriptions of melodrama inadequate. Daniels' plays begin to fall in different categories with reference to the trajectory of the heroine/villain/hero triad: in *Masterpieces* she creates an inversion and Rowena's act of murder shows a temporary release in structure because the victim becomes an oppressor; in *Neaptide* this is never a possibility, the apparatus of the prevailing order remaining intransigent. As a result of the shared status group of women they are never in a position to invert class-relations (as Marxism expects the working-class to) thereby becoming powerful because they are in a sense contained by their category and the very act of naming them a shared status group. Thus Daniels shows women as needing to escape the male-dominated world and despite the fact that Claire, Joyce and other women in the play experience a growing solidarity throughout, identifying them as a "class in themselves", they are ultimately confined by the letter of the law. Fantasy and myth are the non-naturalistic devices that enable escape from the realist text.

Daniels' play then incorporates what can be described as a conventional public melodrama which links it with preceding socialist drama, for instance, in the battle against the establishment. At the same time it is concerned with the internal and domestic scene and this dual-narrative is reflected in a conflation of the two worlds to the extent that social and political concerns are collapsed and Claire is both a victim in the public domain, that is in the legal wranglings of the play, and also a victim in the domestic world. This might point to a reciprocity between public and domestic domains traditionally separated as traditional stage melodrama which is always public and Hollywood melodrama which is invariably domestic and aimed at women. I will demonstrate how Daniels both maintains the notion of a dual-narrative or public and domestic melodrama but also collapses it, the collapse being most evident in her use of the motif of the female body in representation, as opposed to the corporeal presence of

the performers, as the site at which social laws are inscribed. I would argue that the point at which domestic/public relationship is not wholly reciprocal is to do with the transformation of the terms we use to describe social relations. That is, in the displacement of the domestic to the social there is a momentary discrepancy because the terms of social relations have been revised to include women as a shared class group. At this point the transaction, for it is in effect all but a transaction, is not quite comfortable and the existing structures are unable to contain both domestic and public melodrama, a situation where the victim may become the oppressor, and where a radical feminist epistemology replaces the previous terms and conditions of a heterosexual patriarchal order. And at this point the kind of reviews Daniels' plays elicit may be questioned in that the terms upon which they rest will have been revised.<sup>10</sup> Subsequently the term "melodrama" may be cleared of its negative connotations.

A further feature of melodrama that transforms Daniels' naturalism is found in the analysis of single or isolated scenes such as scene six, part two, in which there is a note saying that Poppy and Claire have fled to the States or Rene's line cited earlier (*Ripen Our Darkness*, scene nine). Here, selected scenes can be seen in isolation from the whole play as an indication that "action" may be shown, confirming the traditional association of melodrama with demonstrative, musical and visual cues, as opposed to spoken discourse. The point is clear: that dialogue (the critical medium of naturalism) is a secondary concern. Although Daniels' work does not go so far as to subordinate dialogue to action, actions do indeed become more important than they have been in previous issue-based plays. On the one hand, we can examine gesture, status and performance style, and on the other hand, we see her as retaining the centrality of dialogue as a means of highlighting narrative structure and the political concern of a male dominated world governed by Oedipal desire.

This masculine sphere of action was the main characteristic of plays of the seventies where class concern was paramount; as Michelene Wandor delineates in her book, *Look Back in Gender*, there was a noted shift away from private concerns to public landscapes; plays and women playwrights are seen by Wandor to have focussed (inevitably) upon certain themes. Once again there are two concurrent styles present in Daniels' plays: (1)

Class-based - external and eliciting acts of inversion; (2) Status-based - concerned with the domestic and internal scene.

Isolating and examining single scenes of Daniels' plays is possible given the disjointed structure of the plays which allow each scene to be almost autonomous. It is within these scenes that the notion of "action" is perhaps most clearly established. Framji Minwalla in her article "Sarah Daniels: A Woman in the Moon" talks of, "...the structural anarchy of such snapshot insertions" to describe the surreal and humorous scenes invariably included in all her plays.<sup>11</sup> What I think Minwalla shows is that these scenes are inconsistent with the class relations (of melodramatic inversion) dominant in the main body of the text, in that they cannot be analysed with reference to traditional class relations in so far as these are generally deployed through naturalism. Minwalla thus associates these "anarchic" scenes with surrealism and what are essentially non-naturalistic devices. This enables us to consider the *mise-en-scene* without any real recourse to other scenes and without making any reference to the kind of consistent narrative that class analysis requires. Describing scenes thus - as *mise-en-scene* - highlights the discrepancy between the framed image and the scenes on either side. That there is no continuity is an indication of the gaps in a linear development and therefore reveals the discrepancies between the class-based and status-based premises. One such scene is the opening of scene Thirteen of *Ripen Our Darkness*, demonstrating where naturalism becomes surrealism, based as it is upon images that have no other reference in the play:

*A hospital room.*

MARY *in bed, semi-conscious.*

*Presently THREE WOMEN enter.*

MARY (*mumbles*). What? Where? Oh, er. What's...

OLD WOMAN. It's all right, dear, you're perfectly okay. You're safe. (*and continues later...*)

OLD WOMAN (*gesturing to TALL WOMAN*). This is the Holy Hostess with the mostest and this (*She gestures to YOUNG WOMAN*) is my daughter who bled in a shed for you - and for many.

*Silence.*

MARY (*panics*). Now hold on a minute, what sort of hospital is this? It's a loony bin, isn't it? He's had me committed to the bin.

*She is frightened.*



OLD WOMAN (*takes hold of MARY's hand*). No, Mary, you're in paradise.<sup>12</sup>

The scene situates Mary away from the confines of her home, as shown in her presence earlier in her own kitchen, and away from male-dominated institutions. Thus it presents a new environment that is set up initially as being quite familiar, perhaps thereby raising our expectations that she has been hospitalized, only to be later defeated as we realize that she is in the presence of a woman we might describe as an "angel". Moreover, this is no ordinary angel and Mary soon learns that she has entered a feminist paradise where from her perspective she is still alive and yet removed from a male-dominated world; from the point of view of the spectator, this world cannot bear any resemblance to the naturalized world, and naturalized social relations therefore, of the prior scenes. Interestingly, whilst the women in *Neoptide* were disempowered by their escape from the patriarchal world, Mary is subtly empowered in that she is able to later interfere with the Monopoly game her "widowed" husband continues to play.

In summary then, the implications of materialist-feminism for theatre theory, that I discussed in Chapter One, are such that: in this instance status replaces class and women are seen as a "class in themselves". A continuation, therefore, of the issue of social relations can be developed by using what I would call a feminist melodramatic form.

The structure of the rest of this chapter will be as follows. First I will consider in more detail Daniels' plays in relation to previously cited issues of narrative convention, class analysis and the relationship of oppressor to victim, using melodrama to provide the main structure of analysis. Second, I will consider the new representation of meaning to include a radical feminist epistemology, where comedy, excess and also violence - extensions of melodrama - help redefine the framework of theatrical naturalism. This transition will be apparent in Daniels' accommodation of both external and public issues and domestic and internal concerns rather than her taking only one direction as other playwrights have done.<sup>13</sup>

Melodrama: public and private debates

In this section I develop in more detail the parallel between public and domestic melodrama. One of the difficulties of placing Daniels' work is rooted in the ambivalent genres of so-called feminist theatres, and whilst it has been convenient for me to describe her work as "issue-based" there are alternative generic categories to which her work can, and has been ascribed. It is precisely the seemingly disparaging tone of reviews likening her work to soap opera, situation comedy and melodrama which provides the opening for developing new ways of describing her work.<sup>14</sup> At the same time that Daniels has produced the majority of her plays feminist theory has introduced a radical transformation in the status of romance fictions and soap operas as part of developments in reader-response theories of the woman reader or spectator. Tania Modleski's *Loving With A Vengeance* was for instance a key text in establishing this transformation and so has subsequent work in film and media studies. One of the implications of analyzing the subject position of the female spectator has been to do with processes of identification and the possibility for an over-identification. where the spectator is metaphorically too closely involved with the object of her gaze, that is the female performer.<sup>15</sup> The issues at stake are those clearly associated with the emotional pull of melodrama.

The relationship between the spectator and the performed and visual text has been most clearly explored in the work on melodrama in film by Laura Mulvey and Christine Gledhill who have recently considered the genre of "women's films".<sup>16</sup> These films are the product of a male-oriented Hollywood industry and function to place women in much the same way as a naturalistic narrative can be said to interpellate the spectator in ideology. Daniels, I would suggest, has a dual-position here, that on the one hand involves using traditional dramatic structures and therefore engaging her political theatre at a direct and "interventionist" level, and on the other hand involves her establishing a particular connection with the woman spectator and processes of identification with characters. Thus she offers the possibility for identification seen to be important for women watching women's genres - because through identification with characters women are able to share experiences and go through a liberation of emotion - yet at the same time uses the

mechanisms of existing political theatre in order to maintain a public profile for her women characters. These women, then are both able to function actively within the heroine/villain/hero triad by challenging its rigidity but at the same time are based upon women-only identification. I will explore the processes of what I call feminist melodrama with reference to Daniels' most polemical play, *Masterpieces*.

*Masterpieces: a paradigm of feminist melodrama*

Christine Gledhill describes the basic structures of melodrama in the introduction to *Home is where the Heart is: Studies in Melodrama and the Woman's Film* as follows:

Melodrama utilises narrative mechanisms that create a blockage to expression, thereby forcing melodramatic enactments into alternative and excessive strategies to clarify the dramatic stakes. Characteristically the melodramatic plot turns on an initial, often deliberately engineered misrecognition of the innocence of a central protagonist. By definition the innocent cannot use the powers available to the villain; following the dictates of their nature, they must become victims, a position legitimated by a range of devices which rationalise their apparent inaction on their own behalf. Narrative is then progressed through a struggle for clear moral identification of all protagonists and is finally resolved by public recognition of where guilt and innocence really lie.<sup>17</sup>

Gledhill's description exposes plot mechanism as depending upon the rather sweeping forces of good and evil that Peter Brooks indicated as belonging to a heightened emotional state where there is the possibility of an "impulse toward dramatization, heightening, expression, acting out".<sup>18</sup> If this pattern acts as a mechanism for identifying the trajectory of plot and the nature of characterisation, it is this structure and easy familiarity which displaces individual characterisation in favour of looking at the larger forces of society. In *Masterpieces* this is reflected in the shift from the general discussions of pornography to a focus instead upon its various social and domestic manifestations. It is a focus away from character, and a reversal which Daniels uses in her plays despite the apparent development of character. In fact, I would suggest that the women only develop in terms of consciousness raising as part of the plot mechanism in order that they are able later to turn upon their oppressors. The narrative structure of *Masterpieces* follows the pattern Gledhill has set out, therefore constituting a public melodrama.

However, in terms of anticipating a denouement Daniels includes a critical scene which fails to be easily accommodated by the melodramatic model, suggesting again that a feminist revision of social relations constitutes in itself an excessive strategy in melodrama. Daniels' play is an anti-patriarchal play and the final resolution of where "innocence and guilt really lie" is only ever clear-cut if the spectator takes up a realigned political - that is a feminist - position. This point I will explore further with reference to the trial scenes of the play.

Trial scenes conventionally indicate moments at which innocence is publicly recognized, the criminal dismissed and the subject reaffirmed. Peter Brooks makes the analogy with Freudian psychoanalysis to describe the scene as an acting out or expulsion of repressed feelings.<sup>19</sup> Daniels' extends her analysis of the trial scene to moments outside of its immediate frame: for instance Rowena is talking to a woman police officer, thus using a different register of language to the play on words she employs as her defence against the judiciary. Her final speech introduces the important melodramatic feature of emotion and stands as the moment of exchange from an existing legal system and belief-system that condemns murder however justified to a system whereby the individual is activated to the extent that she takes part in a redefinition of social practice. This latter perspective, where Rowena is made politically active, relies on a transition towards what might metaphorically be read as a revolutionary position in which Rowena is aligned with the working-class, one of the class of women. In this position she becomes the aggressor and then victim in the exchange of power and to condone her action is to condone further action against what constitutes the state. Daniels has shown women to be victims of pornography and it is this victim state that enables them ultimately to fight against oppression and invert the melodramatic structure to the extent of taking events into their own hands. The spectator is given an insight into the psychological motivations for this in addition to the motivation to "action" in the following speech from scene Seventeen. I have not only included the speech in full, but the scene also, as it is in the dialogic exchange that the mechanisms of emotions are first aroused.

ROWENA and POLICEWOMAN. ROWENA is absorbed in her own thoughts.

*There is silence.*

POLICEWOMAN. Is there anything I can get for you...?

ROWENA. What? Oh. No... Thanks.

POLICEWOMAN. Cigarette. (*She offers her one.*) What was it like?

ROWENA. Sorry?

POLICEWOMAN. The film you saw.

ROWENA. Oh, that.

POLICEWOMAN. What was it like? Er, don't...If you don't want to.

*Pause.*

ROWENA (*very quietly*). 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 then 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.

*Long pause.*

That's it. The end. And I kept forcing myself, to pretend that it was only a movie.

POLICEWOMAN. No. 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.

ROWENA. I'm going to have a long time to think about it.

POLICEWOMAN. We do our best to convict them.

ROWENA. Yes. (*ROWENA moves away.*) I don't want anything to do with men who have knives or whips or men who look at photos of women tied and bound, or men who say relax and enjoy it. Or men who tell misogynist jokes.

*Blackout (p.229).*

This is the final scene in the play, an elaboration of the other side of the law made whilst Rowena awaits the jury's decision. Her speech is testimony to the underlying motives (the political reality) of her act of murder. Significantly she is unable to make this speech in the courtroom itself, and her own defence becomes increasingly flippant in view of her realization that her own language is inadequate given the terms of the judicial

system. Rowena's anti-establishment jokes show her as simply fighting a losing battle, and humour is the medium through which her intense anguish is mediated. Daniels has spoken herself of the use of humour as a means of diffusing tension.<sup>20</sup> Other writers, Bryony Lavery for instance, have described it as a weapon.<sup>21</sup> In the courtroom scene Rowena's flippancy is both in that it diffuses some tension yet is merely an impotent weapon against her intended audience in the courtroom. As was the case in Wendy Kesselman's *My Sister in This House*, the court room scene demonstrates the severity of judgment made on a woman denied language and by implication denied the opportunity for her innocence to be publicly proclaimed and criminality be expelled. Thus Rowena's relationship to the "acting out" of melodrama is ambivalent in that she has access to the traditional structures of melodrama in her inversion of the heroine/hero opposition yet is excluded from it as a woman at the hands of a patriarchal system.

I would suggest that this scene constitutes a locus for the action of the play itself in that from it issues to do with narrative developments in terms of the gaze and issues related to conventional hero/villain structures emerge. But what of that action itself? Gledhill states that, "by definition the innocent cannot use the powers available to the villain" yet we see that Rowena is able to use the powers of the villain, these being violent tactics. However, what she is unable to do is to use the medium, the judicial system, through which the powers of patriarchy are legitimised. Rowena, the policewoman and the spectator are aware of this and this fact leads me to consider the relationship between emotion and affect that I have previously discussed in Chapter Two as a performance issue and touched upon with reference to Brooks' description of melodrama as an "acting out". This requires a further consideration of the framing and construction of Rowena's speech.

Specifically, the speech relates Rowena's experience of watching a snuff movie. By definition this film is contrived to the extent that the act of mimesis, or the simulation of reality (making the verb appropriately active) is challenged by the actual violation of the female actor. At once the pro-filmic scenario is brought to the fore as the image is not simply iconic but is a direct and actual attack on the body as that which is the signified. Throughout the speech the codes of the signifier are conflicting and the act of sadism,

which we understand to lead to a certain conclusion, is literally carried out. Rowena's description moves step by step through this sadistic narrative in which the use of the term is not simply the metaphorical analogy Mulvey and subsequent feminist critics have made.<sup>22</sup> Instead it moves from the metaphorical application of the "sadistic narrative" with which we might consider the first part of the film Rowena describes through to a literal application of it in the second part. This literal transition is notably framed within a film studio, the place where the sadistic attack on women is commonly metaphorical, in that it was film critics who first established theories of the gaze with which to address their media. In these theories women are simply signs according to the principals of a meta-fictional theory developed to describe desire and are always represented in terms of the surface of an objectified sexuality. The description is of a film, yet this scene is re-created for the theatre spectator aurally, and the filmic narrative is inserted into a theatrical narrative, thus removing it from the immediate and visual image. Interestingly it is the policewoman whose experience of pornographic desire is to do with the victims of male attack who automatically registers the description on a literal as opposed to a metaphorical level.

Scene Seventeen is shown only subsequent to Rowena's act of murder and therefore acts to absolve Rowena of the charges of murder levelled against her, at least in the eyes of the (feminist) spectator. In a sense her own act of murder, which I will consider in more detail later, is a precursor to the snuff movie murder she later describes because both are governed by anonymity, yet it is shown to depend primarily upon a cathartic release build up in the prior domestic scenes (the courtroom scene simply absolves her public crime). It is in the memory traces between the two that emotional involvement becomes a prominent issue because we are invited to judge Rowena's traumatic experience of watching the snuff movie as a cause for her own act of murder, despite there being a temporal dislocation of the two scenes. Moreover, I would point out here that the striving towards a realism based upon a new set of ethical and epistemological feminist criteria takes on melodramatic proportions and the concept of conventional realism is distorted. Rowena as victim is transformed in a last bid attempt to become the innocent hero but is incomplete as an oppressor and finally she returns to

being an eternal and archetypal female victim incarcerated for her "revolutionary" act. Only in its verbal retelling, elicited by the policewoman asking, "What was it like?" does the weight of emotions provoked release cathartic energy.

The implications of this discussion raise an issue in staging that was prevalent throughout late seventies and early eighties women's theatre and cabaret, that is, the ways in which debates around female sexuality might be staged without provoking the very objectification of women as sexual the practitioners were trying to criticise. That this has proved consistently problematic indicates its complexity, yet more than this - perhaps it is a way of distinguishing between the analysis of the male gaze in film and in theatre. We might ask, is the policewoman's question to be seen as an invitation to a voyeuristic narrative translated into a verbal narrative? The spectator has no choice in her/his subjection to the speech, and therefore to the processes of a sadistic narrative, making her/him immediately vulnerable to the shocking nature of its content. In this case it can be seen as a direct shock tactic of the feminist playwright, reflecting the crudeness of the pornographic film in the verbal account and contrasting with the glamour and fixed positions characteristic of film. It is a situation sufficient to make the spectator uncomfortable in her/his seat, since not only can the speech be seen out of the context of the action of the play, but also because Rowena's own act of killing is anonymous. The anonymity of her victim actually is disturbingly more aligned with the anonymity evoked in the snuff movie than with the naturalistic consciousness-raising of the main text.

Tracey C. Davis' essay "*Extremities and Masterpieces A Feminist Paradigm of Art and Politics*" discusses the presentation of sexuality, crime and pornography in the film by comparing it with a play written by a man.<sup>23</sup> She concludes that each works through different structures and that Daniels' play "...is message-oriented - it attempts to prove an argument rhetorically - but it does this by fusing emotional responses to ideas that have been introduced but are not necessarily answered within the fiction of the play"(p102). It is my contention - which necessitates an analysis of the play through melodrama - that if the act of murder, and the release of cathartic energy, functions in the way of a conventional Oedipal drama, as a release and an inevitable climax, then the emotion acts to confuse and reduce the clarity expected and associated with political theatre.



Moreover, an emotional response for the woman spectator may serve a different function to that for the male. Its role is suggestive of the reality of the exchange in that women are never in any position to achieve a mastery of the text in question. The ambivalence of the relationship between affect and confrontation, that the speech symbolises is also reflected in another ambivalence: is the crime of pushing the man from the tracks actually a calculated act of homicide? Or is it a crime of passion? Clearly, the indeterminacy of this act in terms of the uncertainty of Rowena's motives demonstrates how far a discrepancy showing the act as either an aggravated act against the state, or an accident, reflects on the status of Rowena as victim.

I wish to return to an often quoted essay by Laura Mulvey here, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema", in order to extend the analysis of the implicit sadism of traditional narrative.<sup>24</sup> Her point is that, "Sadism demands a story, depends upon making something happen, forcing a change in another person, a battle of will and strength, victory/defeat, all occurring in a linear time with a beginning and an end"(p14). The exception she makes to this progression is fetishistic scopophilia, "as the erotic instinct is focussed on the look alone" (p14). In *Masterpieces* fetishism is set against the relationship between pornography and its wider contexts. Pornography frames the play which opens with three monologues from men representing different levels in the hierarchies of the pornography industry. The speeches, each from a baron, a peddler and a consumer interrupt the restaurant scene where the three main couples of the play are eating. The sound of Concorde landing interrupts the sound of restaurant-style music, standing as a metonym for the interruptions to easy scenarios that are to follow throughout the play. The consciousness-raising of the women that follows is always placed against manifestations of pornography as impinging on the characters' lives; the public melodrama is directly related to the domestic melodrama and in this relationship fetishistic scopophilia becomes a prominent issue.

Tracy C. Davis contrasts a masculine and linear narrative within the play with a cyclical and female disruptive narrative which she identifies in the breaks in chronology and different strands of plot.<sup>25</sup> I would suggest that the melodramatic mode is a more appropriate description and that the breaks in narrative are those which address the issue

of fetishism as extensions of story as much as plot in so far as pornographic debate lies at the centre of the subject or story of the play as also precipitating Rowena's act of murder and thus being crucial in terms of the play's action. The primary mechanism for approaching pornography is through verbal description and voice-over, a common feature in Daniels' plays that severs body from voice and never allows the female body to be subject to the scrutiny of the spectator. She consistently ensures that these descriptions are anonymous, reinforcing the point made earlier that verbal telling allows a literal rendering of information and avoids the complexities of looking which are dealt with tangentially and obliquely. For instance, where pornographic material constitutes a stage property it is shown only in a way that the spectator - perhaps anticipating the minutiae of stage naturalism - has no access to it. In scene Eight Rowena asks Yvonne if she might look at some of the pornographic magazines she has confiscated from children at her school:

ROWENA. Can I have a look at it?

YVONNE. Only if you think you must.

ROWENA *looks at the magazines in such a way that the audience is not exposed to their contents.*

*Female monologues. (Voice over on tape)*

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 (p.202).

Throughout this scene Rowena glances at the magazines and later burns them; other magazines are described as being kept under the bed, on the table and video titles tell the spectator all she/he needs to know. These items are never on display to the spectator. The implied fetishism of having these properties on the stage enhances the story in the domestic scene, leaving the plot to work through the public conflicts of melodrama.

### Issue plays and affect

In *Masterpieces* a relationship between issue and affect is highlighted at both levels of story and plot. Affect is used here with reference to psychoanalysis where it denotes the emotion associated with a set of ideas. In so far as it points to a possible relationship between the spectator and the performer/character there is an interesting analogy to be made perhaps with the early feminist of drama in which the idea of feminist drama as rhetoric was significant.<sup>26</sup> If plot structure entails the arrangement of events in the play, here, it moves through a consciousness-raising experience in which all three main women characters reject the domestic realm and move into the public domain where murders are committed and innocence made public. Plot and story are shown to be interdependent in that Daniels' highlights a continuum between degrees of pornography - soft, hard-core, erotica and so on - and Rowena's response is as much to the telling of dirty jokes as it is to hard-core pornography, for instance.

Pornography is a force through which class differences are exposed despite the shared status of women. Jennifer, Rowena's mother, for example, is well aware of the several manifestations of pornography within her marriage but opts for the escapism that her relative wealth and middle-class lifestyle affords rather than confronting the issue directly. Here it is class that intervenes in the shared experience of the status group by providing an escape route for the privileged women. Otherwise the idea of escape is reflected in terms of form in that there is a move outside of naturalism for women if they are to be understood as a status group.

I would suggest then that this mutuality involves a rather more complicated relationship for the spectator, for she/he is shown an Oedipal or sadistic narrative at work (albeit through inversion of the structure of heroine/villain/hero in melodrama). In addition she/he is invited to witness an emulation of the mechanisms by which one is affected, in the production of an emotional response in the character. This process is perhaps one of catharsis. James L. Smith in his introductory book *Melodrama* makes a distinction between what he terms a melodrama of "triumph" and one of "defeat".<sup>27</sup> He contrasts the latter with a further distinction, of a melodrama of "protest" that he suggests

can be found in the work of contemporary practitioners such as Richard Schechner. Daniels' plays similarly might be described as melodramas of protest to the extent that they are issue-based, but they are also melodramas of defeat, in that women invariably suffer at the hands of men, thus becoming victims. In this case the spectator shares a relationship of suffering with a victim and as Smith makes clear, such a relationship has a particularly useful social function in that it enables a systematic purging of emotions, where emotions are the mainspring of potential uprising:

Regular exposure to the sentimental melodrama of defeat will keep our neurotic anxieties comfortably relaxed, our hearts tenderized and our tear-ducts periodically flushed. They will function the more smoothly when next we need to use them in real life (p.60).

This may indicate that the mechanisms of affect in the play serve an ideological function because there is an inversion of traditional public melodrama. Rowena is both a victim of "defeat" and a martyr of "protest" theatres. In *Ripen Our Darkness* and *Neptide* women are able to transcend the confines of naturalism as a strategy for dealing with its defeats but this is principally a result of the solidarity of the status group. Unfortunately Rowena changes her status and enters the public domain in that her act is a solitary one, rather than maintaining the pleasures of women's unity shown extra-diegetically in scene Thirteen: "A cold but sunny spring day. ROWENA, YVONNE and JENNIFER are having a picnic. The atmosphere between them is warm and relaxed. The pace is slow." Pace here denotes a contrast with the accelerated speed of events in the public melodrama and shows the scene as an Utopian respite against which the events of the plot are rapidly building. Such scenes are evocative of the distancing of immediate emotions associated with the naturalistic world.

In the theatrical melodrama Smith finds a copying, which I will call mimicking, of a build up and release of emotions, contrasting the simulation of events with the actual experience. In her conflation of the snuff movie image and the theatrical reconstruction of a courtroom scene Daniels is questioning such an easy distinction between the "real" and the "staged" world. Therefore, the spectator is positioned in a viewing arrangement in which she/he is always in a relationship of empathy with the victim. In film, there is a

more systematic switching of identification between the sadism of the director/protagonist and the masochism of the victim. In her exclusion of visual stimulation Daniels ensures that this is never a possibility, yet she allows the spectator an insight into those mechanisms by providing perspectives on the gaze and on fetishism.

The key narrative technique with which such switching is available is evidently suspense. I would suggest that suspense has an interesting and ambivalent place in the plays if they are understood with reference to Daniels' radical feminist epistemology; in a sense such an epistemology has the same function as a prologue (significantly added to the later play *Beside Herself*) in that the spectator has a degree of certainty in her knowledge of what message the play will entail, and perhaps also be of the opinion that she may predict the likely trajectory of events, or at least their conclusion. Suspense, moreover, is used by Daniels in such a way best understood through the kinds of relationship of affect to performance discussed in Chapter One. There, as here, affect is central in defining the relationship of the personal to the political is located again in the kinds of exercises found in feminist psychodrama. By examining these I am able to examine the mechanisms by which she seeks to elicit "gut responses" in the spectator. I will use Roland Barthes account of suspense as a distortion as an introduction to this analysis:

'Suspense' is clearly only a privileged - or 'exacerbated' - form of distortion: on the one hand, by keeping a sequence open (through emphatic procedures of delay and renewal), it reinforces the contact with the reader (the listener), has a manifestly phatic function; while on the other, it offers the threat of an uncompleted sequence, of an open paradigm (if, as we believe, every sequence has two poles), that is to say, of a logical disturbance, it being this disturbance which is consumed with anxiety and pleasure (all the more so because it is always made right in the end.) 'Suspense', therefore, is a game with structure, designed to endanger and glorify it, constituting a veritable 'thrilling' of intelligibility: by representing order (and no longer series) in its fragility, 'suspense' accomplishes the very idea of language: what seems the most pathetic is also the most intellectual - 'suspense- grips you in the 'mind', not in the 'guts'.<sup>28</sup>

Rowena's act of homicide is the locus of suspense in the play. From scene Two the spectator is aware of it for this is the first courtroom scene, constructed as a clarification of events. It constitutes a foreshadowing of the final scene but it also serves as exposition

and is an attempt to destroy the thrill of suspense. However, in the interchange between public and domestic melodrama suspense is again generated and scene Five, for example, is virtually a rehearsal of the event. The spectator observes Rowena walking along a road and being followed and her/his expectation is raised by Rowena's disembodied voice-over articulating the fear that any woman might have - the fears of a shared status group - of her own complicity in being vulnerable:

ROWENA. Wish I wasn't wearing. I look quite respectable though. What am I doing out this late at night? Working. The only women who work at night were prostitutes. Otherwise their husbands would meet them. Can't walk fast, it will look funny. Don't look too nervous. Why the hell doesn't he cross over? (p.187).

Despite our awareness that Rowena's crime was committed on a station platform we are caught up in the creation of suspense in this scene, a suspense heightened by the trepidation of the disembodied voice which serves to distance fear from knowledge and dematerialize the voice from the body subject to real violence in the play. Ernst and Goodison include a psychodrama exercise in *In Our Own Hands: A Book of Self-Help Therapy* from which this scene could easily be a staged reconstruction. The exercise involves a woman walking around a space imagining the threat of someone walking behind her; as she increases her space she is encouraged to stamp and begin to shout out "no" to the imaginary attacker. From this exercise, called "Stamping" they move to another, called "No, No and Please, Please", designed for more than one actant in order that the main protagonist learns to express "strong feelings of anger or pain".<sup>29</sup> The additional person figures as a sounding board for the expression of deep emotions and although she is aptly dispassionate she is in effect part of a move towards a dyadic coupling. Thus, there is a transition towards a status exchange based upon the second actant granting the first the power to express emotion. In the same way that the second actant figures in relation to the first, so might the spectator in relation to this staged version. As she/he watches Rowena she will be caught in the range of sympathetic emotions and recognition of the fear and therefore placed in an ambivalent relationship to the trajectory of events.

Interestingly Rowena begins to question her own complicity in both "inviting" attack and eliciting suspense by asking herself if she wearing the wrong clothes, being out at night without care and so on. And it is specifically this confusion which provokes suspense and the expectation of attack although this scene is only symptomatic of the story and not part of the plot.

It is not until scene Fourteen that the actual murder committed in the play is staged. This time there is no voice-over and the action is mimed; the entire scene is constructed through the use of extra-diegetic information:

*Tube station. It is 10.30 p.m. A man enters. There is the sound of a train pulling in. He sits on a bench, half-asleep, free to doze. ROWENA rushes on to the platform. As the train pulls out another man enters smoking a cigarette. There is the sound off of a tube approaching on another platform. The man looks at his watch. Pause. He casually saunters up the platform towards ROWENA who doesn't look at him. Long pause. He then says something to her which we don't hear. She turns away and weighs up the options of whether to run back up an empty, dark passageway or stay where she is. She moves away from him deciding that the next train will arrive any minute and she'll be safe. He approaches her again very fast. Very close to her face. She shoves him violently. He falls on the track. There is the sound of a train. Simultaneous blackout. Lights flash on ROWENA looking back at the track. Blackout. The train screeches to a halt (p.224).*

Again Rowena's space is threatened in such a way as to resemble the threat of overpowering spatial status which Johnstone talks about as a key status interaction on a level with language-based status. Significantly all language is removed from the scene and it is a miming of a threat to women. As was the case at the beginning of the play the mechanised sound of the train screeching to a halt functions as an alienating device with which to demonstrate, through *mise-en-scene*, the reconstruction of a status interaction. It also is the point at which the sound effects can be read as alienation effects in that the private moment becomes a social and public moment. In this scene the inversion of the traditional heroine/villain/hero triad is effected and the public melodrama is momentarily empowering for Rowena. On the other hand, Daniels develops in parallel the domestic melodrama with which women are more easily able to identify, more so than the previous

scene in which Rowena's act has to be regarded as distanced from emotional involvement and simply a staging of revolutionary action.

#### Scenes of domestic melodrama

The basis for reconstructing melodrama so far has been the opposition of public forces, specifically using strategies of inversion. In addition Daniels details a secondary and parallel narrative in her emphasis upon the domestic scene. This affords the opportunity for a women's melodrama based upon a distinction from its public part. It is this domestic melodrama to which I will now turn, arguing that a problematic conflict between traditional distinctions of social class is here more evident than in the public melodrama, where it might be expected, and where class distinction tends to set men and women in different categories.

Given that melodrama is typically characterized by the notion of "excess", the body of the text in question (film, play, novel) can be read as resisting a conventional realist reading. This resistance can be further defined as "hysteria", a term complementary to excess. Christine Gledhill makes the following observation on melodrama's relation to reality:

If the family melodrama's speciality is generational and gender conflict, verisimilitude demands that the central issues of sexual difference and identity be 'realistically' presented. But these are precisely the issues realism is designed to repress. Hence it is the syphoning of unrepresentable material into the excessive *mise-en-scene* which makes a work melodramatic.<sup>30</sup>

The verisimilitude cited here is located as central to the public melodrama of Daniels' plays; in contrast, through *mise-en-scene*, "hysteria" and "excess" is evident in the utopian and non-naturalistic devices. This is a feature, I would suggest, of *Neaptide* and *The Devil's Gateway* in particular, those plays which I would label as concerned with issues (lesbian parenting and Greenham Common respectively) and therefore more prominently public melodramas. In contrast, in the group I would call domestic dramas, including *Ripen Our Darkness*, the notions of "excess" and "hysteria" are indicators of the redefinition of social relations. To an extent, this distinction is arbitrary as there are



elements of both in all the plays, yet it provides a useful marker between the public and domestic melodramas - and therefore narratives - for which I am arguing. Thus, given the significance of "excess" in the domestic melodramas it is necessary to consider the significance of revised social relations in which the women are a class in themselves (a status group) as a substitute for traditional class relations and somehow accommodate the verisimilitude of public melodrama with the "excess" of the domestic scene. This can be done by establishing a reading that allows for the complementary relation between the two. As a result of this re-alignment of Daniels' "social dramas" it is not the case that the plays can be judged with reference to the notion, and criticisms, of the "classic realist text"; their naturalism is constantly redefining itself so that it is no longer the naturalism it once was. And our understanding of "issue-based" drama is perforce transformed.

In view of the revision of critical reading Daniels' domestic melodrama is seen to provide an alternative form to the structures commonly implicated in naturalism and therefore constitutes a positive feminist intervention to the extent that she uses both existing strategies but transforms them by introducing new theatrical devices and social relations. However, at the same time, these positive interventions are made more questionable in the presentation of the existing working-class. Daniels incorporates a straightforward class-basis as part of her strategy for showing the "class of women" that at times brings with it the problematic baggage of prior assumptions regarding the presentation of working-class characters on stage. This appears to be a difficulty arising from her critique of patriarchy as it is constructed through binaries, where for example, she consistently chooses to highlight a familiar assumption that the working-class do not have the same command of language and vocabulary that their bourgeois counterparts do.

Laughing at malapropisms is targeted as being reprehensible in several male characters: in *Beside Herself* one of the male members of the Management Committee, Roy, makes a point of picking up one of the nurses for linguistic errors, mocking her "weren't" for instance. Similarly, colloquial language is also used as a dramatic technique of characterisation, establishing the working-class in particular, as is the expected cultural knowledge of each class (a feature which Daniels develops to a greater extent in *Beside Herself* and which I will consider in detail later as a direct reflection of contentious issues

within feminist theory). Hilary, a working-class woman in *Masterpieces*, consistently fails to understand Rowena, a middle-class and by implication articulate woman, misinterpreting her literary references as Rowena says, "My mum was reading *Ivanhoe* when she was pregnant with me. That's where I got my name", to which Hilary replies, "I don't blame you for changing it. Rowena's strange enough but *Ivanhoe* - God what a mouthful." The discrepancy in their cultural experience is highlighted by Rowena's next comment, "No, Rowena's a character in it." to which Hilary can only reply (*flatly*) "Oh, really" (scene Four). I am not quite convinced that this exchange serves to confront the predominantly middle-class audience with their own prejudice. Indeed, it may well serve to reinforce ideological assumptions for which the "classic realist text" is criticised in that such techniques set up characters as working-class, and offer no possibilities for change in the formation of the working-class subject and the experience of that subject in the play. Hilary for example is an eternal victim.

It appears that any simple explanation of the anti-mimetic devices used in the plays as confrontational and contrary to its otherwise naturalistic structure depends upon how the scenes are interpreted: whether they are seen to be separate from or integrated within the linearity of the public melodrama. If in fact they are read as isolated scenes, through *mise-en-scene*, then it would be more appropriate to describe them as non-mimetic, rather than anti-mimetic. If interpreted with reference to a coherent narrative then the isolated scene can be described as making a statement through intervention and therefore as political. Rather, I would argue, these scenes demonstrate fundamental political issues concerning social relations upon which the plays are based, and for which the domestic, as opposed to the public, provides a more appropriate summary.

One of the significant relationships between the notion of the domestic and "excess" is located with reference to the female body, and as Elaine Marks makes clear,

To undomesticate the female body one must dare reinscribe it in excess - as excess - in provocative counterimages sufficiently outrageous, passionate, verbally violent and formally complex to both destroy the male discourse on love and redesign the universe.<sup>31</sup>

In *Ripen Our Darkness* "undomesticating the female body" is a process that describes first, the feminist "bildung" of Mary's consciousness-raising experience, and second, the emphasis upon the physical female body and the fact that it is sequestered by domesticity.<sup>32</sup> In the play Daniels juxtaposes the working-class world of Potter's Bar council estate and high-rise flats with the middle-class world of Mary's home, metonymically located in her kitchen. Mary's consciousness shapes the feminist "bildung" and the patriarchal establishment is condemned through her experience. Her final act against oppression is an attempted suicide. Daniels uses traditional class distinctions and physical location in order to show the domesticated female body in different circumstances and to this end creates a social realism dependent upon showing individual characters within the context of a larger social whole, as products of a particular social context. This makes Mary's consciousness-raising experience, like Rowena's in *Masterpieces*, part of the narrative of a public melodrama. This point then makes for a comparison between the two classed worlds that is connected only tenuously by the lesbian relationship between Mary's daughter Anna (middle-class) and her working-class lover, Julie. Significantly, these two characters are usually shown as part of the construction of a domestic melodrama and therefore construct a subjectivity defined by a marginalised lesbian position, making their role as link rather more complex.

However, it is Rene who is the focus of the working-class characters. Rene, like Mary, is a mother, yet, unlike Mary, has no recourse to the structuring device of the feminist "bildung", for this is largely defined through access to middle-class experience, of which Rene has none. Hence, the potential for moments of "excess" that would take her beyond the naturalistic world towards a feminist utopia is small, and instead is translated into potential moments of comedy and also violence, or a conflation of the two. I would suggest that the absence of a feminist "bildung" here indicates the absence of a constraining narrative for Rene, and by implication the containment that "bildung" would strive to counter. Rene, like other working-class women, is too much contained by the limited material conditions of her class status to challenge it. She has only one privilege in the play and this is a soliloquy that shows her as a status(ed) subject. Daniels consistently interrupts her plays to allow certain characters a monologue through which their

subjectivity is explored. Given that there is otherwise a dominant naturalism of dialogue, it is rare that the structure allows such an indulgence; and the previously established category of disruption or "excess" through *mise-en-scene* is replaced by the simple and unambiguous rhetoric of monologic speech. The soliloquy involves a direct address to the audience, and for the working-class figures especially there is a candour that reveals that which is most distressing in their experience. Rene's monologue constitutes the whole of scene Twelve:

I was an old nag I was. I used to rabbit on and on and yesterday evening, coming home from the bus stop on me own I started to get that nervy feeling again but I ain't never bin beaten up or raped outside me own home. For twenty-four hours I lived with that fear...Oh Gawd, don't start me off. When Susan was in hospital she met this woman who used to go on all the time you know, she was a bit like that Julie nutter except for...Don't try and tell me - career or family or both, it don't seem to make no difference - still moaning. I said to her, I said, that's the trouble with us, we don't seem to know what we want (p.64).

Rene speaks with the stoicism typical of representations of working-class women; a stoicism that only the stilted abruptness of the words may deny. What is significant about this description is that Rene shows her fear (and therefore the fear of all women) to have its roots in the context of her own home. Her status position coincides with her economic position, although at this point she no longer shares the position of housewife to her husband because he is dead. She is simply at the mercy of both men and an oppressive social structure. For it is only now, when she is removed from that class relation with her husband, that she feels vulnerable to attack from the outside. The insistence of the attack defines the stoicism she must maintain as a strategy for dealing with suffering; in its insistence it contrasts with the unexpected nature of outside attack and as a result the violence of the situation is subdued. Daniels here is relaying a compatibility between realism and affect that is otherwise challenged as situation depend upon melodrama and an interrelationship of the grotesque with violence.

Where melodrama is most keenly felt is in the violent imagery, which is a means of linking what is social and what is domestic. Invariably, this relies on the presence of men in a domestic exchange, and thus contrasts with the monologue form with which only

Daniels' women are ever privileged. For example, there are two points in the play which establish comedy and violence as critical moments of excess. I include here the whole of scene Nine:

*RENE's kitchen. One o'clock in the morning.*  
*RENE sits in a chair reading Woman's Own.*  
*ALF, purple-faced, is slumped over the table with current bun in his mouth.*  
*SUSAN enters.*  
*Silence.*  
*RENE (looks up. Then flatly). Your father's choked to death on a scone.*  
*Blackout (p.51).*

There is a violence here in the description: not the violence of attack against the oppressed but violence at the point at which it crosses the boundary of naturalism to become humorous, even farce. It is a tendency of violence that becomes excessive and grotesque, even Bakhtinian. Rene sits in the characteristic position of the domestic scene for which this unexpected event is a surprise.

Again, the family is shown as experiencing what may be termed violence and this is the violent reception which Alf, Susan's father, affords to her disfigured child. The revelation of the child is a point of crisis in the play that, whilst first introduced in scene Two, reaches a pitch of hysteria later only to be subsumed by Mary's "bildung" - the domestic melodrama being subsumed by the public melodrama. This second scene takes place again in Rene's kitchen, where Alf has returned home drunk and talking abusively about the baby:

*ALF (at SUSAN). Bleedin' slut. Cow. Little filthy fucker. See, yer know what this bleedin' is, eh? Retribution from God. All-bleedin' mighty. Mighty wrath of God lands you with a shitty, vegetating baby. Thank fuck Christ it's dead. (He lifts his hand to hit SUSAN.)*  
*The scene continues with a discussion of the child between mother and daughter:*  
*RENE. I thought it would be different when we rehoused to Potter's Bar. (She speaks more softly.) It's my fault. I talked yer outta the abortion - mothers are supposed to know best - only this one's a complete bloody flop.*  
*SUSAN. Mum, it's nobody's fault. If only for a few days Peter was alive.*  
*RENE (rising hysteria). Alive! Alive my arse, he was like a bit of squashed fruit. (She slaps herself.) Oh, for Christ's sake, shut up, Rene (p.12).*

Although absent from the stage, the body of the child highlights the extent to which the balance of violence and the grotesque exacerbates relationships within the domestic scene. Despite his intense aggression towards his daughter and her child, it is Alf himself that is later framed as grotesque (see above). The disabled child is treated as a sign of corruption within the family but one whose innocence shows it as both a result of, and sacrifice to, material reality.

The issues of social realism that, for instance, are shown above, are later dealt with through excess. I would suggest that it is as if the discomfort with which these issues are raised can only be dealt with by the softening lens of comedy. In this scene, whilst the issue of the child is rooted in real domestic violence, the narrative leads to an undomestication of the female body in that Rene is in a sense dislocated by the experience of the death of her husband and is no longer identified by the domesticating position of being a wife, yet this undomestication is shown as comic/grotesque. The reality of the situation is reduced by humour and by melodrama in that the violence is but a shadow of its potential - because characterised by exaggeration.

Daniels' plays have been described by critics as rather like situation comedy, a form in which stock characters and archetypal situations are constructed according to the shared experience of characters and audience. Whilst my argument so far in this thesis has challenged this kind of labelling for not taking into account the alternative social relations being created within the plays, the focus on form is worth considering, because situation comedy is a television form readily available to a female audience, and therefore, compatible with features of the "women's film". In *Ripen Our Darkness* it is the middle-class scenario with which the collective audience might feel most familiar because after all, this is theatre and not television, a point which might be considered differently in the light of Sarah Daniels writing for television soaps. David Buckingham in his study of the long-running British soap opera, *EastEnders* identifies the difference between situation comedy and soap opera: soap opera allows for the unexpected whereas situation comedy is consistently formulaic and predictable.<sup>33</sup> The scene of Alf's death demonstrates what is unexpected and thus becomes more than simply part of a stock situation, for it also

alters the potential for feminist transformation by transforming the context and groundrules of the domestic scene. In this sense Daniels can be seen to use a variety of different forms as a move towards transforming theatrical structures in order to accommodate what is familiar and also unexpected for the spectator.

As such Daniels' concern with theatrical structure reflects a pattern seen to be consistent in the plays I have looked at throughout this thesis, and this is a modernist preoccupation with theatrical experimentation based upon the confrontation of existing structures or existing theatrical genres. At the same time she can be seen almost to parody her role as a writer in the use of both collisions of violence and comedy and melodrama within the domestic scene. Daniel Gerould, a North American critic, has suggested that certain avant-garde performers, such as performance artist Richard Foreman and playwright Sam Shepherd, construct a performance dependent upon a parodic relation to melodrama.<sup>34</sup> Gerould does not develop the point beyond suggesting that contemporary developments of melodrama (in that he makes reference to a performance artist) can always in a sense be read as parodic, focussing primarily on a system of gestures. I would read this as a relationship to mimetic models of performance, therefore assuming non-naturalistic devices.

Daniels similarly has constructed a theatre dependent upon a parodic use of melodrama and yet her relation to naturalism sets her work apart from Sheperd and Foreman who in this sense are working within the perimeters of what was traditionally called performance art. Not only do such scenes as those described above constitute a parody of the domestic but they are also a parody of domestic melodrama when that is based upon violent relations between people. It is a reaffirmation of the impulse to act out, to show what is usually unseen, when the reason for it being unseen is that it is grotesque and violent. Located within the familiar structure of her plays - where there are frequent scenes of excess as non-naturalistic or alternately within naturalism as this scene purports to be - the abruptness of each scene and its shocking impact highlights the impulse to act out. This makes melodrama, in effect, specifically a performative impulse: this is either contained and valorized by clear theatrical structures or foregrounded when

those structures are less certain, as in performance art or Daniels' more eclectic theatrical form.

So far I have explored this issue with reference to plays located somehow in relation to naturalism. I wish to turn briefly here to Daniels' most recent play, *Head Rot Holiday* in order to see the ways in which such scenes are constructed in what I would describe as a play based upon a relationship to naturalism more distinct than the previous plays. *Head Rot Holiday* is de-contextualized from the naturalistic world in that it concentrates on the lives of women held within the confines of a psychiatric ward in a women's prison. Time therefore, and the access to what is deemed "normality" are distanced by the very containment of these women in a different world. The notion of ritual therefore is more readily evoked as a way of establishing the women's relationship to the world, in that these women have no access, and seemingly little reason, to live according to the temporal patterns of everyday life. Instead, their lives are based around the "life-rhythms"<sup>35</sup> of eating, waking and regular doses of medicine and Daniels' overall structure is constructed according to the rituals of Western life - Christmas and so on. Therefore, these women's experience of time differs from women outside the prison and there is always the notion that these women are mimicking the gestures of everyday life, rather than having a full access to them. For example, dressing-up for the Christmas party is an elaborate process of parading femininity and these women, more than others articulate their transitory adaptation to the masquerade of woman by referring repeatedly to the situation as a "ritual". The mechanical nature of the gestures is perhaps analogous to the differences I described in Chapter Two between "action" in naturalism being to do with psychological motivation and prior theatrical forms, for instance melodrama, as being to do with initiating events and determining pace, in that as mechanical the gestures lack a psychological definition normally found in naturalism (p.54). These scenes then, illustrate a parodic relation to normality that I would describe as melodrama. a point that is backed up by the women prisoners' relation to "reality" which is far from "normal" or naturalized relations.



### Placing the lesbian subject in melodrama

I have described the extent to which features of Daniels' plays are characterised by both a public and a domestic melodrama, pointing out to what extent class differences are problematic in the reconstruction of each narrative. One particularly interesting feature of the plays given this reading concerns the placing of the lesbian subject. I have established that Daniels' is seeking to redefine social relations by looking at the class of women, and given this, the position of the lesbian subject assumes a significant place. Referring back to Elaine Marks' analysis of the "undomestication of the female body", it was seen primarily as a possibility only in moments of "excess".<sup>36</sup> These moments were in a sense those of a heightened domesticity, in fact, moments that are implicitly undomestic (which I described as grotesque, comic or utopian) in that they transcend what is banal in everyday life. Thus it is important that Daniels shows an alternative set of social relations within the domestic world in order that existing social relations can be revised, and in a sense, this is evident in the normality of the relationships between her lesbian characters. If this were not the case, then the melodramatic text will always be located in the familial set-up and a discourse of love dependent upon the heterosexual contract.

Some critics, Jill Dolan and Teresa de Lauretis for example, have suggested that the lesbian subject is always in a position outside of heterosexual discourse.<sup>37</sup> If this is the case then the lesbian subject is shaped by a narrative arrangement always inscribed through excess. Moreover, her marginal position gives her a place in relation to the "classic realist text" that is always in some sense marginal or tangential, thus avoiding the ideological implications raised by its naturalism. In effect, the point can be extended to include the structures of melodrama, but what Daniels is doing, I would suggest, is reinserting the lesbian subject into the naturalistic world. And it is the very conditions which shape that world, its social relations, that she seeks to transform - by confrontation in the public melodrama and by assimilation in the domestic melodrama. Thus, the lesbian couples may well have to fight against a repressive regime on the one hand, but on the other hand, they are suitably incorporated into the domestic scenario and the banalities of life. In contrast, it is the older generation of women - Mary, Rowena and Rene - who are

constantly battling against the establishment to gain a feminist consciousness, and the containment which existing social relations subscribe to. Their daughters, on the other hand, lesbian or otherwise, are in the position of having already revised, and continuing to revise, the social relations that bind their mothers. It is through the lesbian subject especially that Daniels shows a revision of the framework of naturalism and all that it entails to be in process in that the lesbian women already live according to revised sets of social relations. They are thus shown to be in a more satisfactory position than that of their mothers who are forced to negotiate and confront the practices of patriarchy.

The lesbian subject, therefore, rather than offering a radical position is accepted as part of the norm in Daniels' plays. Consequently it is not she to whom we turn in order to see a parodic relation to (heterosexual) normality, as is a familiar motif in contemporary lesbian theatre - parodying television, theatre and everyday patterns of behaviour through a heightened version of camp. Rather, this notion of parody is located with reference to melodrama and the idea that performance is an expression of self, or an acting out. It is this idea that I will develop further in the next section where I look in detail at Daniels' play *Beside Herself* as an example of a domestic drama in which the notion of the performance of self is critical.

#### Performing the divided self: *Beside Herself*

So far in this chapter I have looked at how social issues are shown in relation to specific narrative structures and where the relationship between comedy and excess is indicative of a radical feminist epistemology testing its own limits. In each analysis I was concerned to look at the relationship in Daniels' issue-based plays between affect and performance strategies when those strategies rely upon melodramatic narratives. "Affect" is a term that includes the relationship between the text and performer, critic and spectator. The relationship between the performer and character also is important and interestingly is indicated in the title of the play *Beside Herself* which suggests not only the notion of a split subject but also the notion that the performer stands beside the character as if observing and demonstrating her. To study these relationships I looked to see where "status" might replace "class"; extracts were read as having a clear reference in status as

the concern of women as a shared group. Status shows a relationship between what is performed and what is performative, and it is with a view to this interaction that I will now examine *Beside Herself*, Daniels' most recent published play to date.

Since the first publication of the play by Methuen for the Royal Court in 1990, in conjunction with the first performance of the play in March 1990, Daniels was commissioned to write *HeadRot Holiday* for Clean Break Theatre Company, a company comprised of women ex-offenders, but this is yet to be published. The fact that the play was not initially performed at the Royal Court but instead by a small scale touring company suggests that it probably will not be published as an independent volume, although it did receive some attention in that its rehearsed reading was done by established actors, an event to which Clean Break Company members and some women in prisons who Daniels had interviewed, were invited. Lizbeth Goodman discusses the process of the rehearsed reading in her book *Contemporary Feminist Theatres: To Each Her Own* as a performance strategy of significance to feminist theatre. It is worth considering this in a little more detail in that it provides an additional focus to my discussion of the relationship between rehearsal strategies and performed text. Goodman explains the process as being word-based rather than visual and as critical in (re)placing the author who she suggests has been removed by criticism since Barthes' "Death of the Author":

*Beside Herself* was clearly informed by the processes of interpretation and reception not only of audiences and critics, but also of the author, director and performers who took part in the rehearsed reading. The rehearsed reading itself involved reception and interpretation of various kinds, both scenic and extra-scenic. The most important aspect of this play as a rehearsed reading was the interaction between Daniels as the author and her audience (of performers and spectators/listeners).<sup>38</sup>

I think Goodman's account is very interesting, although I would suggest that perhaps the significance of the rehearsed reading is altered in the actual performances of the play by Clean Break in view of their established reputation and company policy which diverges from the nature of work done at the Royal Court, for instance. Moreover, she makes clear a connection between the rehearsed reading and performed text,

foregrounding the significance of the former and emphasizing the role of the author. My view is based upon different premises and I would advocate a continuation of the kinds of theatre criticism since Barthes' "Death of the Author", preferring instead to make the connection between the two kinds of text (rehearsed reading and performance text) rather more abstract. The conditions of that connection then can be extended to include not only the actual experience of the rehearsed reading for each play, but also the nature of the work carried out in the pre-performance period. It is this connection between pre-performance issues and performed text that I would suggest can be considered with reference to the context of the play as an issue-based drama in which the issue is inherently private. Hence, ostensible relationships between the personal and the political can be examined.

The central issue of *Beside Herself* is child abuse, a symptom of a wider social ill, and often contained within the family network. The dramatic strategy Daniels has developed here is one which on the one hand, shows a new strategy compared with her previous plays, and on the other hand, affords a strategy for approaching the aspects of personal/political oppositions as described above. Basically, this strategy involves the doubling of the principal character and superimposing a frame to the play which includes a prologue of a different, and wider social context, a device I discussed earlier as effectively destroying elements of suspense and being a conscious device of a radical feminist epistemology.

The issue of child sexual abuse within the play is constructed as largely a middle-class concern, but is additionally located in the lives of the plays' working-class characters. The exploration of abuse differs between traditionally described classes in that whilst Evelyn (the middle-class character) has been consistently abused by her own father, Lil's daughter, Nicola, (working-class) was abused by a father figure, her step-father. Ostensibly such paralleling shows all women to be subject to the same oppression from a common male system: it is the system of relations in Christine Delphy's sense that characterises oppression rather than blood kinship being significant. In addition, the contrast between the two parallel relationships is shown by the transition of issue into performance: whilst Eve is the physical double of Evelyn, Lil and Nicola must deal with

and confront the issue alone. Hence there is a distinction in the access to non-naturalistic device afforded the middle-class character, and the restrictions of naturalism imposed upon the working-class characters. This suggests that the naturalistic world is also the classed world.

The paralleled relationships reflect the social world of the play and a public melodramatic narrative as it is played out between different classed characters. Daniels uses the setting of a community hostel for the mentally ill and the debates surrounding it to make connections between her characters. It is in the home that Evelyn does voluntary work and Lil is a community worker.

I make this observation because the notion of having a double, or split personality, is a conscious strategy in many women's texts. Moreover, the role of women's literature is certainly evident in the play; Lil is a great reader and says to Shirley:

SHIRLEY. You're not related are you? Only I thought she  
looked quite like you.

LIL. Was Jane related to Mrs Rochester or was Mrs Rochester part of herself  
which  
had to die before she could live happily ever after (p.33).<sup>39</sup>

Lil's knowledge of literary debates is such that can differentiate between various critical interpretations of *Jane Eyre*. It is typical of more conventional readings of the novel to focus upon Jane herself and see Bertha Mason as a dark and repressed "other" - Jane's sexual side. In fact, that is a reading associated with the early generation of feminist critics such as Elaine Showalter who celebrated Jane as an independent woman, resilient and a great heroine, making her the icon of a liberal feminist criticism. Subsequent readings show Bertha as a separate person from Jane, yet only separate in that she is a colonised "other", emphasizing Jane as a subject conditioned by specific social relations and historical context, and therefore vulnerable to the racial prejudice evident in her dreams, and common at the time. Bertha is shown to have her own story of oppression, one which Jean Rhys has written as *Wide Sargasso Sea*. My reading of Daniels' play is based upon the supposed analogy between the extent of attention each classed subject receives and feminist critical studies of *Jane Eyre* such as Gilbert and Gubar's *The*

*Madwoman in the Attic*, written significantly earlier than Daniels' play in 1979. For instance, whilst several relationships are shown to be affected by abuse, as an issue it is only resolved with attention to the middle-class. The working-class characters are left to resolve their own distress in a triple exchange that includes father-figure/father, mother and daughter; the middle-class scenario includes father, absent mother, Evelyn (adult) and Eve (abused child). The class hostilities between Evelyn and Lil to an extent are exonerated by Evelyn's experience of abuse on childhood. Thus she is granted a reprieve from the responsibility of perpetuating the class distinctions and class antagonisms evident in her wranglings with Lil.

Furthermore, Lil's discussion of the bond between Jane and Bertha reflects the relationship of the sets of characters in this play: if they are related by blood as are Evelyn and her father, then the complexity is shown as social and public, and if Bertha is read as a part of Jane, then Eve is a dissociated part of Evelyn that can only be dealt with by working it through: the two selves represent a crisis of a conflicting and fragmented subjectivity. The social issue of female oppression is mediated at the hands of the father, and ultimately a melodramatic structure shows Evelyn as victim of her father. Hence the lack of criticism her own crime of class prejudice receives, in that it is treated almost as ahistorical and symptomatic of her anxiety rather than located specifically in her own experience and classed background.

In terms of the overall structure, *Beside Herself* opens with a scene reminiscent of Caryl Churchill's *Top Girls*. This is a framing device that shows the play is dealing with issues of apparently archetypal and mythic stature. As a frame the scene sets up possibilities of transformation through linked but continual frames to which there is no seeming closure. This is because that scene is never recalled throughout the rest of the play. Rather, Daniels works to debunk Western patriarchal systems of thought by showing characters from the Old Testament in a contemporary situation. This is essentially a female domestic domain - a supermarket. The women - Mrs Lot, Delilah, Mary, Martha, Eve - stand gossiping, in what could be an improvisation exercise. In the first production of the play at the Royal Court the women were wearing long dresses and

using both contemporary and colloquial language in contrast to the later more ordinary clothing.

Through humorous dialogue the women discuss their individual pasts. The pleasure of the spectator in this scene relies at least a basic knowledge of the Old Testament of the Bible. For example, Delilah's new job as a hairdresser can scarcely be appreciated without prior knowledge of her Biblical role as hairdresser. This scene uses humour as a weapon of subversion for women, yet differs in its use of humour from other plays in that the environment established by the scene has an apparent security that was only ever a transitory moment hitherto. As with *Top Girls* these women, experience of oppression occurred a very long time ago and both Churchill and Daniels have built on this as a way of showing that the women are now able to discuss and joke about it to the extent that pain is distanced. Significantly, the characterization of the women is that of primarily working-class characters, and like many of Daniels' working-class characters their stoicism further distances the nature of their suffering. In effect, as relations between oppressor and victim are shown to assume mythic stature, or status, and are relayed through reminiscence, the impact of the patriarchal system is softened. It is perhaps interesting that the scene, whilst serving to debunk these myths, relies primarily on Western myths. Not only does this identify a specific Western audience, but also indicates that the patterns of oppression outlined have a place in a particular historical tradition.

#### Performing the double

I have indicated already the relatively familiar literary motif of doubles and split personalities in feminist writing, both as a concern for critics and writers alike. Although it is not so common in drama as it is in literature, drama too has explored the possibilities of the double. Otto Rank's study, *The Double. A Psychoanalytic Study*, is one of the early psychoanalytic analyses of the motif of the double, and has some bearing upon my study of the notion of "performing the double". A relevant comment follows that: "It is noteworthy that the interest of the reading (and listening) public seems especially to have been drawn to the theme of the double during or just after major upheavals of society".<sup>40</sup> In Part One of this thesis I advocated that the continued use of the metaphor of

"revolution" in theatre studies, as well as in the Women's Movement, reflects a comparable "upheaval". Moreover, my discussion of transformations of performance style from melodrama to naturalism and again to melodrama show a consistent use of a term such a "revolution". If then, contemporary women's plays constitute a chronicle of the social upheaval caused by the "revolution" of the Women's Movement, then exploring the "double" is an apposite literary theme. Rank's own ideas, arising from Freud's theories on Narcissism, include the study of early filmic versions of tales of doubles, thus enabling attention to be placed upon the visual presentation of the "double". It is Rank's point that,

The uniqueness of cinematography in visibly portraying psychological events calls our attention, with exaggerated clarity, to the fact that the interesting and meaningful problems of man's relation to himself - and the fateful disturbance of this relation - finds here an imaginative representation.<sup>41</sup>

As he makes clear, the medium of film allows for a visual exploration of doubles which can be shown through exaggeration. Theatre similarly provides the context for exaggeration where the analysis of self or subjectivity is highlighted as very much a social issue. Here the fragmented subject is made material, thereby leading me to make the rather obvious comparison between a literary text and a performance text, that in representing doubles the performance text requires the body of another performer. So, with regards to Evelyn and Eve there is an apparent doubling that also implies a further *'doubling in that there are two performers and two "selves"*. As a result issues surrounding the processes of performance and performance strategies, to do with the bodily presence of the actor rather than to do with representation, will emerge as significant.

Generally it is assumed that the triumvirate of performer, character and spectator is based on the understanding of the performer either demonstrating or embodying character. When, however, this relationship is set up independently with another performer (the double), there is a bond established both between this character and the other, and again between this performer as character, and the spectator. Evelyn is a mature, middle-class woman who is able, because of her marital status (to a politician) to engage in altruistic work in the community. Consequently, she is confident of a degree of status and social identity not necessarily afforded to Eve, her childhood self. Furthermore,



her adult self is shown to be fairly short-tempered and uncomfortable in communication with other people. Eve as the childhood self, on the other hand, is dressed simply as a child; she shows her emotions intensely and readily, and is constantly seeking to assure Evelyn of her presence.

The spectator, in viewing Eve, is able to see a spatial presence and status different from that of the other characters, for it is only in the relationship with Evelyn that Eve as performer elicits a response from anyone other than herself. The status exchange then rests upon a dynamic exclusive of all others. Whilst it is critical in performance for those on stage to respond and react to each other, a certain spatial distance sets the performer playing Eve apart from all other performers. This constitutes a contrast between the naturalistic text and a figure whose psychical location is non-naturalistic although her physical presence is very much in evidence on the stage. Hence Eve is both kinds of double which Rank describes:

...in which the uncanny double is clearly an independent and visible cleavage of the ego (shadow, reflection)...different from those actual figures of the double who confront each other as real and physical persons of unusual external similarity, and whose paths cross. (p.12).<sup>42</sup>

The marginal spatial position of the Eve character, and her identity as a double indicate that her place is not simply in relation to the social world, but to the psychology of Evelyn in that she is not a double separated by time, that is a synchronic double or simply the childhood self, but is separated as if diachronically in that she personifies certain memories from childhood. Perhaps I should say that she is both. Here, it is important to emphasize that in the status exchange a psychoanalytic reading may be useful. Eve is spatially positioned always at the margins that the frame of the stage provides, where she is involved in an exchange between herself and the spectator and with Evelyn. The dynamics of a status transaction usually includes a dyadic coupling between characters yet in her role as double Eve is located specifically with reference to Evelyn, and to the spectator, but not to any other characters. It may be that interpretation

establishes the emergence of a split personality or dissociated personality as occurring at a traumatic stage in childhood development. As such Eve separates from Evelyn early on.

This is a common motif throughout this thesis, where it seems that it is a condition of the instability of the classed/gendered subject, or a subject situated by both a class and a status narrative, that dissociated personalities are synonymous with the personal/political relationship of the performed self. In Dowie's play *Adult Child/Dead Child* personal trauma is located in the domestic and familial scene and the creation of an additional personality or persona is a performative issue connected with the construction of a stable and consistent gender identity. In Lochhead's plays doubles are shown to be related through class and sexual identity and by implication status relations and these are acted out through stylized scenes which transcend a naturalistic discourse of character and social issues. In contrast, *Beside Herself* is primarily naturalistic, charting a transition from the public to the personal or domestic scene. As a result Daniels is dealing with an implicitly personal issue but introduces a perspective on traditional class-relations with the result that the conditions of abuse are shown to be symptomatic of and systematically related to class issues. By now examining a series of scenes in which Eve and Evelyn are brought together I hope to show the implicit relationship and dramatic expression of the personal and political.

In *Beside Herself* the double provides the means by which the issues, both personal and social, are made public in that the physical embodiment of the abused child is both seen and heard by the audience. In addition this relationship moves into one of affect, in that as the issue is no longer kept private the spectator is invited to have some emotional involvement in the exchange. Here, I will continue my analysis of the personal as political in women's theatre with reference to a specific exercise by the self-help therapy group recorded in *In Our Own Hands* called, "doubling".<sup>43</sup> The series of exercises involves an improvised scene being set up in order, for example, the protagonist to work through an issue that concerns her: she may explore through improvisation a domestic arrangement she is unhappy about. In addition to the performer/protagonist is a partner, described as the "double", whose task it is to embody one part of the protagonist in order that this part is articulated and addressed in particular. The purpose of the exercise is to enable the

protagonist to direct her thoughts towards the issue concerned. Daniels' construction of the Eve/Evelyn relationship is comparable to this exercise in that the process of doubling has a therapeutic function for Evelyn. In effect the presentation of the relationship can be seen as Daniels' representing this particular kind of exercise and relationship, and in terms of the issues of representation Eve signifies the role of the partner. Given that Eve is removed from established structures of characterization in that the other characters do not "see" her as a character, she is removed from the processes of performance which identify the performer playing Eve "as" Eve. Thus her role is simply that of the partner who elicits a response in Evelyn, rather than a character in her own right - the spectator will specifically be more interested in the relationship and the emotions and the issue of child abuse it entails. In contrast to the traditional assumptions of theatre which credit characters as always significant in defining some relationship with the spectator, Eve can perhaps be seen to play a part in reproducing something like the "doubling" exercise as much as being a part of the processes of representation.

*Beside Herself* as a title connotes the rage of Eve at the abuse she has suffered as at the same time indicating a more demonstrative relationship with her older self, Evelyn. This bifurcation of the subject shows Eve to foreground issues and demystify the adult Evelyn whose desire is rather to fail to "recognize" in the Lacanian sense her fragmented self. Clearly, the continued expressions of rage and frustration at this disjointed self emphasizes the analogy with therapeutic strategies and the significance of the "double". However, the nature of the doubling tends to fluctuate throughout the play and for instance in the context of the social work meetings Eve functions as a dissociated self, showing Evelyn as schizophrenic. She is there with Evelyn, speaking her mind, explaining and interjecting tenaciously judgements concerning the other characters. At other times she is shown to be an independent observer of Evelyn, passively watching the performative gestures of Evelyn's behaviour in certain situations, where Evelyn plays the socially acceptable part always expected of her. Hence, the relationship is shown to be at first observational and later confrontational as Eve urges Evelyn to face up to her problems and in effect Eve's passivity becomes active as their mutuality involves them looking directly at each other.

The last scene of the play is the site of direct and specific confrontation in that Evelyn is forced to come face to face with her father, the abusing parent, whilst Eve looks on with pain before she is finally properly acknowledged by Evelyn. At this point Eve is recognized vocally, but more importantly she comes to be recognized spatially and is no longer forced to seek to show herself, is no longer sat behind Evelyn, nor has need to move closer to Evelyn when she feels threatened in search of some physical contact. In this scene Eve has moved considerably further away and Daniels has not used the clear staging instructions she had earlier to indicate exactly where Eve should be positioned in relation to Evelyn. In view of the lack of extra-diegetic instruction and a less prominent vocal plea from Eve, she comes to be recognized and described by Evelyn as separate in scene ten:

EVELYN (*calmly*). There was a child who was abused by her father for many years. She hurt. She was in pain and humiliated and eventually robbed of herself. No, father, I don't want revenge. What could I possibly do to you that would undo what you've done to me? I've lived with it and I don't want to any longer. (*She thrusts the money back accross the table at him.*) You can live with it. (*Eve turns and looks at Evelyn and slips away.*) And I won't forgive you because what you've done is unforgiveable (p.171).

EVE holds out a large white bath towel toward 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.

This coming together of the two parts of the woman is reminiscent of the therapeutic process Betty and Betty go through in Caryl Churchill's *Cloud Nine* as they embrace each other. In *Beside Herself* however, the mirroring continues to serve as an act of symbolic ritual: it is their first physical contact and as Evelyn has cleansed herself she is then able to go on and cleanse Eve. Spatial distance is used throughout the play as indicating access or lack of access to other people and Eve is consistently shown to be seeking to re-establish or assert a social status. Not only that but Evelyn's psychological trauma is subordinate to her social concerns and it is only as the spatial presence of Eve impinges upon Evelyn that she learns to address her problems. At first, Evelyn's expressions of anxiety are internalized and consequently the security of the subject position is weakened; it takes a sado-masochistic exchange between the two figures to

attract the attention of the other and thus to recognize a lack of unity. In this, it is as if Daniels is effecting the integration of both domestic and public melodramas to the extent that they cannot be read or defined separately as was considerably easier in the earlier plays. And this is achieved through the mechanisms of doubling as a dramatic device and the premise of the personal and political as double, as if in that doubling the impulse to act out is achieved and domestic and public melodrama are joined together.

Hence, in the more naturalistic play *Beside Herself*, where the relation to naturalism is not to go beyond it to the surreal, for that is contained by the prologue, but is instead to use a conventional literary device, the social relations which provide moral imperatives are not necessarily based in a radical feminist epistemology as they were in those earlier plays. The difference will perhaps reflect upon the status of the play as a successful feminist play. Where devices such as doubling have a specific feminist dramatic function is further addressed in the next chapter.

- <sup>1</sup> See bibliography for a fuller list of Daniels' plays.
- <sup>2</sup> A selection of reviews which demonstrate the fixed reception of *Masterpieces* are by Irving Wardle (*The Times* 12/10/83), Michael Billington (*The Guardian* 12/10/83), and "Sexual Politics Takes the Stage" by Robert Hewison (*The Sunday Times* 16/10/83). Peter Hepple describes the television style of *Neptune* in "Feminist Soap turns Men into Wimps" (*The Stage*, 10/7/86) and Michelene Wandor's review of *Neptune* also points out her doubts about Daniels' use of theatrical form, *Plays and Players* (September 1986), p.34.
- <sup>3</sup> Talk given at Sheffield University, 1993.
- <sup>4</sup> Lizbeth Goodman discusses *Neptune* as an issue-based play about lesbian parenting in *Contemporary Feminist Theatres* p.40.
- <sup>5</sup> These do not in themselves indicate particular generic features but instead constitute theatrical devices which may cut across generic categories freely. This is both familiar and acceptable in drama.
- <sup>6</sup> See Peter Brooks introduction to *The Melodramatic Imagination: Balzac, Henry James, Melodrama, and the Mode of Excess* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1976), p.ix.
- <sup>7</sup> Talk given by Sarah Daniels at Sheffield University, Summer 1993.
- <sup>8</sup> David Edgar's introduction to *David Edgar: Plays: One* (London: Methuen, 1987).
- <sup>9</sup> Christine Gledhill, *Home is Where the Heart is*, (London: British Film Institute, 1987), p.17.
- <sup>10</sup> It has become common practice amongst feminist dramatic critics to examine reviews along the basis of sex differences. See for example, Susan Carlson's book *Women and Comedy: Rewriting the British Theatrical Tradition* (The University of Michigan Press, 1991).
- <sup>11</sup> Framji Minwalla, "Sarah Daniels: A Woman in the Moon", *Theater*, vol.21, part 3 (1990), pp.26-29.
- <sup>12</sup> Sarah Daniels *Collected Plays*, all references will be made to this edition, p.65.
- <sup>13</sup> Michelene Wandor charts the changing emphasis from public to private concerns in *Look Back in Gender: Sexuality and the Family in Post-War British Drama* (London: Methuen, 1987), pp.137-160.
- <sup>14</sup> See for example the reviews I cited in note 2.
- <sup>15</sup> Mary Anne Doane has discussed this in relation to notions of female fetishism in "Film and the Masquerade: Theorising the Female Spectator", *Screen*, vol.29, no.3 (1988), pp.74-87.
- <sup>16</sup> See Laura Mulvey's "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" *Screen*, no.16 (Autumn 1975), pp.6-18, and Christine Gledhill's *Home is Where the Heart Is*.
- <sup>17</sup> Christine Gledhill, *Home is Where the Heart Is*, p.30.
- <sup>18</sup> Peter Brook, *The Melodramatic Imagination*, p.xi.
- <sup>19</sup> Peter Brook, unpublished paper delivered at BFI Melodrama Conference, July 1992, "Melodrama, Body, Revolution".
- <sup>20</sup> Comments made by Sarah Daniels at talk at University of Sheffield, Summer 1993.
- <sup>21</sup> Bryony Lavery is discussed by Susan Carlson in *Women and Comedy*, p.225.

- <sup>22</sup> Following Mulvey's early work the metaphor has been used by several critics, including Teresa de Lauretis in her essay "Desire in Narrative" in *Alice Doesn't: Feminism, Semiotics, Cinema* (London: Macmillan, 1984).
- <sup>23</sup> Tracy C. Davis, "Extremities and Masterpieces: A Feminist Paradigm of Art and Politics", *Modern Drama*, vol XXX11. no.1 (March 1989), pp.89-103.
- <sup>24</sup> Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema", p.14.
- <sup>25</sup> Tracy C. Davis "Extremities and Masterpieces", p.92.
- <sup>26</sup> See for example Patti P. Gillespie, "Feminist Theatre: A Rhetorical Phenomenon", *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, vol.64 (October, 1978), pp.284-94.
- <sup>27</sup> James L. Smith, *Melodrama* (London: Methuen & Co. Ltd., 1973), p.58 and p.50.
- <sup>28</sup> Roland Barthes, *Image/Music/Text* (London: Fontana Paperbacks, 1977). p.119.
- <sup>29</sup> Sheila Ernst and Lucy Goodison, *In Our Own Hands: A Book of Self-Help Therapy* (London: The Women's Press, 1981), p.126 and p.128.
- <sup>30</sup> Christine Gledhill, *Home is Where the Heart Is*, p.9.
- <sup>31</sup> Quoted by Teresa de Lauretis in "Sexual Indifference and Lesbian Representation" in *Performing Feminisms* edited by Sue-Ellen Case, pp.17-40 (p.27).
- <sup>32</sup> In this instance I am using the term "bildung" to describe the trajectory of feminist consciousness-raising which several of the female middle-class characters, including Mary, undergo. It is a term I make more use of in Chapter Five where I use a fuller account of it in my reading of Claire Dowie's plays.
- <sup>33</sup> David Buckingham, *Public Secrets: Eastenders and Its Audience* (London: British Film Institute, 1987).
- <sup>34</sup> Daniel Gerould remarked upon this in an unpublished paper given at the BFI Melodrama Conference, July 1992: "Melodrama and Revolution".
- <sup>35</sup> Richard Schechner coins the term to describe the rituals of eating, sleeping, walking and so on. See discussion in Chapter Two for further elaboration of this point in *Performance Theory*, p.21.
- <sup>36</sup> See page 135 of this chapter.
- <sup>37</sup> See essays by de Lauretis and Dolan in *Performing Feminisms*, edited by Sue-Ellen Case: "Sexual Indifference and Lesbian Representation", pp.17-40 and "Lesbian Subjectivity in Realism: Dragging at the Margins of Structure and Ideology", pp.40-54.
- <sup>38</sup> Lizbeth Goodman, *Contemporary Feminist Theatres: To Each Her Own* (London: Routledge, 1993), p.1990.
- <sup>39</sup> All page reference will be to the Women Playhouse Series edition of the play in conjunction with Methuen Drama (London, 1990).
- <sup>40</sup> Otto Rank, *The Double: A Psychoanalytic Study* (London: Meridian, 1979), p.XIX.
- <sup>41</sup> Otto Rank, p.7.
- <sup>42</sup> In chapter Five I use a similar distinction between doubles and their relation to the self. This is determined primarily to representation of monsters and is not specifically concerned with psychoanalytic description as Rank is.
- <sup>43</sup> The "doubling" exercise is grouped with several others, *In Our Own Hands*, pp.42-43.

CHAPTER FOUR: MARGINAL THEATRES AND TEXTS: STRATEGIES OF  
ADAPTATION IN THE PLAYS OF LIZ LOCHHEAD.

STRATEGIES OF ADAPTATION

In this chapter I focus on the playwright Liz Lochhead, who, like Sarah Daniels, is concerned with a political theatre. However, whilst I argued for Daniels' plays to be read with direct reference to a radical feminist perspective, I would suggest reading Lochhead's plays with reference to a nationalist stance, given that Lochhead is Scottish and her source material is invariably located within and concerning Scotland. In reading her plays as always related to a nationalist stance I am by implication politicizing them. The analysis of place that her stance implies is one specifically informed by a feminist perspective.

I have chosen to examine three of Lochhead's plays by considering the notion of "adaptation" as a strategy through which the feminist playwright re-reads previous writers or theatrical genres and conventions. I wish to identify the term here as useful in describing literary and dramatic conventions through which feminist strategies are most evident, and in the choice of plays I examine in detail in this chapter I focus specifically on that concern.<sup>1</sup> The term "adaptation" contains within it the suggestion of a literary and theatrical plenitude and the possibility of access to at least one source, one referent - an originary text. In effect, therefore, "adaptation" foregrounds its own intertextuality and the inclusion of at least one set of signifying systems that provide a useful framework for comparison.

As is consistent with the textual analysis so far in this thesis I make the assumption that these signifying systems reflect a steady interrelation or juxtaposition of class-based and status-oriented narratives. Adaptation - where text is seen to function as that which is signified - localizes, and perhaps makes plain, the place where those systems/narratives (class and status) meet and it is through the analysis of the processes of adaptation that I will explore that meeting point. Bearing this in mind I have chosen to focus on Scottish poet and playwright Liz Lochhead who can be classed as marginal because her position is both as a feminist and a Scottish playwright. Lochhead's choice to write in dialect, as in *Mary Queen of Scots Got Her Head Chopped Off* (1987), to translate into Scots, as in



her adaptation of Moliere's *Tartuffe* (1986), and to work primarily within and for the Scottish theatrical network, shown most clearly in *Jock Tamson's Bairns* (1990), is indicative of that marginal position, most of her plays being produced in Scotland in connection with Communicado Theatre Company and the Royal Lyceum Theatre, Edinburgh. It is significant that in the body of what may be termed feminist dramatic criticism, especially in the works cited in Chapters One and Two as prominent in the growing field of feminist dramatic criticism, Lochhead's is a name invariably absent.<sup>2</sup> Her work has been briefly described in Trevor R. Griffiths and Margaret Llewellyn-Jones' recent guide to *British and Irish Women Dramatists Since 1958: A Critical Handbook*.<sup>3</sup> Mention of Lochhead within this book is with reference primarily to a Scottish grouping or identity and contemporary plays by women are divided by regional and national preoccupations. Up to now then, Lochhead's poetry and her own performance have been the subject of critical attention more so than her plays, for instance, Jackie Clune discusses her as a performance poet, studying the monologues with reference to the relation between performer and character.<sup>4</sup> I would suggest that her absence from recent scholarship on British theatre is directly linked with her national identity and her distance from London, a view substantiated by the fact that the first critical book on Lochhead has only very recently been published by Edinburgh University Press, thereby reinforcing her position as marginal writer, whilst at the same time demonstrating the disparity of critical attention paid to London-centred theatre compared to provincial theatre.<sup>5</sup>

It is this very fact of difference that I take as a starting point. Not only can Lochhead's work be incorporated into the growing canon of feminist plays and considered within the context of debates around the aesthetics of feminist theatre (surely her involvement in the adaptation of canonical texts introduces her to this area), but in addition, her work involves issues peculiar to a working-class theatre and Scottish nationalism. In view of the fissures within British political theatre back in the 1970s the direction which John McGrath took is relevant as a context to Lochhead because he sought to bring together issues of class, gender and Scottish nationalism as a theatre strategy. The impact of this strategy has been the creation of a theatre practice determined by a notable shift from class-based analysis through to the analysis of discourses of

power. If issues of class and gender are mediated through such discourses of power, then actually Lochhead can be seen to have a similar concern to that of McGrath because she too is concerned to use the diversity of "adaptation" to create an eclectic theatre of popular appeal. McGrath, in his book *A Good Night Out*, delineates how forms of traditional working-class entertainment, for instance club cabaret, can be incorporated as part of a politically efficacious form. The importance of familiarity, accessibility and humour as part of a class-based theatre are evident in his argument and it is these features which Lochhead also uses. Significantly the familiarity of these forms rests largely upon non-naturalistic devices and this will be addressed shortly.

Lochhead works specifically with the principle of using culturally familiar material by concentrating upon adaptation. Moreover, the playwright's task in any mode of dramatic adaptation or revision is implicitly charged with an historical and theoretical specificity. To the extent that we are privileged with two texts to make comparisons (the source text and the adapted text) we are informed of the political agenda that conditions the process of adaptation itself. Lochhead's primary concerns, and these in part constitute a political agenda, are women, sexuality and work, suggesting a clear link with feminist theory, as at the same time confirming her concern with a nationalist and political agenda. Rather than simply describing her adaptations as feminist revisions or processes of historicisation or (de)historicisation which tell us something about social relations and issues of the source text, I would suggest that the adaptation similarly can be scrutinized for its own context, material conditions and practices, making it is as much under scrutiny as the source text itself. Hence, I have opted to refer to the "source" text as the "anterior" text, suggesting that this text does not simply belong to a former time, neither is it an uncomplicated, definitive or originary text, but rather as being subject to shifts in critical readings. Thus, establishing the notion of an "anterior" or preceding text allows for a crucial feature of reader response theory, that aspects of the making and reading of the latter text, the adapted text, will inform our reading of the former text, therefore making it the anterior text.

Furthermore, I would point out that the term "adaptation" is not simply associated with one source text, as in the case of Hollywood adaptations of the "classics" for

instance, but can be eclectic and construct a story from diverse sources. Andrew Davies makes this point in his study of film and adaptation by dividing adaptation into categories which include borrowing, intersecting and transforming sources.<sup>6</sup> And Jan McDonald has shown Lochhead to have used Penelope Shuttle and Peter Redgrove's *The Wise Wound* in addition to Bram Stoker's novel as background material in her adaptation of *Dracula*.<sup>7</sup> However, in order to begin to construct theories of adaptation which can incorporate specifically feminist theatre there are specific structuring principles to be looked at first. These, I would suggest, in so far as they rely upon temporal and narrative structures, provide an opening for the examination of systems of social relations. The analysis of the dramatic and theoretical construction of social systems will in turn show the concerns of class and status narratives.

The critical debate surrounding adaptation provides multifarious readings, one of which is the point that for one adapted text there may be more than one source text. I would suggest at this stage that Lochhead's uses frameworks which can be described as adaptations yet which have only an arbitrarily resemblance, if any, to a source text. Moreover, there is culturally familiar material, for instance local myths and literary myths, that may be adapted for stage or screen and it is this familiarity and popular resonance of her material - Mary Shelley's life for instance - that should enable these plays to be included under the terms of adaptation, especially when to use culturally familiar material may constitute a political strategy. In a sense this practice is a common enough strategy that can be readily distinguished from plagiarism for example yet can also be theoretically described if a framework for reading different kinds of adaptation is available.

#### Finding a premise for adaptation

One of the key areas of investigation of the intersection of film and novels - an exchange into which I would like also to insert theatre - is time. This specifically is located in the study of narratology, where it is in the reconstruction of the distinct temporal and narrative structures of each text (source text and adapted) that indicators of adaptation begin to emerge. Seymour Chatman in his article, "What Novels Can Do That Films Can't (and Vice Versa)" argues for the importance of time in facilitating a distinction

between the linear diegesis that characterizes a realistic narrative and what he designates 'discourse' time, that is, a time where other systems of meaning come into play or, more specifically "the time of the presentation of...events in the text".<sup>8</sup> Of the latter time he cites flashbacks as an example, saying that linear or story time is subsumed by discourse time. Clearly, those other systems of meaning may be significant in terms of representation for the influence of feminist theory or as indicators of specific social contexts. Chatman talks in the article primarily about novels but there are obvious parallels with theatre, and his points are pertinent to this analysis, and therefore worth considering a little further. He describes a linear diegesis where the story time is comparable to a realist novel in which the protagonist develops from childhood, through adolescence into adulthood (and towards death). The alternative temporal structure he points out, includes 'discursive' time, and is illustrated through the use of flashbacks and memory traces, features for instance most readily identifiable with the *nouveau roman*. A comparison with the integration of time and narrative in plays, I would suggest, can elaborate a distinction between the classic realist/naturalistic play and a play using anti-mimetic devices. Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman* is an example of a play integrating 'discourse' time in its use of flashbacks as a way of representing some aspects of Willy Loman's mind against the simple story time of the last few days of his life before his suicide.

Evidently, what is significant here, and perhaps the most distinctive feature of adaptation is the extent to which the adapted text foregrounds its own process, that is, the act of adaptation itself. Hence, any deliberate disruption of chronology will assume a degree of prominence and be identified to an extent with authorial intention; this kind of act may reveal a deliberate feminist revision. For example, in my analysis of Wendy Kesselman's *My Sister in This House* in Chapter Two I suggested that Kesselman was concerned to account for causal relations and one of the ways she did this was to provide information concerning the maids' earlier life, information preceding the sequence of events that Genet was including. This is one point at which the significance of temporal structuring is prominent, because to foreground difference is to make a clear indication of the forces which shape difference. The distinction is also useful in defining the chosen

trajectory of plot in that, for instance, a feminist revision or adaptation may seek to challenge the direction and shape of narrative by criticizing a linear diegesis as patriarchal, preferring instead a cyclical and more fragmented structure. To consider temporal structures is therefore an informative task.

A second important feature of adaptation is the use of narrative voices, and specifically in the adaptation from novel to screen we see that the multiple perspectives and narrative voices of the novel are drastically reduced for the sake of clarity; meaning unfolds through mechanisms and images other than the articulate and articulated voice. Thus, although there may be a multiplicity of perspectives to be found and held within the framed image we observe on film, there is no longer the variety of narrative voices we are accustomed to find in the novel. Moreover, for adaptations for the stage, the issue is further complicated in that theatre is based around the absence of these inflections of narrative voices according to a principle of (re)constructing reality through dialogue as either naturalistic or deliberately non-naturalistic. Inflections of irony, for instance, which are so much a defining part of multiple narrators in novels, can only be approached tangentially, if at all, in the theatre, in that verbal intonation is subsumed by numerous other images and signs which will readily dominate subtleties of tone, for example. The issue of irony is something I will return to in so far as it points to the complexities of the relationship between inflections of adaptation and political efficacy where they are broached in dramatic construction. This requires a closer look at camp and postmodernist distinctions between parody and pastiche as performance styles used as part of the process of dramatic adaptation.

### Dracula: a test case<sup>9</sup>

Lochhead's adaptation of Bram Stoker's *Dracula* can be used as the clearest example of the form, in that the anterior text has a well-known and established place in literary and cultural contexts. As an adaptation from novel to stage there is a lack of coherence between specificities of narrative and it is not simply the case that the novel will provide various narrators where the play does not. Rather, Lochhead substitutes alternative dramatic methods as the equivalent of multiple perspectives. These include the

doubling of performers and character and, I would suggest, ambivalent sexual and class identities. In this case, the issue of multiple and oblique dramatic voices is replaced by the more concrete focus of doubling of performers' bodies. Carol A. Senf in her reading of Stoker's novel argues against conventional readings concerned with the oppositions of Good and Evil - the oppositions which determine and define public melodramas and characterize Oedipal narratives - and instead prefers to focus upon "more specifically literary matters such as style, characterization, and method of narration".<sup>10</sup> In particular, her emphasis is upon what she identifies as the subjective nature of the story as it unfolds through the written and spoken form of the characters. She adds that "...Stoker provides several clues to their unreliability and encourages the reader to see the frequent discrepancies between their professed beliefs and their actions." (p.161). It is the complexity of such narratorial features that film versions, and now theatrical versions, apparently fail to construct. What they offer instead is the reconstruction of identity and gender as both social and material, and also show it in the process of transformation. In addition, the very presence of a performer adopting character and therefore foregrounding the processes of performance enforces the division between authors and narrators, and thus questions the notion of the authenticity of self in relation to character and performer.

In effect, this focus upon the performer is a further example of the ways in which dramatic adaptation involves not simply narrative concerns but also the relationship between narrative and naturalism. Dramatic adaptations, I would argue, imply a shift away from naturalism in the construction of dramatic character as well as using anti-mimetic devices. Consequently there is a transformation of customary descriptions of character and characterization. Rather than characterization being based, in a feminist revision of a source, in the re-creation and consolidation of a picture of characters such as Mary Shelley, Mina and Lucy, Elizabeth the First and Mary Queen of Scots, providing information about their personal lives hitherto untold, I would suggest that the characters are used as a device for exploring ideas in a more abstract way. The idea of character is shown in tangential relation to naturalism in that character/female bodies embody and

demonstrate social relations and material conditions which governed women's lives in their time.

This point rests upon a particular theory of adaptation and illustrates the focus of a materialist-feminist criticism. The process of adaptation is one which demonstrates the extent to which gender is socially constructed because it challenges the notion of authenticity and an "originary" text by using a history of theatrical convention in which both spectator and performer are aware of anti-illusionistic devices. Hence, Lochhead plays with our understanding of what Mary Shelley, for example, was like, not in concrete terms, but instead as an abstract figure and icon of female Romanticism.

I have suggested that narrative voices and naturalism are gradually undermined by the process of adaptation, and my next step is to consider how far temporal arrangements expand upon my earlier point about political agendas. A description of adaptation may rest upon distinctions derived from the Russian Formalist critics, namely *fabula* and *suzhet*, story and plot.<sup>11</sup> In this distinction the source text will be ascribed the basic structure of what the story entails and the adaptation will be worked to reorganize plot, the arrangement of events, by consolidating or disrupting them. Hence, Stoker would provide the events of the story and Lochhead the structuring or restructuring of plot. This account of plot and story is to an extent comparable to the distinction between linear and cyclical narratives that has become familiar in feminist dramatic criticism, where linearity and cyclical structures denote patriarchal and feminist narratives respectively.

In Chapter Two I discussed this distinction as a way of relating the representation of social relations to playstructure by describing linearity and circularity in relation to scenes of ritual and the feminist realignment of naturalistic discourse (p.69). And in Chapter Three I described Sarah Daniels' play *Masterpieces* as incorporating its issue of pornography as an integral part of both part of plot and story (p.127). I would therefore propose a revision to the Formalist distinction between story and plot, bearing in mind my emphasis upon the anterior text as opposed to the source text, which depends upon the continual move away from naturalism and naturalistic characterization that adaptation implies. This shows character as a construct of a specific set of social

arrangements in both texts, thus highlighting a mutuality in the two rather than synchronic development. If this is so, then the story is more in keeping with Brecht's description of "Die Fabel" that can be therefore regarded as a structuring principle about which the adapted text frames itself.

Elizabeth Wright in her book *Postmodern Brecht: A Re-Presentation* outlines features of the fable:

It is the moral of the story not in a merely ethical sense, but also in a socio-political one. The Fabel...does not simply correspond to actual events in the collective life of human beings, but consists of invented happenings. The stage figures are not simple representations of living persons, but invented and shaped in response to ideas. The Fabel is the 'core of the theatrical performance', the 'sum total of all the gestic incidents'...and all the various V-effects have to be seen as contained within it, not mechanically listed as mere stage effects. To reveal the Fabel is to engage with the discourse of the text.

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If, as Wright suggests, and I would agree, the "stage figures are not simple representations of living persons" then characterization is basically the reconstruction of ideas: Mary Shelley signifies an amalgam of Romantic ideology and women's experience of it. Dracula signifies the embodiment of threats to the social order. The point is conveniently substantiated by seeing the female body (in particular) as the site at which physical and social law is inscribed and played out. Because the audience is familiar with the character from a previous text or source, then this re-staged character works through abstract considerations of the material conditions which construct that character at a given historical and cultural time. This is perhaps most apparent in Francis Ford Coppola's 1992 film adaptation of Bram Stoker's *Dracula*, where the nineties' fear of AIDS emerges as a central preoccupation given the prevalence of images of blood and penetration. Moreover, all traces of naturalism are either subject to scrutiny or removed by such a definition; the implicit political and ethical dimension concomitant with "Die Fabel" is not only maintained but also foregrounded.

Two avenues are opened here into the processes of adaptation. First, that the (Brechtian) fable provides a structure concerned with socio-political effect; through this we turn to narrative, either disrupted or reinforced and the naturalized arrangements of



Oedipal narrative relations. This enables me to consider the adaptation of *Dracula* not simply as a story but as a metaphor or allegory for the working out of an Oedipal narrative in the same way that adaptation affords a reading of character as allegorical. Bram Stoker's *Dracula* has received a good deal of critical attention, fostering a diversity of interpretative readings which for instance may explain the novel as to do with Stoker's own anxiety about his sexuality, as exploring the role of the New Woman and perhaps as illustrating British imperialist xenophobia, or as related to Freud's work in *Totem and Taboo*, to do with male conflict and community. With respect to this I wish to confirm my previous point about character being defined as abstract in order to qualify the basic narrative of *Dracula* as also abstract. In so far as it constitutes a clear psychological and Oedipal narrative its allegorical nature provides an interesting locus for the issues of class and status relations considered here. As a result of describing this allegorical framework interpretative readings of the novel, but not the play, tend to be of more interest here than aspects of the novel itself. for they generally work to establish an idea in relation to the basic outline or fable.

Second, that adaptation is centred on the idea of the Fable as the 'core of performance' and the 'sum total of all the gestic incidents'. This means that by close examination of particular scenes, the processes of adaptation and the constraints of the fable will become evident, thus ensuring that any problematic images and moments of distance between adapted and anterior text become apparent. Adaptation may be seen to function in the same way as narrative in that it provides a structure within which to constrain excess or confusion, and against which new social relations may be measured.

#### "What happens at the end?": narrative strategies of disruption

In Liz Lochhead's adaptation of Bram Stoker's *Dracula* there are two contrasting texts, the narrative of which inevitably moves towards an ending. The conventional structure that we might ascribe to Stoker's novel is quite simply an Oedipal one, as I have suggested before. The male characters of the novel strive to work through and overcome their Oedipal anxieties which are projected onto the figure of Dracula. There is apparent success in the final destruction of the ambiguous figure Dracula himself, and the men are

subsequently left, according to Richard Astle, to shape their own sexual autonomy and identity in the absence of a father figure.<sup>13</sup> Therefore, despite the fluctuations of narrative voice, there is an evident trajectory towards closure in the novel. In view of our assumed prior knowledge of feminist revisionary practice, it is not unrealistic to anticipate that Lochhead's adaptation will in some way contravene narrative arrangements of the anterior text, albeit through disruptions at the level of narrative or temporal formation. In her essay "Refusing the Romanticism of Identity: Narrative Interventions in Churchill, Benmussa, Duras" Elin Diamond discusses how each playwright arrests narrative development through cross-dressing and chronological inconsistency as a way of challenging the lineage of history.<sup>14</sup> It is a familiar dramatic technique of feminist playwrights, one that Lochhead expands upon by ensuring that the narrative arrangements of the anterior text are always in view. This allows for more sophisticated points to be made: the adapted text is shown in relation to the anterior text, first, by using techniques of narrative or chronological disruption, and second, by a recourse to alternative social systems, for example those defined by feminist appraisals of history and materialist-feminist analysis which show the position of women as it otherwise would not have been seen. These systems demonstrate the extent to which the issues of status groups begin to replace and contend with issues of class systems or simply of Oedipal formations.

Adaptation is there to be seen, it is foregrounded and assumes a high profile. Therefore, it becomes a kind of meta-narrative, the processes of which are textually reproduced in the presentation and construction of the female body; of necessity, it is specifically the female body which is directly linked with conventional narrative formation. In Stoker's text there is a gradual deceleration of the female body as life is drawn from it - Dracula's slow drinking of blood is an act of depletion. The body from which the life is drained is the body upon which woman's identity and role in the classed/Oedipal narrative is written and it is symptomatic of its structure that the woman's body is gradually written out of the equation. In Lochhead's text this process is foregrounded as a central message that introduces concerns to women, specifically that Lucy's emaciation, tending towards lifelessness, recalls the slow physical degeneration of the anorexic. Not only does Lochhead draw parallels with the condition of anorexia but

she also shows the mystification of institutionalised illness - both organic and psychological illness - through the character of Renfield.

Interestingly, Lochhead does not confine her analysis to women, showing Lucy as the anorexic or hysteric, but she also includes men. Renfield contrasts with Lucy in that he steadily demands and seeks oral gratification - flies, spiders and beetles are his repast; Lucy, on the other hand, rejects all food and whilst he wishes for introjection, or taking in of the loved one, in this case including anything living, this is a condition which Lucy openly rejects. So it is Renfield who is basically abject in his behaviour and physical appearance, whose corporeality must be contained by the mental institution, whereas Lucy adopts some control in her resistance. Where Lucy can be seen to fulfill the physical symptoms of the female hysteric, thus offering the possibilities of the underside of society, Renfield is actually more bound up with his master, Dracula.<sup>15</sup> In fact, whilst both demonstrate a marginal perspective upon the relationship between time and narrative Renfield demonstrates the symptoms of the obsessive or psychotic. Julia Kristeva talks about the obsessive as possessed of a slave mentality and it is this definition which places him outside of linear time, and inserts him in a temporal order based instead upon notions of repetition.<sup>16</sup> Renfield fits precisely into this category, which is similarly that of the slave, in that his role is always determined by his master. Hence, he can only flirt with the possibilities which femininity affords him. As Kristeva says:

A psychoanalyst would call this 'obsessional time', recognizing in the mastery of time the true structure of the slave. The hysteric (either male or female) who suffers from reminiscences would, rather, recognize his or her self in the anterior temporal modalities: cyclical or monumental.<sup>17</sup>

If Lucy's, and later Mina's, lapses into reverie or, on a more literal level, their relations with Dracula, are the signs of a hysteric's temporality, then this is a time which Renfield has little access to: perhaps because of his status position as slave.

The women as a status group exist only tangentially to a class narrative, they both belong and at the same time do not. Lucy, identifiable as both anorexic and/or hysteric, is also of a particular social class. In that context she is simply as a female body upon whom a social law is being worked out. In effect she "dwindles to a wife" as she moves towards

a marital state; this runs parallel to the depletion of her physical well-being, and contrasts with the solidity of Mina whom the men in both Stoker's and Lochhead's texts favour.<sup>18</sup>

As Lucy is transformed from the coquettish and precocious young woman into a potential wife there is in fact a different emphasis upon the threat to the social order. Where in her youth she is described through her sexual awakening, later she is clearly identified with the symptoms of the anorexic; Stoker shows her burgeoning sexuality and femininity and Lochhead charts her rejection of that role. As Lucy says herself in retaliation to Mina's objectification of her before Seward and Harker: "...crazy Lucy, mad sleepwalking skinny Lucy with her migraines and her over-vivid imagination. I know what you say about me, behind my back, you bitch, Mina, I wish you weren't my bloody sister!" (p.85). For Lochhead, Lucy's body becomes a central metaphor in resisting the rigidities of the conventional Oedipal reading and instead shows the working of a materialist-feminist adaptation.

Here the parallel I wish to emphasize is that between the condition of anorexia and narrative composition. If it is the case that neurasthenia and related anorexia were, as Jan McDonald notes "maladies (were) assumed to be self-induced" the question of control arises.<sup>19</sup> Lucy, by not eating, or by mimicking the symptoms of the anorexic whilst not quite becoming one, is choosing to suspend the teleology of a linear/Oedipal narrative and her subject position is thus comparable to the construction of the dramatic adaptation in that both suggest a pared down form. This act of suspense withholds the trajectory of the narrative and implies a particular intervention into temporal structures for she is withholding the encroachment of linear time (towards her ultimate death) through the mechanisms of the cyclical and generational time of women. It is interesting that the given class-bound relation to time in the novel - where Dracula as the invading alien "other" is defeated by lower-class men - is challenged by her act of control, and traditional meanings of time are shown to be in a state of confusion. Dracula himself has been described by the director of Lochhead's adaptation, Hugh Hodgart, in its first performance, as "trapped in the prison of eternity" and that he "waits for, even wills, the end of his sterile dislocated state".<sup>20</sup> His place is seen to be outside of linear and therefore class time, and perhaps more aligned with the menstrual cycles of the women.

Interestingly he is described in performance as strong and imposing, a presence that is specifically masculine, placing him centrally in a masculine and linear time; this provides the image of a solidity which the more effete and camp gestures of Hammer House filmic versions have tended to undermine, taking him out of that time again.<sup>21</sup> Lochhead herself in interview has suggested a reading of Dracula as somewhere between male and female, anima and animus.<sup>22</sup>

The endeavour to present a coherent structure or linear narrative can subsequently be reevaluated by considerations like this of the temporal positioning of not only the women but also Dracula, and also by the notion of dislocated moments. For example, if Dracula himself is seen on the one hand as a threat to an existing order, he also on the other hand, can be seen in regard to the representation of a camp and effete tradition that perhaps takes him out of the patriarchal order towards identification with the social position of women. Inevitably the processes of characterizing Dracula himself will be critical for, by implication, his role here is potentially ambiguous. Jan McDonald appraises the critical reception of the play and suggests that, "the reasons for the 'falling-off' are to be found both in the dramaturgy and the *mise-en-scene*" (p.102). The notion of "falling-off" evidently is perceived as a lack of coherence or continuity and therefore it worth turning to these moments as the place where the complexities of the adaptation are most apparent. It is with reference to these moments that the role of adaptation as a political theatre practice may be established.

### Framing ideology

The description of 'falling-off' suggests a lack of consistency in the adaptation and an incoherent strategy of adaptation. In addition, I would argue, it highlights the possibilities of studying *mise-en-scene* and isolated moments or scenes in order to examine aspects of exchange. This has a clear function in relation to the conjunctions of narrative, ideology and time, for it is here that the ideological moment may be shown up. Before I develop this point about ideology by returning to the work on adaptation by Seymour Chatman that I introduced earlier. I wish to demonstrate the openings for such

such an analysis in the context of theatre by including a further quotation from Jan McDonald's essay. She is discussing the use of music in Lochhead's adaptation:

The specially composed, largely electronic music had the same dramaturgical function as music in melodrama, where a sense of unity in the episodic narrative is created by the score, rather than by continuity of action. The opening of bird-song and distant piano-playing that established the atmosphere in the garden-scene changed to a bleak, rhythmic pumping sound for the asylum and to grand organ chords for Dracula's castle. The reiteration of musical motifs, associated with particular characters or locations, reinforces the wholeness of the play in performance (p.97).

Jan McDonald describes the play by proposing an analogy with melodrama (this has a direct relevance to my appropriations of melodrama in Chapter Three). In particular, the play is seen to work through images and effects other than those consistent with the classic realist text, namely, spoken debates, unity of action and time. At the same time, her comment that unity comes through sound as opposed to "continuity of action" can be understood differently, I would suggest, because it is precisely the abstract unity of the Oedipal narrative in the anterior text that offers some "continuity of action". And it is in the broken moments or single scenes that this unity is framed, transformed by adaptation, and made subject to scrutiny. The further connection is the move away from naturalism, the transformation of acting styles which is a result of this move, and the meaning of this for characterization that I have already expounded and will consider in more detail later. First, I wish to consider the ways in which verbal and visual images give us a reading of ideology by exploring the possibilities of the single frame. To this end I return to Seymour Chatman's analysis.

Chatman describes a single frame from an adaptation of a Guy de Maupassant short story, "A Country Excursion", adapted for film by Jean Renoir in 1936. Chatman describes the frame as using the same order of detail found in the selected extract from the story. His next step is to outline what he suggests are the "vital differences", making the point that:

For one thing, the number of details in Maupassant's sentence is limited to three... Thus the reader learns only those three and can only expand the picture imaginatively. But in the film representation, the number of details is

indeterminate, since what this version gives us is a simulacrum of a French carriage of a certain era, provenance, and so on.<sup>23</sup>

Here he is alerting us to the rapidity of the sequences and therefore, the fleeting glance that the film still affords.

What emerges from this analysis - that which is most relevant here - is the concept of the frame, what is contained within it and the extent to which the image is historically located and ideologically charged. Moreover, there is a distinction between the image to be contemplated and the rapid moving image. This is in addition almost paradoxical given the contemplative possibilities of held within the framed image and Chatman's description of a "narrative pressure", itself basically Oedipal, which urges us to read on. In the film adaptation signification is seen to be more active than in the novel in that the spectator is offered visual cues representative of an historical period. There is a plenitude that the novel cannot provide; instead it relies on narrative perspectives and verbal unfolding, however disjointed and fragmented these may be.

Hence in some respects the distinctions between temporal structures enhances the place of filmic adaptation in an historical period. Two points are interesting here and worth considering, repeating even, because they provide the insight into historical and discursive contexts: (1) The notion of plenitude; (2) the relation of adaptation to temporal structures and the assumed realism of the classic realist text. Theatre, through a comparative analysis of film and theatre - filmic and theatrical adaptation - at this point comes into its own. I shall explain how with brief reference to a key premise of my thesis that the theatrical texts I am most concerned with are specifically defined as outside the classic realist text, that is, are easily defined by the oppositional stance of feminist criticism and subgenres of theatre designed in reaction to tradition. It becomes clear then that we are already working outside of a given tradition and in any post-Brechtian theatre the classic realist text has long since been in decline making artificiality the norm.

Moreover, as Stephen Heath has pointed out, a difference between theatre and film might be in the spectator's perceptions of what is outside the frame - in theatre the wings are in evidence, thus maintaining artificiality, and in film single frames isolate images and we assume characters to be "real" and somewhere else although we are never

quite sure where.<sup>24</sup> As is the effect of Pirandello's theatre, the switching between artificiality and dissembling reality becomes even more confused in adaptation because the source text is all that can be signified. It is actually in the coming together of both, that is, in the process of "reproducing" the source text, that historical and ideological moment is constructed.

In the analysis of differences between theatre, film and the novel a further post-Brechtian feature of theatre relevant in studying Lochhead's adaptation is that of "minimalism", both conceptually and practically. Minimalism is suggestive of a starkness and clarity as well as significant in the exposure of theatricality in terms of costume and properties; similarly it is a measure of self-referentiality and it complements a discussion of character and story being reduced to an abstract level. The fact that Lochhead's plays succeed consistently as excellent Fringe theatre emphasizes a minimalism of approach also. Certainly such minimalism as described suggests a simplicity like that of agit-prop, where the instruments of signification are deliberately foregrounded.

The next step then is to draw some bridge between the theatrical minimalism that I would argue defies and contrasts with the plenitude of the image in film, focussing on the perspective of the spectator, and the manner in which adaptation is foregrounded. In Lochhead's plays thus can be seen to derive from the strategy of doubling, both in terms of casting and through characterization, showing how the relationship of character to "naturalism is indicative of the different relations of film and theatre to the classic realist text. In the doubling of casts, one performer takes two or more parts, and in the doubling of character, two characters are reduced to a less than complete whole, becoming two complementary parts of the whole. This is in effect a shift from the practicalities of adapting a novel with many characters for the stage towards the introduction of issues of psychological complexity and subjectivity."<sup>25</sup>

Double casting emphasizes a minimalist approach in terms which defy a close identification of character and performer, hence functional as surface in contrast to the visual stimulants of film; doubling of character similarly functions to highlight the surface of characterization. With reference to consistent temporal structures indicated by narratology a new dimension emerges in that some characters must be switched so as to



ensure the continuity of one story and later the development of another. Nurse Grice and Nurse Nisbett are one and the same person, and the doubling of Mrs Manners, Lucy and Mina as the vampire brides (scene nine) is at once an effective tapping of the spectator's unconscious, and a way of developing various parallel narrative threads. Mrs Manners is an early figure of the young women's education and is later involved in a series of events which precipitate other events; she therefore has a role in a seemingly conventional linear development in that she is witness to the women's early years of development but later is involved in the events generated in fantasy.

### Uncanny doublings and the stage space

Elaine Aston's paper, "A Challenge to Romantic Boundaries: Liz Lochhead's *Blood and Ice* and April de Angelis' *Breathless*" describes Lochhead's play as an analysis of the female subject.<sup>26</sup> It is this issue that I would like to turn to in order to further examine the conditions of naturalistic characterization in the adapted text. It is worth recalling here that I have used Brecht's description of the Fabel as the framework for including all reconstructions or revisions of history under the rubric "adaptation". Therefore, I am here considering the ways in which subjectivity is constructed and character presented when we always have recourse to an anterior text. This analysis is critical in determining class differences between women when they share the apparent \*concerns of the status group.

*Blood and Ice* entirely is focussed upon the subjectivity of Mary Shelley, in relation to whom all other characters are peripheral. This immediately distinguishes the play as being of a particular feminist concern and contrasts it with other re-workings of these notorious Romantic figures, such as Howard Brenton's *Bloody Poetry* which has a clear concern with class. Aston uses Sue-Ellen Case's analysis of three subject formations found in plays by women - the split subject, the metonymically displaced subject and the collective subject - to identify the construction of Mary as a "metonymic" subject. As such Mary is constructed as a subject who, "Rather than inhabiting a stable, split position, [it] may move from position to position through the dynamic of displacement, leaving only its itinerary as a sign of its presence".<sup>27</sup> Case emphasizes that this kind of subject

does not necessarily require a corporeal presence, in fact she may simply be located as a voice over. Aston continues her own distinction between subject formations by looking at the second play, *Breathless*, a reworking of Gothic conventions, commenting that it deals instead with the "collective" subject, a formation based upon a continuum rather than separate states. In this latter play the central figure has a maid who is also a scientist, in the former the maid is also a significant if unidentified presence, and whilst Aston did not make this prominent it was quite evident in her staging of extracts from both plays by students as part of the presentation of the paper: in each case the maid figure was an additional figure onstage who tended to be collapsed within the perspective of the bourgeois subject.

I mention Aston's study of April de Angelis' *Breathless* in addition to Lochhead's play because it is specifically concerned with the gothic genre, and because it introduces the notion of the "collective" subject in conjunction with the horror genre and therefore non-naturalistic characterization. This enables me to stress links between characterization of different types in each play. What is significant in each is that class distinctions of characters were not made clear. This constitutes an interesting feature dependent on the close links with conventions of horror where sources of threat to the establishment - women, working-class, ethnic groups - are made corporeal monsters.<sup>28</sup> Given the prevalence of what is monstrous, if not monsters, and threats to both sexual and social security pervasive to all the plays, I would suggest that rather than Mary being a "metonymically displaced subject", she is part of a collective subject in that she is shaped with reference to the working-class maid and her own half-sister. Although this is developed in detail later I must stress that a materialist-feminist reading always includes a study of classed subjects. Furthermore, we know that these characters are not constructed mimetically but with reference to the abstracted and allegorical adaptation. It seems that the two categories of subject formation depend upon a relation to bourgeois sensibility. In the case of the collective subject there is a shift away from the processes of empathy and identification which provide us with a reading of Mary as a tortured individual to a reading of her suffering as comparable with other women's and subject to the same conditions of oppression.

Lochhead's *Dracula* similarly focusses upon bourgeois subjects in that Lucy and Mina are the central characters. In addition though, the peripheral characters are interesting, and I have previously outlined the parallels between Lucy and Renfield as part of the narrative structure. Other divided characters are Renfield's nurses, Grisbett and Grice. These, I will suggest, are defined through the category of horror, a category which in turn is juxtaposed to the analysis of the bourgeois subject. Consistently, it seems that those characters shown to be horrific are aligned with what is both threatening and monstrous, for they are women, madmen, split subjects and working-class.

Nurse Nisbett is also Nurse Grice, performed by an actor who is also Dr. Goldman and Mrs Manners; this is not simply an inversion of the carer of her profession as she is also incomplete as a character and therefore elicits an interesting response as if to a literary double. This is substantiated by consideration of the horror genre in literature and film by Noel Carroll in his book *Philosophy of Horror: Paradoxes of the Heart*.<sup>29</sup> Carroll's analysis rests upon a basic difference between visual and cognitive horror, concentrating principally at the fear and loathing felt by characters when looking on what is monstrous. Whilst he suggests that these feelings are shared by the spectator also, he fails to outline the processes of identification and desire felt by the spectator and manipulated by the staging or director - our experience of the monster is assumed to be consonant with that of the character looking at the monster as object. The logical \*consequence of this would be a comparable fear and loathing of, oscillating with desire for, *Dracula*, both in the anterior text and the adaptation, because quite simply the cognitive processes would remain the same.

The implications for political adaptation are considerable here. A pertinent feature Carroll outlines is the splitting of the monster depends upon two categories: "fission" and "fusion". The figures denoted by "fusion" he defines as follows: "A fusion figure is a composite that unites attributes held to be categorically distinct and/or at odds in the cultural scheme of things in unambiguously one, spatio-temporally discrete entity." (p.46-7). He cites Frankenstein's monster as an example in that it retains a physical autonomy and distinction from Frankenstein himself. Fusion on the other hand, he indicates as distinguishable both temporally and spatially: "Temporal fission - which the split between

Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde exemplifies - divides characters in time - whilst spatial fission - for instance, the case of doppelgangers - multiplies characters in space. (p.47). Thus a distinction emerges between fusion on the one hand, which offers a stable character, and on the other hand, fission, which is both unstable and shifting through time. Lochhead draws on both of these definitions: Grice and Nisbett for instance within the asylum are fission characters, and Dracula and the female vampires (his wives/daughters?) are examples of fusion. In both cases there is a symbiosis in the relationship that leaves one figure/abstract being dependent upon the other. With reference to definitions of subject formation, fusion corresponds to the "metonymically displaced" subject and fission to the "collective" subject.

The distinction between the two demonstrates the ways in which the plays can be read. I prefer the idea of the "collective" subject for two reasons. (1) That it outlines the extent to which characterization is distanced from naturalism, and therefore shows the subject in relation to material conditions. (2) That it demonstrates shared experience as part of a continuum. This continuum may be contained within a status group definition and show women always on the same scale but with different experience, as Christine Delphy has suggested, and in so doing opens up the possibility that experience is subject to change.<sup>30</sup>

However, because this summary depends principally upon a relation to the idea of \*the anterior text as providing an abstract structure, the points at which material conditions are traced are particularly important. I would suggest that these are traced especially on the maid figures in the plays, Florrie in *Dracula* and Elise in *Blood and Ice*, who although part of the collective status group subject cannot deny their class definition. Through them the abstract concerns are made more concrete and the female subject is returned to a temporal structure implicitly concerned with class relations.

The second part of this chapter addresses the construction of the maid figures in three of Lochhead's plays as a way of affirming political issues in the practice of adaptation. The maids are also the bodies on which class and status concerns are inscribed and materiality made corporeal.

The fact that I have outlined different types of narrative arrangement is important here. The idea of an Oedipal narrative is deliberately contrasted with a menstrual narrative, thus establishing a binary. However, it is my contention that the maid figures are not readily contained within either one or the other of these narratives, and therefore are the source of a politicized reading of Lochhead's adaptations. This is worked out in detail in the next section where I address the notion of the maid as an ideological subject and the construction of both bourgeois and working-class women in relation to temporal order and the naturalized world.

### THE MAID AS IDEOLOGICAL SUBJECT

At this stage I will argue for the centrality of the maid figure in each of Lochhead's modes of adaptation by examining the construction of this figure in *Blood and Ice*, *Mary Queen of Scots Got Her Head Chopped Off* and *Dracula*. In so far as processes of adaptation foreground a comparison of anterior and adapted texts it is useful to find a locus for this comparison. Here, I have chosen to examine the maid figure in each play with reference to text-based analysis and also the processes of performance as part of a materialist-feminist criticism. I will argue that there may be some inconsistency in the representation of the maid figure in that she at once highlights the theatricality of doubling and also illustrate an interesting bond between naturalistic and non-naturalistic discourse where naturalism is seen to be identified with the dominant ideology.

The maid is unequivocally a classed and gendered subject whose identity overlaps the implicit oppositions of master and slave, coloniser and colonised, internal and external threat. I would suggest that it is through the maid and her relation to her mistress(es) that class and status narratives are brought together and foregrounded. It is she, in effect, who is the embodiment of sex/class systems showing her to be both defined in relation to, and separate from her mistress(es). In the three forms of adaptation in Lochhead's work - novelistic, literary and national and historical myth - the construction and significance of the maid is differently figured, whether a feminist reconstruction, a literary adaptation, or a directly political agenda informs that construction. Therefore, the relation between the

class and status narratives will be figured differently. I suggested at the end of the first part of this chapter that class definition enables characters to re-enter one temporal formation, that is, of the prevailing order. This observation was based upon the assumption that Lochhead had intervened into arrangements of narrative and ideology and these were best explored in isolated moments or scenes. As a result it seemed that specific social relations were defined that showed class and status groups in conflict and yet mutually interdependent. This interdependency can be described as being shaped by the processes of condensation and displacement and an exchange between issues of class formation and sexuality. Hence, there is a familiar displacement of the concerns of the bourgeois subject onto the working-class woman (the maid). Moreover, this indicates a further conjunction of processes of condensation and displacement through reference to Julia Kristeva's third category of the abject: a disgust at the signs of sexual difference.<sup>31</sup>

The ways in which sex differences emerge as an issue affecting the lives of both bourgeois and working-class women will be examined here as an interesting aspect of the adaptations. These betray a concern with the corporeal body and physical signs of difference that is complicated in Lochhead's plays by the close association of sexual organs with working-class women, to the extent that the women, as part of a collective subject, cannot discern between a revulsion at class differences and sex differences. These issues of class and status relations are the focus of this next section.

In Chapter Two I began to consider the placing of maid figures in terms of status and narrative in two plays - *The Maids* by Jean Genet and *My Sister in This House* by Wendy Kesselmann. In contrast with Lochhead's plays, where the maid always tends to show us something about her mistress, these two plays centralize the maids and in so doing ensure the prominence of marginal figures. As the maid figures assume prominence so do the concerns of status groups; for instance, pregnancy and motherhood, menstruation and blood are subjects of the drama. Moreover, I suggested that because the representation of women's issues was that of issues largely peripheral to traditional class relations their interaction as a status group can be defined in relation to ritual. This is a term that best describes women's relation to pregnancy and menstruation and also invokes the notion of cyclical narratives. Given that each of the three plays charts changing

relationships between women, especially across classes, it may be that the plays are demonstrating a process of creating and defining new sets of social relations with which to replace existing class relations. As a result of some external intrusion (in the form of the employer or bourgeois subject) or simply the widening of the couplings to incorporate others, there was an inevitable degree of class conflict and friction, and it is this which makes an interesting focus of a feminist reading in view of the clear demarcation of "maid" as a classed position. In the process of (de)historicization or deconstruction the analysis of the text as feminist practice is informed by my previously established category of adaptation. I will conclude this chapter with an analysis of the place of parody in defining the adapted text.

Traditionally dramatic representations of maids signify specific theatrical tropes: she may be a comic figure to relieve situations, she may be the focus of sexual and class status, or she may be treated as a subject in process. These distinctions are reflected in both feminist and earlier theatres. In Sarah Daniels' play *The Gut Girls* (1988) we see women who had a specific public and social identity in the workplace retrained to the more restricted and subordinate role as household maids. This reflects, yet also diverges from, the traditional image of a working-class woman being trained, a woman who provides a convenient and rich resource for the machinations of a male progressive thinker. Lochhead's adaptation of Moliere's *Tartuffe* slots into the first category in that she "uses the maid as comic device whilst at the same time developing her relation with the daughter of the household. Dorian, the maid, is also drawn in relation to the father as a disruptive comic figure - her asides and gestural language indicate the conventions of the Commedia - and her exchanges with Orgon (the father) indicate conventional status inversions leading to a comic upturn and from there, to closure. Where in Daniels play there is an elaborate process of educating the women to use a bourgeois (and naturalistic) language, as Lady Helena instructs one maid as an example to two other untrained women: "All right, now Nora would you take the tray and mime bringing it in, pretending to open the door, set it on the table, and say 'Will that be all, Madam'", in Lochhead's adaptation the focus language an adapted Scottish colloquialism in addition to verse form.<sup>32</sup>

Daniels' *Gut Girls* and Lochhead's *Tartuffe* contrast in terms of their naturalistic reference and it seems that where the process they describe is educative and nurturing naturalism is a key critical form; where other conventions are called into play, more non-naturalistic devices are used. Where the play becomes more politically centred is in the process of adaptation itself, that is, in the act of translation into Scots. This contrast between naturalism and non-naturalistic device may be continued in a dialogue of class and status, to the extent that class-based issues are primarily located within language debate and status is related to the underside or unconscious explored in the visual images which I consider as single isolated units, that is, units which demonstrate or constitute a direct expression of status exchange. I would point out again that the "maid" highlights processes of signification. It is through an analysis of status and class narratives that the relationship between maid and mistress becomes rather more complex, in that it is never simply a case of the servant being "other" to the master. If the master/servant relationship is a class-based one, then I would suggest that the mistress/maid relationship is further complicated in its genesis by the shared status grouping of the women involved. If this is the case, then it might be that the two groups of women have a shared consciousness or subjectivity, that is, an essentially modernist preoccupation and are the collective subjects - doubles, shadows or images of monstrousness. The role of the maid figure in the dual narratives of class and status, I would argue, returns us to a class-based temporality and one also based upon sex-difference. This is most clear in the essentially ritualized moments of exchange or physical contact between women where the process of displacement is effectively a dramatic gesture in that the exchange of class and status is performed in front of us.

### *Blood and Ice*

It is in Lochhead's play *Blood and Ice* that Mary Shelley, Shelley and Claire Clairmont, Mary's half-sister, form a triumvirate of two sisters and one lover which at times is extended to include Byron and Mary's maid Elise. The play incorporates the myths of the Romantic poets lives and traces the development of their interrelationships across the landscapes of England and Europe in search of a secure home, and secure



premise for the progressive lifestyle espoused by their philosophy. By focussing upon the subjectivity of the central protagonist Mary, the problems of free-love and libertarianism are presented through a materialist-feminist analysis of motherhood and childbearing in the nineteenth century.<sup>33</sup> The play opens with a non-naturalistic exegesis: Mary Shelley is in the nursery in a cold candlelight surrounded by stage properties evocative of nursery fears and dreams, musty and distorted images that reflect an oneiric working of her anxieties. She is reading her life in her own book *Frankenstein* much as we, the audience, read the play through features peculiar to her unconscious - there is a sublimation and conflation of creativity, childhood, childbearing and memory. This defines the space of Mary's subjectivity and at once becomes a motif straining throughout the play which emphasizes the potential slippage which Lochhead wishes to present between historical accuracy, and historical uncertainty as it is shown through revisionary theatre. This is done primarily in moves away from the classic realist play.

Elise is the name of Mary's maid, herself a shadowy figure in biographical accounts of the Shelleys. At first the play is presented as a play of Mary's consciousness through which the maid figure is defined: without the authority figure Elise loses her identity and without the maid figure, Mary is transformed. So we are invited to speculate as to the identity of the maid in relation Mary's subjectivity and pose the question: is Elise simply presented as part of Mary's consciousness, her "other"? And if so, does the \*class/status paradox which shows them as related as women, but not through class or national identity (Elise is Swiss), at any time enable Elise to transcend that relationship and assume autonomy? I choose primarily to focus upon Elise here because of her class identity, rather than on Claire Clairmont with whom Mary is more commonly compared in biographical work.

In Chapter Two I looked an extract from the play in which Elise is used as a prop to reflect the interaction of the other characters.<sup>34</sup> In that exchange the idea of game playing was critical as informing the political agenda of the play; here that motif will be continued but focussing primarily on single scenes and the ways in which status is related to games. The plays I have selected for analysis are *Blood and Ice*, *Mary Queen of Scots Got Her Head Chopped Off* and *Dracula*. I will argue that in these scenes non-verbal and

spoken utterance identify the playing out of various status interactions and act both to interrupt a linear narrative and begin to shape one through which Elise, as both a classed and gendered subject, comes into definition. The features of repetition and suspense characteristic of ritual highlight the play's non-naturalistic perspective in that the characters repeat the structure of an isolated ritual moment. These scenes of repeated action become part of the thematic and developing narrative and work to unhinge the linear narrative by dislocating trajectory, character, social and sexual identity. This transition is reflected in the stratum of ritual Richard Schechner has defined in his book *Performance Theory* as, "strictly programmed, expressing the individual's submission to forces 'larger' or at least 'other' than oneself. Ritual epitomizes the reality principle, the agreement to obey rules that are given. Games, sports, and theater (dance, music) mediate between these extremes".<sup>35</sup> In *Blood and Ice* each character then takes part in the process of this larger ritual, through which the uncertainty of the historical narrative is illuminated and ideas of class are introduced. Lochhead's significant contribution through these scenes - an exploration of which follows - is to chart a shift in focus from the Claire/Mary relationship to the Mary/Elise relationship. A feminist linear development and focus upon Mary is taken to be the larger pattern against which class interest is measured, and thus the exchange between women is shown to be a testing ground of a relationship to the "reality" principle, the issues of the symbolic order of events.

The key scene, upon which all the others are based, shows Mary and Claire in candlelight brushing out each other's hair. It is worth clarifying the point that, where such scenes are repeated and therefore made into rituals, the "reality principle" being tested is naturalism. Moreover, the scenes depend upon a transition from status-informed play to games-to-ritual. I have included the three extracts here in sequence. In the first Mary and Claire are alone together; in the second repeated action Claire is dressing herself in lacy finery; in the third Mary and Elise are facing each other, and at this stage Elise is fully articulate in the social and feminist discourse she has been taught by Mary. Interestingly Elise speaks English as a second language and therefore she is distanced as a social subject from one specific patriarchal discourse, as she had previously been distanced by identity as a maid. The three sequences are as follows and numbered for convenience :

(1) (*ELISE goes to the edge of the light where we ought to just sense her waiting resentment. She stands stock still with armful of frou-frou, leaving, in a sort of tableau: MARY and CLAIRE alone together by the fire and candlelight. As if under a spell they begin to brush out their long hair slowly with silver hairbrushes, each other's image*). (p.86)

(2) (*Little flashback now and MARY is back in Switzerland at the mirror scene in Act One - (so there should be a definite sound cue or lighting cue for the flashback within the mirror scene in Act One) - CLAIRE's voice should be light and gay when she next speaks, as opposed to frantic in her last speech which has triggered MARY's mind back...MARY snapping back from then by sheer will. ELISE has already retreated to her menacing shadowy presence again*). (p.104)

(3) (*MARY slaps her hard. ELISE and MARY looking at each other. Echoing the CLAIRE/MARY mirror scene in Act One*). (p.107)

The three sequences simply exchange character participation and chart the move away from the question of Mary's female subject position - the metonymic subject - an essentially bourgeois exploration of the middle-class subject, toward an exploration of status interaction apropos of class. It is a move away from interpersonal entanglement through ritual, from internal to external, as Mary's obsessional involvement with the maid denotes a class debate and serves to place the previously peripheral maid centre stage. This transition is effected in Mary's failure to keep the maid internal; when by force of will she snaps out of the second scene ridding herself of the image of Claire, she is unable to similarly disassociate Elise, who retains the shadowy and menacing presence of the ritual. Thus the repetitiveness of the ritual is distorted as the figure of the maid, Mary's ideological other, becomes also the nemesis of her bourgeois narrative. The ritual created in the scene goes beyond the "reality" principle of its limits and therefore beyond the control of Mary as bourgeois subject. At this point class and status are conflated as the relationship is not confined to class relations - in that Elise remains in her frame of vision whilst Claire is released.

A further disruption of established relations occurs when Mary twice transgresses social and class barriers by touching Elise - first when she moves her hands up and down the breasts of Elise as Shelley and Claire goad her in a game of blind man's buff, and second, when she slaps her for speaking out of place. It is the game which allows for the first contact and traditional class (therefore spatial) barriers which account for the second.

The second incident is in effect a framing of class guilt demonstrated in the way Mary responds to the corporeality of the maid. Not only is the maid made physical but she is also pregnant and a reminder to Mary of her own difficulty in childbirth. Here, Elise is not simply a classed/gendered subject shown in relation to her mistress but also a generative subject seeking her own place in the bourgeois and linear narrative by bringing into it a child. This move towards an independence from Mary is worked through a mainly naturalistic discourse: Shelley becomes involved with Mary in dealing with the problem of the pregnancy and typically Elise and the suspected father (a groom) is dismissed. In a sense, Shelley's visible involvement makes the matter public, to do with two men, master and servant, thereby excluding the women's involvement. Each of the scenes illustrates transitional stages in the relationship of *Mary* and *Elise*, which because of the prevalence of male power as public power become more and more internalized. What is particularly interesting is the dislocation of visual and verbal cues in the ways that the scenes are constructed. In the first scene it is Claire and Mary who talk, although temporally Mary is recollecting a situation in which Claire switches from expressing anxiety to a frivolity of speech. Elise at this point remains silent. In the second incident it is Mary and Elise who speak, and thus Elise has replaced Claire in the relation of intimacy to Mary.

Before continuing with my analysis of the effective transition across class that *Elise* makes, I would like to stress the frequency and also the prominence of mirror images and exercises in Lochhead's plays, which in part serve to demonstrate the underside of expression and what is at stake in using the mirror as a lens into the construction of subjectivity. This is, on the one hand, an effective mechanism for demonstrating the relationship between self and other, and on the other hand, an interesting way of openly using rehearsal-type exercises within the narrative. By referring to a sequence of exercises devised by Augusto Boal, I hope to indicate exactly how these images are more than static and isolated: they are part of a sequence. In Chapter Two I made reference to Boal's concern with the relationship between a Marxist political understanding of performance and physical gesture, a concern which Zeig developed as part of her feminist project. This concern accounts for the ways in which single images

form a discernible visible narrative strategy. From Boal's chapter "The Arsenal of the Theatre of the Oppressed", subsection "Seeing What we Look At" I have selected examples of interactive exercises that depend upon a mirroring of self. Here is Boal's account of "The Distorting Mirror":

The joker should always warn the group before giving any signal to move the sequence on to its next stage. In this case when the signal is given, the relationship between the two partners changes completely. Up till now all movements, facial expressions and gestures have been reproduced in an identical, 'mimetic' fashion; now there is 'commentary', 'response'. Each person is allowed to do whatever feels right, and at each new stimulus, their partner 'answers', 'comments', 'enlarges', 'reduces', 'caricatures', 'ridicules', 'destroys', 'relativises' - in sum, produces an image responding to the received image, but in a contrapuntal relationship to it.

There should be no sense of adjustment between the 'image' (gesture, movement, expression) and its 'response'; on the contrary, they should be simultaneous, or virtually so, and continuous. The idea is not to do something and wait for the other person to repeat it, and then respond to that while he waits; there should be a continual dispatch and reception of visual messages answering each other, distorting each other. Of course, absolute simultaneity is impossible, but any period of waiting (and loss of concentration) should be avoided.<sup>36</sup>

Boal stresses how all other exercises in the sequence, apart from this one, depend upon a mimetic relationship between the two partners. The exercise becomes narcissistic as one person reflects the idealized image of oneself. In the discrete space between one movement and its reflection is, I would suggest, a moment of disparity where the image is distorted, and where temporality is momentarily challenged or transfixed.

At this stage it is worth introducing some further discussion of the "gaze". What is interesting in relation to Lochhead's text is how in that moment of disparity it is the maid who has a fragile and shadowy presence, who is incomplete as an image in Mary's mind, as is Claire. In a sense it requires the two women, Claire and the maid, to complete the reflection of self for Mary; as Claire is adorned with the trappings of femininity, wrappings of lingerie, she mirrors or signifies Mary's femininity and sexuality. She too, it seems, sleeps with Shelley. An interesting contrast between the two women comes in the way that their sexuality is staged through images of lacy underwear: Claire is often seen wearing lacy underwear and Elise is merely carrying the bundle of frou-frou. For Freud, femininity was characterized by masquerade, and for the woman, "Illusion, travesty,

make-up, the veil, become the techniques she relies upon to both cover over and make visible her 'essential assets'".<sup>37</sup> It is perhaps the difference in the two women's social positions which makes this notable, for if the veil (for which we can read the lingerie) signifies femininity then Elise's position is more ambiguous, for she is carrying the veil of femininity which doesn't belong to her. Significantly it is a Lacanian description of the masquerade of femininity that further depends upon the metaphor of veiling as being associated with femininity and this is an association commonly used to talk about all women; yet Elise, perhaps by her classed subject position, is seen only as carrying the signifiers of feminine behaviour. And it is also Elise who is the woman onto whom Mary has projected her anxieties; she is therefore reproduced as both the monstrous feminine and classed subject and because of her class position is unable to fulfill the role of Mary's idealized self, thus challenging the notion of a mimetic relationship between the two of them. Mary's anxieties are primarily divided between the two women, and it is only Elise's pregnancy which grants her some degree of kind of social identity. At this point the monstrous feminine and the classed subject (maid) come to mean one and the same identity.

In the very act of entering what I would call the bourgeois narrative Elise raises a class issue and the scene is shown to be an exploration of Mary's own prejudice. But by force of her prominence, and as a pregnant woman, she must be seen to engage with Mary at a class level, and therefore she can be read as part of an historical and class narrative and not simply within the context of Mary's consciousness, thus changing the ostensible concerns of the play. Elise's role is not simply to invert the familiar master/servant relationship but to transform it by actualizing the new frame of reference that the revised juxtaposition of status with class affords. This is where feminist structures of narrative begin to replace traditional structures.

In a conflation of sexual and class subject Lochhead creates the image of the doll that Elise has sewn for Mary's child. It is a doll modelled in the image of Mary yet underneath the skirts of the doll is the top half of Elise's body - the maid (as classed/gendered subject) has taken the place of Mary's genitalia. Both in the mirror sequences and through the image of this doll Lochhead confronts Mary with her own

class position. In effect Elise's transformation depends upon an oscillation between her shadowy and vague threatening presence and a corporeality emphasized by her pregnant body. It is as if she represents a threat to Mary's own position, that is dependent upon an empowerment through intellectual prowess. In Freudian terms the maid's pregnant body is the vessel through which the baby signifies the phallus, which in turn threatens Mary. Significantly it is the woman of working-class origins who is empowered by this and Claire, who demonstrates her femininity through her clothes, who cannot compete in this class/status conflict, and who is reduced to a final passivity through her subordinate relationship with Byron and the denial of access to the child by whom she might have been empowered.

In my study of playstructures dependent upon what Schechner has termed "life-rhythms" - eating, sleeping, walking (to which I would add menstruating) - the inclusion of scenes constructed around games and play is a familiar motif. Lochhead also incorporates these rhythms into her plays, yet by focussing upon the maid figure it seems that the issue of ideology is exposed as crucial to that cyclical structure. The status or slave identity that the women share places them in this category of life rhythms but it is class difference that fails to confine women such as Elise to this category. Through her act of generation the chronology of the play which charts Mary's own difficult entry into motherhood is challenged and the maid comes to require a spatial priority as she equally "requires temporal privilege. Thus she enters, and expects to enter, the symbolic order of which Mary previously only has had a part by masquerading as masculine. Hence, in her refusal of the identity that the narrative has bestowed upon her as a figment of her bourgeois counterpart (she, like the other maids is not confined to her space because of the workings of the bourgeois woman), Elise stands to do more than confirm Mary's identity, in itself implicitly weak because of her femininity: she confounds the implicit master/slave relationship through the bond in status identity, the ability to have children that they both share.

Essentially what Lochhead is doing through her act of feminist adaptation is transforming the perceived view of Mary as isolated and middle-class woman through a materialist-feminist analysis of the ways in which the working-classes are mediated. Ellen

Moers describes the product of woman's experience of Romanticism and the trauma of afterbirth: "A dark double, its materiality never to be drawn back into the recesses of consciousness, the monster haunts its creator".<sup>38</sup> This points to the monster in feminist rereadings of *Frankenstein* as being conceived of as Mary's creativity. Here, the monster is clearly that which haunts her mind in the form of the maid, whose corporeality represents the materiality of ideology and reminds her of status/class and also of sex differences.

Theatrically the scenes are interesting in that they are removed from the clarity of naturalistic theatre. Lochhead prefers instead to rechannel attention from the issues of characterization, for instance, Mary Shelley's creativity, to the act of exchange and the mechanisms by which class and status are interrelated. The transition of the sequences involves the exchange of character participation and the scene becomes ritualized in that it introduces a discourse of life-rhythms otherwise unacceptable to the dominant ideology. Barbara Creed indicates in her study of horror films that the "...function of the monstrous remains the same - to bring about an encounter between the symbolic order and that which threatens its stability".<sup>39</sup> Elise is the mediator of all that is monstrous and her body is a cypher for the abject forces which threaten the symbolic order. Both marginal in her use of language, for she undergoes what can be described effectively as a class consciousness raising, and marginal in terms of staging, the figure is significantly \*peripheral to the image of naturalistic discourse.

This returns me to the issue of naturalism and characterization and how these scenes interrupt the relation of the two. The 1992 BBC radio 4 production of *Blood and Ice* points out the ambiguous figure the maid offers, challenging the construct of the monstrous, for, by reflecting a predominantly naturalistic dialogue any image or reference to the surreal or the ambiguous is lost. The maid figure only spoke on the occasions I have previously described and therefore she was shown as a classed subject rather than a threat at the level of physical and generational status. Hence, there are two perspectives in juxtaposition: that of the relationship between Elise and her employers (Shelley and Mary), and also the relationship bound by sexuality where it is traced mnemonically and through fantasy in Mary's mind.



Women here are always linked through generational status, through childbirth and motherhood. It is a feature common of the Romantic women, Mary Wollstonecraft in particular - she is there in her own written text and also through the image around Mary's throat as an insignia. In the second play I shall look at, the throat is the connection of the status group of women, a sign denoting their shared status as victims.

### Dracula

Lochhead's adaptation of Bram Stoker's *Dracula* for the stage is, primarily, a reworking of a text about one kind of desire to make it about another. It is invariably the case that in filmic adaptations of *Dracula* women are constructed as objects and that they are situated in the narrative as the target of male advances, characteristically both Oedipal and sadistic. This is the myth of the vampire through which Lochhead transforms the role of her female characters as the object of male desire, presenting them instead as desiring subjects. Both Mina and Lucy are liberated by their encounter with Dracula and in the play they move toward an undefined area that is scarcely hinted at in filmic versions. This is an area defined, with reference to death, as liminality and staged through the assertion of Mina's sexuality as she kisses Jonathan against a backdrop of "blood-red" falling petals.<sup>40</sup> Traditionally the notion of cinematic framing and its relationship to spectator positioning reflects an established and fairly resistant arrangement in which the women are usually defined with reference to Dracula's own ambivalent sexuality rather than discovering their own sexual desires and autonomy as in Lochhead's play. Psychoanalytic theories of fantasy maintain that fantasy functions always with reference to reality; here that might be translated as a reference to the classic realist text. Lochhead uses the flexibility of the stage, non-naturalistic staging and performance styles in addition to the abstracted anterior text as a way of complicating that reference to reality and questioning the social relations of constructions of that reality itself.

Based upon the assumption that class-issues revolve around the naturalistic text and status-issues around the non-naturalistic text, it is my suggestion that Lochhead's use of maid figures becomes more ambivalent and this is in part due to the definition of naturalism and the place that a maid has within that definition. Florrie, Lucy and Mina's

maid, is Yorkshire born and seems fairly young. She is, for Lucy especially, both mother and friend. Her place in narrative development relies, as did that of Elise, upon her getting pregnant, the result of which demonstrates her actions as autonomous and subject to class distinctions: her story is told independent of the consciousness of her mistress. Two aspects of Lochhead's adaptation illustrate the points at which the narrative is played out according to the dictates of status relations in which motherhood and femininity are constructed: (1) The fact that Mina and Lucy are now sisters rather than Mina being of a lower class governess in the anterior text; (2) Florrie's various roles as mother and friend and maid. It seems then at first that class differences are collapsed and differences depend on aspects of the "feminine", internal relations within the confines of femininity (for instance, between mother and child) and it is only as the plot unfolds that the status relations are transformed.

Key images in the development of the narrative are again based around mirror exercises. For instance, the play opens with Lucy playing with a handmirror. As she looks at herself and speculates about her future she seems to seek the definition of self described by Lacanian psychoanalysis where, rather than perceiving itself as a unified subject the child undergoes a process of misrecognition, assuming unity where there is none. It is at this point that the child is deemed to enter into the symbolic order, effecting a shift away from the mother-child relationship dominating the earlier imaginary stage.<sup>41</sup>

\*It is perhaps this that Lucy seeks to re-establish in her relationship with Florrie by constructing Florrie as a substitute mother to replace the absent mother in the text, rather than the perhaps obvious mother-figure of Mrs Manners, the governess. Dracula similarly fails to recognise himself in a mirror: the fact that he can perceive no image at all shows him to be almost more feminine than the women themselves. Whereas it is a woman's awareness of lack which guarantees her awareness of sex differences, in that she knows she does not have the power represented by the phallus, Dracula's inability to see himself in the mirror points to his inability to reach the processes of the Lacanian mirror stage. At the very least it is his ambivalent sexual identity that fails to identify difference and also his inability to distinguish difference which makes him feminine, that is lack or absence, rather than female.

Class prejudice is exposed in the play in both Mina and Lucy's treatment of Florrie. As just another bourgeois subject Mina's generosity of spirit is, as Mary Shelley's was shown to be, only manifest once or twice in the play. The new century to Mina represents equality and fairness, and she espouses the spirit of this on occasion:

*(To Florrie)*, Call me Mina! Florrie, we wait  
but one year to a brand new century, times are  
changing, we'll have no more mistress and servants,  
I don't believe in them.  
FLORRIE:...No, miss. *(pause)* You will still pay my wages? [1,8]

Mina predictably later turns to shout at Florrie simply because the disenfranchised status of the maid makes her a suitable target of emotion. Florrie in turn maintains the disbelieving, sceptical and slightly scornful attitude of her class towards the token measure of friendship offered by her employers. She is at times the object of their affection and their antagonisms and yet conversely ensures their well-being, and each sister must seek her approval and intimacy as a step against rupturing the intimacy between each other which is characterized by antagonisms. In this scene the two sisters are vying for the attentions of the maid, and is she whom Lochhead grants space to, privileging her with a soliloquy, the form usually preserved for a focus on conceptions of an "individual" speaking voice. I would suggest that her marginal position and class position serves to deny her the opportunity of an genuine and naturalistic exchange with the sisters and this is compensated for by the soliloquy in which she is able to outline her own subjectivity.

Florrie here is both the speaking subject (enonce) and the subject which is spoken (enounced):

Oh, don't believe in servants, don't you,  
that's very interesting. Better pinch  
yourself, Florrie my girl, look in the  
mirror, pinch yourself to see if you're  
real. *[fade]* (p.98).

It is Florrie who states the need for a confirmed identity through looking in the mirror, yet in stating this as a means of identification she actually no longer needs to do so, neither does she need to pinch herself for a recognition of her corporeality. Significantly, it is her social identity as a maid that is being threatened here, and the fading of stage lights is

indicative of both this and the vastly reduced role of Florrie in the subsequent narrative. At least, the role is to be transformed as she is more identified with reference to Lucy, as mother and carer. As a result of the sisters' interference Florrie's status is diminished and compromised.

In what is apparently a conflict between the structuring of "life-rhythms" - menstruation, maternity - with the Oedipal narrative, the classed/gendered subject is placed in a prominent position. Within the context of these "life-rhythms" sexuality, specifically female, and the importance of menstruation as life determining, is made evident. In the absence of the mother - another feature familiar to the horror genre - there is no indication of the satisfactory process of learning through which the female child comes to an awareness of her own body, its limits and its pleasures. Barbara Creed continues her discussion with reference to Julia Kristeva's analysis of the abject, saying that Kristeva,

...argues that the subject's first contact with 'authority' is with the maternal authority when the child learns, through interaction with the mother, about its body: the shape of the body, the clean and the unclean, the proper and improper areas of the body. Kristeva refers to this process as 'primal mapping of the body' which she calls 'semiotic'.<sup>42</sup>

Florrie steps into the role of mother as an educator of Lucy in sexual knowledge, replying to Lucy's inquisitive, excited questioning in search of sexual knowledge, that isn't it "the most sweetest delicious swoony magical marvellous thing you ever - ?" [1,13] with the candid remark that it is something, "Very strange, very ordinary". The central oxymoron of her reply indicates the paradoxical nature of her role as surrogate mother, in that she can simply fulfill that role only in so far as her class background will allow her. It may be, that as it is Florrie who fails to confine Lucy to her room and therefore fails to prevent her from becoming a corpse: "the most sickening of wastes, is a border that has encroached upon everything". Elizabeth Grosz points out, "The cadaver poses a danger to the ego in questioning its solidity, stability and self-certainty".<sup>43</sup> This is the projected life or future of the subject Grosz suggests, in this instance reached with celerity. If Florrie has failed Lucy by not assuming the role of the mother sufficiently, then her

failure must surely be as a result of her class or the anticipation of her soon-to-be-motherhood, and it is the class difference which affects the status relations.

Grosz identifies in her reading of Kristeva the threat of the corpse as external and in contrast to the internal threats posed by bodily fluids, faeces, and menstrual blood. Florrie, like Elise, becomes pregnant and therefore enters into the temporal and chronological narrative of the play, using pregnancy generally associated with cyclical time as an access to linear time. She too, like Lucy, suffers a loss of bleeding but this is the result of the loss of menstruation through pregnancy and therefore not an act of feminist denial or reclamation of a female narrative. Instead she, like Elise, is forced to find a place in the bourgeois narrative because this is how Lochhead presents the material relations of the classed subject - she must enter the linear or bourgeois narrative before being able to step outside of it. She thus seeks entry into the class narrative by being a mother and therefore is defined not solely as a maid, but at the same time is subsumed by "motherhood" to the extent that she is losing control. Menstruation is metaphorically the source of control.

As Grosz goes on to delineate Kristeva's analysis of the mother she points out that there is no implicit sex difference implicated by menstruation:

In fact, menstruation does not differentiate female from male. Rather, it marks the difference between men and mothers. The horror of menstruation serves to tie women into a (presumably natural) maternity without acknowledging women's sexual specificity, a residual femininity unrepresented by maternity (p.76).

It is by becoming pregnant and therefore entering into the temporal reality defined by "maternity" that shifts occur in the class relationships. Florrie's pregnancy shows her to be autonomous from her mistress and more clearly linked with class background, and consistent with, yet contradicting, the trait of horror genres in producing that which is monstrous in a corporeal fashion of the monster, Florrie as the working-class figure is seen to be more monstrous. In effect the threat which Dracula had previously denoted is transferred to Florrie who comes to take her place back in the naturalistic discourse, where she voices her fears and anxieties, and shows herself to be separate from the fantasy by losing speech and actually fading away from the series of events. She is

transfixed as she watches Dracula attack Mina, rendered passive and helpless - a classed subject as a maid and only a mother as a woman, and like Mrs Linde in the scene from a *Doll's House* discussed in Chapter One, she is subordinated to the peripheries of the stage as the bourgeois woman takes part in the reconstruction and exploration of sexuality.

Florrie's role is less prominent than Elise's, and this provides a contrast between the plays that is developed further in the third play I shall discuss here, a play in which the processes of adaptation are more directly political.

*Mary Queen of Scots Got Her Head Chopped Off*

In this, the third play I wish to examine in terms of Lochhead's construction of the classed/gendered subject, I would suggest that there are a series of oppositional systems that extend and elaborate the pairing of the subject as both classed and gendered. In this process I would argue that the efficacy of the play as political theatre is construed as those systems of meaning are integrated. As in both previous plays Lochhead is examining the ways in which feminist adaptation may incorporate historical and literary material; this time she locates her material in the historicity of her own country. It was a play written for, and implicitly celebrating, the Edinburgh Festival, where Lochhead herself makes regular appearances as a poet. Winner of a Fringe First award, the play became part of the celebration of Scottish culture and identity that the Festival preserves, and the clear historical context contributes to this also in the reappraisal of an historical Scottish figure shown in opposition to (and maltreated by) her English counterpart. Hence, it takes as its subject the history of Scotland's short-reigning monarch, Mary, and shows her in relation to England's harsher queen, Elizabeth the First. Ilona Koren-Deutsch in her article "Feminist Nationalism in Scotland: *Mary Queen of Scots Got Her Head Chopped Off*" emphasizes the importance of Lochhead's Scottish background in conjunction with her feminism in her excellent reading of the play.<sup>44</sup> Whilst I base my argument upon a similar analogy I am keen to introduce the processes of performance as an integral part of my reading.

The placing of the play at the Festival serves to highlight modes of production. The figure of the playwright is similarly integral to the modes of production in that she is

writing both for her country, defined by the borders of Scotland, and also as a feminist writer. In effect a particular relationship between spectator and play is established to the extent that certain expectations are elicited by both. This provides a notion of exchange and perhaps of transference also, to which I will return, arguing that though Lochhead examines the maid as classed/gendered subject here, she also requires the specificity of an historical and cultural context through which the play becomes politicized.

This notion of exchange is developed thematically throughout the play with the marginal country always drawn in relation to the dominant ideology, with Mary as subject always defined in relation to Elizabeth. As in the other plays the "maid" is central but here she primarily serves as a cypher through which the other two women meet rather than an extension of bourgeois self. There are three strands to the trajectory of the play: (1) The historical events resulting in Mary's imprisonment and final decapitation - the final scene of the play re-enacts this as myth in a children's game; (2) The juxtaposition of Mary and Elizabeth's experience as monarchs and their experience as women; (3) Chastity and sexual awakening. The last two are the subject of status relations where power, sexuality, marriage and childbirth are collapsed through a series of displacements. The first, on the other hand, provide a focus for the trajectory of plot, as at the same time providing a historical context, yet as they are subsumed into myth and games there is the notion that there is not a great deal of contact between such myths and historical relations. Thus the plot is translated into tableau and lifted out of an historical narrative, to the extent that it shares the same deceleration of time and shift away from naturalism that the moments of exchange or ritual do.

This concluding scene - "*(And all around MARIE/MARY suddenly grab up at her throat in a tableau, just her head above their hands. Very still in the red light for a moment and then black)*" (p.67) - effaces the illusion of continuity and replaces it with melodramatic structures in which there is a transition from naturalism and the exploration of psychological reality to visual images, in which words such as motivation and action become declarative and dramatic as opposed to being important to naturalistic acting. This is reflected in the transformation of performers playing specific historical characters to playing contemporary children. The point is, I feel, that the historical material - anterior

text or chronicle as in this case - is only one part of the playwright's project and the other feminist (status) issues take precedence. Hence, the materialist-feminist reading I am undertaking necessitates a focus on single frames and *mise-en-scene* and an analysis of social relations as they are deployed through sex/class systems.

In thus drawing attention to social relations it is convenient to outline the traditional patterns of binary opposition between virgin/whore, queen/maid, subject/object, colonised/coloniser which are the structuring principles of the play. It is through these that social relations are most clear and through which Lochhead seeks to impose further boundaries of nationalism than those evident in the previous two plays where such structural systems were less clear-cut. Lochhead sets up an opposition between England and Scotland where the latter is seen as the colonized and the former, the coloniser. An analogy with the conditions of production of the play emerges, and this is textually readjusted through the gradual devolution of power to England - explored through a focus on status, childbearing and sexuality.

In contrast to the two previous plays, the maids in *Mary Queen of Scots Got Her Head Chopped Off* are not shown as autonomous characters but are always involved in the exchange between one country and another as well as between the figureheads of those countries. Elizabeth as monarch is the coloniser in that it is her powers which enable attacks upon Scotland, as Mary is colonized as a queen and as a woman, that is, according to both status and class. The position this accords each woman is that of subject and object. They are both the object of the male gaze within the play and Mary is also the subject/object of the imperial rule of England. However, this relationship is shown not to be continuous throughout the play as a result of a cross-casting which involves each figure playing the maid to the other's queen. Thus each maid is seen to be both subject to her mistress, also the object of male attention and perhaps identifiable both as social and sexual subject, as if performing two separate selves.

The four characters then are Mary and Elizabeth, Marian and Bessie - Mary becomes Marian and Elizabeth becomes Bessie, thus transforming the relationship of subject (social) with a clearly theatrical status inversion. It becomes a status inversion in that the inversion focusses the scenes upon private rather than public issues - Elizabeth's



relationships, sexuality and the fears and weaker moments of the monarch. Dramatically the double-casting affirms the relationship between Mary and Elizabeth, showing them as subordinate at any one time in the physical presence of the other, and directing the relationship of the monarch to her ideological other. This suggests perhaps that as the maids are aligned with the queens as sexual their sexuality is perceived as being outside of the order of monarchy. Again, as in the other plays, there are moments when the maid figure transcends the historical narrative with a different narrative impetus.

Transformation becomes a key word in an exchange as each woman assumes a different social status.

Act One, scene Three is entitled "Queens and Maids". The androgynous figure La Corbie, standing at the side of the stage manipulating and directing the action as a "fool", slips between naturalistic description and surreality, saying that, "Ony queen has an army o' ladies and maids" as if their identity has a plenitude, even lack of clarity, in the reflection of so many selves.<sup>45</sup> This would indicate them as collective subjects. Of these,

That she juist snaps her fingers toa summon.  
And yet...I ask you, when's a queen a queen  
And when's a queen juist a wummin?  
*(She cracks her whip, and the hectic and garish  
but proud ELIZABETH bobs a curtsy, immediately  
becoming BESSIE.),* (p.16).

The scene sets up the first sequence of mutations between mistress and servant; the conventional curtesy of servant to mistress is inverted as Elizabeth herself curtsies (to the audience, to La Corbie? - showing a subordination to the spectator or the medium or controlling agent?) and in doing so becomes the maid. It is interesting that a conventional image of the transformation simply being of doubles comes with the power position, and the potential threat of torture (castration) that comes from the androgyne, as if the doubling allows inversion rather than ambivalence because the oppositional figures are always in evidence. Moreover, the scene moves away from naturalism towards a stylized staging, combining with the deceleration of time, the brightness and energy of Elizabeth being reduced to the passivity of servitude which is shown later to be transformed through sexual confidence. Again, it is La Corbie who effects the opposite transformation "*And*

*with a drumbeat, or a flash of lightning - change, ELIZABETH, proud queen, is on a pedestal, preening, as MARY becomes, in that instant, modest MARIAN, ELIZABETH's gentlewoman)"* (p.17). So, as Mary, the demure and chaste Frenchwoman becomes the socially highly established 'gentlewoman', Elizabeth, the powerful monarch who consistently indulges a sexuality outside of the structures of marriage, and her position, becomes Bessie, the sexual maid (bawd?). This difference between the maids seems to suggest a collapsing of the coloniser/colonised binary with sexually active/passive binary in that Bessie is the colonized and wild Scottish woman, and Marian in contrast is sexually inactive and socially passive. It is an assumption reflected in the characterization of the men where the Scottish Bothwell, for instance, is notoriously more sexual and conventionally masculine than his English counterpart, Darnley.

If this metaphor is continued, then the issue of sexuality can be seen to be played out upon and between the bodies of the women. Elizabeth, Mary and Bessie are identified with reference to men to some degree, Marian is not. Elizabeth is involved in a relationship with a man she is unable to marry and she sacrifices him, making herself a victim of a masochistic impulse, shaped and reinforced by the desire for state power. Her constant jibes about Mary - "bit on the tall side", "hair that reddish colour that makes the complexion sickly looking" [1, 5] - reflect upon her superior sexual knowledge, a knowledge which perpetuates her own sexually marginal position as a woman outside of marital and generative cycles. Mary becomes pregnant and Elizabeth must live out the historical iconography that has constructed her as the virgin queen.

The opposition/bond between the two women is transformed with reference to heterosexual relations, broadening the reflective and mimetic exchange between the women to include a third party. Bothwell, whilst avidly pursuing the queen, is also conducting a sexual liaison with Bessie. One scene in particular draws Bessie and Mary together with the sexual energy generated in the woman but deriving at the outset from the man: "A swaying shudder runs with a gasp through BESSIE straight through MARY herself. Sexual current as electric shock." The body of the maid is a channel for a sexuality between higher class levels, yet in this it also generates the tension which Mary

later refutes by saying she really was never interested in Bothwell. This relationship shows her not simply as the victim of Bothwell's sexual energy and control, as the subordinate Bessie is, but using the experience as a means of dealing with her own marital and public state.

The cross-casting which is made constant throughout the play effects a more conventional class/status relationship for the characters are played to part. And where the two plays studied previously are seen to move towards an ending that cannot constitute an narrative closure because the maid figure steps beyond that, here, the relationship rests upon what might be termed issues of female concern, that is, a cyclical time, but only in the context of the linear time which the historical process sets in motion. Bessie remains distinctly more lower class than Marian, Mary is confined by Elizabeth' machinations. However, there is a degree of ambivalence elicited by the conflict between our awareness of the performers' doubling and the presentation of the women's sexuality as conceived, for example, in the sexual tremor running through Bessie to Mary in that we have so far perceived Bessie as the psychological manifestation of Elizabeth and yet here her function is specifically sexual. The ambivalence lies in the dominance of the association of the working-class woman as sexual above the bourgeois narrative which is focussed upon the two queens. The women then are seen to occupy a position that, as I have said before, is both subject and object, thus echoing the position of abjection which "involves the paradoxically necessary but impossible desire to transcend corporeality. It is a refusal of the defiling, impure, uncontrollable materiality of a subject's embodied existence".<sup>46</sup> In a sense by occupying the position made available by the deliberately non-naturalistic staging device of consistent doubling, the bourgeois women - and this makes sense for Mary Shelley's perception of Elise too - are constantly reminded of their failure to control and contain the working-class women (and thus class debate) by establishing them as abject.

Issues of sexuality and childbearing indicate something about the characters and historical subjects: Mary as more of a carer, nurturing her child, her throne and her child-husband Darnley, and Elizabeth primarily concerned with the throne, at the expense of her womanhood. The latter must be dealt with in the world of nightmares and dreams, where her father, her lover and the crown are confluent images that show her identity as a

woman and sexuality to be complicated. The regularity with which these images work through metonymic and metaphorical figures stresses the significance of the move away from naturalism which Lochhead is trying to create. And yet she has focussed in this play upon specific historical events and maintained the structural mechanisms and binaries I first defined, and into which the characterisation of the two queens fits. It is the significance of the metaphor of slave and mistresses to which I would now like to turn and through an examination of which the increased politicisation of this third play will become more evident than its historical material ostensibly suggests.

### Parodying the quotable gesture

In this final section I wish to consider the transformation of the women/slave analogy and women/class analogy through the three Lochhead plays I have studied. In so doing I will examine the relationship between "adaptation" and a politically effective theatre by introducing first what distinguishes Lochhead's plays from the other plays I have looked in this thesis. The difference rests very simply upon the ways in which she seeks to work with her material; by choosing the variety of forms of adaptation she is showing/demonstrating that which she aims to subvert or question rather than seeking to replace it by offering a new set of social relations. And in the very fact that adaptation works at a level always of textual signification there is the availability of showing the material she takes as her source, especially in her adaptations of *Dracula* and of *Tartuffe*.

I have previously described the difficulties involved in the inclusion of source material by looking at the quotations from Stoker that Lochhead uses as extra-diegetic information.<sup>47</sup> This complexity may be considered further with reference: first to the notion of parody, for I assume that is the intention behind including this material and the complications that may ensue; second, to the early parallel I made between adaptation and the Brechtian fable. Both are implicitly parodic gestures, and reading the plays as both makes them immediately political, however, this may not always be the case. I wish to consider the parallels a little further.

Walter Benjamin, in his essay "What is Epic Theatre?" addresses what he calls the "The Quotable Gesture".<sup>48</sup> His point is as follows:

...interruption is one of the fundamental devices of all structuring. It goes far beyond the sphere of art. To give one example, it is the basis of quotation. To quote a text involves the interruption of its context..."Making gestures quotable" is one of the substantial achievements of the epic theater. An actor must be able to space his gestures the way a typesetter produces spaced type. This effect may be achieved, for instance, by an actor's quoting his own gesture on the stage.<sup>49</sup>

I would suggest that adaptation works in a similar way in that, by its relation to the anterior text, it is in a position of perhaps quoting or demonstrating that text. This is a description that not only is fundamentally demonstrative, where, for example, Lochhead shows a contemporary reading of the anterior text, but also interruptive and interrogative. And this allows for the strategy of interruption and the insertion of parody into the process of adaptation itself.

I would like to qualify this point by referring to Jan McDonald's essay on Lochhead's adaptation of *Dracula*, specifically where she discusses irony in the play. She observes that it is, "The dramatist's use of irony...(that) serves to undercut any tendency towards misplaced mirth from the spectator..." and cites the Lyceum director as saying that, "the jokes worked as points of release for the audience which, forced repeatedly into an objective, cerebral response, was allowed temporary respite from the profound emotional implications of the main theme".<sup>50</sup> My argument is that the irony and jokes may not so readily release the audience from involvement, rather that the presentation of irony rests on two levels, making it a problematical technique. First, irony is evident in the example of Renfield parodying Van Helsing's song, "King Laugh" and this is an irony that rests upon the internal events of the play's narrative - simply echoing and distorting a prior moment.<sup>51</sup> Second, there is the kind of irony reflected by the director's comments upon the extent to which the jokes functioned cathartically for the audience. It is this which depends upon the awareness of the processes of adaptation, and the play upon the anterior text; at the same time, it is this which is subject to the collective spirit of the audience, and therefore most subject to the limited access to extra-diegetic information through which Lochhead textually indicates inflections of irony. I would suggest that the

former examples illustrate the "quotable gesture" in that they recall aspects of the prior text and characterization.

That these moments of parody are subject to variables and therefore, perhaps subject to the specific expectations of different audiences, confirms the qualification of adaptative strategies I am intimating. It also indicates the extent to which the term parody accounts for a politicalizing of the adaptive or revisionary strategy, implying that the revision is making some comment on the inserted or anterior text. In Chapter Two I first explored the possibilities for including material from anterior texts into drama and suggested the inherent conflict between the exercise when the gesture is not always clear. In so doing I used Fredric Jameson's distinctions between parody and pastiche and suggested that in Lochhead's plays it was not always clear as to whether the incorporation of the anterior text was parodic or pastiche, where pastiche is the non-political form. This distinction, I would suggest, depends very much upon the clarity of information available for the spectator, and in particular the importance of demonstrating which theatrical conventions or generic categories are being explored.

In the third play considered here, *Mary Queen of Scots Got Her Head Chopped Off*, the direct political subject shows a move towards that clarity specifically because the interrelationship between class and status-based narratives was developed in the first two plays by a particular focus upon concerns of status - child-bearing, sexuality and "motherhood" and in the third play upon more historically grounded events. Moreover, this was most clear in the constructions of time: in the former, time was cyclical and generational and in the second it was more linear in that Lochhead sought to maintain the binaries (the focus on maids best illustrates this difference). I would suggest, therefore, that the ambiguities of demonstration and interruption that may arise in the former plays are less evident in the latter, and that in presenting a play concerned with national boundaries Lochhead uses the processes of displacement from social issues to sexual issues, difficulties of the latter being symptomatic of the former, as opposed to the former plays in which the feminist focus serves to invert the processes of displacement from specifically sexual issues to social issues. It is this which sets *Mary Queen of Scots Got Her Head Chopped Off* apart from *Blood and Ice* and *Dracula* and perhaps thus places it

in a different subgenre of adaptation. The reason for this is the clear historical location of the play's material and the extension of the spectator's perception beyond the frame of adaptation to a wider political and social context.

Hand in hand with the term parody in contemporary feminist theatres and performance art comes the term "camp" which suggests showing a relationship to naturalism and is commonly associated not just with gay but also lesbian theatres; it is now a familiar strategy amongst performers, generally moving outside of the frame of "plays", to combine the two with a play on previous theatrical form. For example, as a strategy of lesbian and gay theatre the North American group Bloodlips play, "Belle Reprieve" plays with the characters and conventions of *A Streetcar Named Desire*, *Brief Encounter* and other American forms. These in fact may represent the new feminist strategies. What is important here, and this will be examined in the next chapter, is the significance of form and the spectator's familiarity with forms in shaping a political gesture, and through which feminist concerns may be explored. I will argue for a clear definition of forms and it is this premise which opens the avenue for comparing the construction of class and status narratives in the next chapter, where the chosen plays by Claire Dowie stand for an examination of the relationship between genre and establishing categories of sex difference as being critically interrelated.

<sup>1</sup> In each of the plays examined feminist revisions are apparent and for this reason I have only briefly touched upon Lochhead's adaptation of Moliere's *Tartuffe*. Moreover, in that I am seeking to base these within the context of Modern British Political Theatre the conventions of *Tartuffe*, the influence of the commedia for example are not contained by the parameters of a relationship to naturalism that in itself provides a point of comparison between the plays.

<sup>2</sup> There is one mention of Lochhead's poetry in Lizbeth Goodman's comprehensive study of recent British feminist playwrights *Contemporary Feminist Theatres: To Each Her Own* and this is of her as a poet.

<sup>3</sup> *British and Irish Women Dramatists Since 1958: A Critical Handbook*, edited by Trevor R. Griffiths and Margaret Llewellyn-Jones (Buckingham: Open University Press, 1993), pp.127-9. Significantly this book is concerned to provide an account of recent British drama which includes sections of Irish and Scottish playwrights, as opposed to previous books which have tended to focus on London-based playwrights.

<sup>4</sup> Jackie Clune, "Hearing Voices: Monologues and Revues" to be published in *Liz Lochhead's Voices*, edited by Robert Crawford and Anne Varty (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, February 1994).

<sup>5</sup> Forthcoming volume, see note 4.

<sup>6</sup> Dudley Andrews, *Concepts in Film Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), p.99.

<sup>7</sup> Jan McDonald, "'The Devil Beautiful' *Dracula*: Freudian Novel and Feminist Drama", in *Novel Images: Literature in Performance*, edited by Peter Reynolds (London: Routledge, 1993), pp.80-105 (p.86).

<sup>8</sup> Seymour Chatman, *Critical Inquiry*, Autumn (1980), pp.121-140 (p.122).

<sup>9</sup> I will refer throughout to the penguin volume which includes both *Dracula* and *Mary Queen of Scots Got Her Head Chopped Off* (London: Penguin, 1989).

<sup>10</sup> Carol A. Senf, "*Dracula*: The Unseen Face in the Mirror", *Journal of Narrative Technique*, (1979), pp.160-170 (p160).

<sup>11</sup> This is basically what Seymour Chatman is doing in his essay "What Novels Can Do That Films Can't (and Vice Versa)" *Critical Inquiry*, (Autumn 1980), pp.121-140. See also Manfred Pfister's *Theory and Analysis of Drama* translated by John Halliday (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), for a more detailed analysis of these distinctions with reference to drama.

<sup>12</sup> Elizabeth Wright, *Postmodern Brecht: A Re-Presentation* (London: Routledge, 1989), (p.28).

<sup>13</sup> Richard Astle, "Dracula as Totemic Monster: Lacan, Freud, Oedipus and History", *Sub-Stance*, no.25 (1980), pp.98-105 (p.99).

<sup>14</sup> Elin Diamond, "Refusing the Romanticism of Identity: Narrative Interventions in Churchill, Benmussa, Duras" in *Performing Feminisms: Feminist Critical Theory and Theatre*, ed by Sue-Ellen Case (John Hopkins University Press, 1990), pp.92-109.

<sup>15</sup> See Elizabeth Bronfen, *Over Her Dead Body: Death, Femininity and the Aesthetic* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1992), pp.315-321, for a discussion of Lucy as hysteric. Also see the definition of hysteria in Notes for Chapter Two by Elizabeth Wright, page 105 of this thesis.



- 16 Julia Kristeva, "Women's Time", in *The Kristeva Reader*, ed. by Toril Moi (London: Basil Blackwell Ltd., 1986), p.192.
- 17 Julia Kristeva, "Women's Time", p.192.
- 18 Andrea Dworkin makes this observation in her study of *Dracula in Intercourse* (London: Arrow Books, 1987), p.135.
- 19 Jan McDonald, p.84.
- 20 Hugh Hodgart quoted by Jan McDonald, p.94.
- 21 Joyce McMillan, *Guardian*, (16 March, 1985).
- 22 "Anima rights campaigner", interview with John Cunningham, *Guardian*, ((8 February, 1990).
- 23 Seymour Chatman, "What Novels Can Do That Films Can't (and Vice Versa), p.125.
- 24 Stephen Heath. "On Screen, in Frame: Film and Ideology" in *Popular Fictions: Technology, Ideology, Production, Reading*, edited by Tony Bennett (London: Routledge, 1990), pp.23-33 (p.23).
- 25 Jan McDonald makes the point that in theatre practice there are often practical reasons for the doubling of characters. For example, these might include: a small theatre company or restrictions in terms of finance or space.
- 26 Paper presented at the "Romantic Boundaries: Gender and Genre" conference held at Sheffield Hallam University, 30 June, 1993.
- 27 Sue-Ellen Case, "From Split Subject to Split Britches" in *Feminine Focus: The New Women Playwrights*, ed. by Enoch Brater (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), p.185.
- 28 Stephen Neale, "Genre and Cinema", in *Popular Television and Film*, ed. by Tony Bennett, Susan Boyd-Bowman, Colin Mercer and Janet Woollacott (London: British Film Institute, 1981), pp.6-26 (p.8).
- 29 Noel Carroll, *Philosophy of Horror, Paradoxes of the Heart* (London: Routledge, 1990), pp.46-7.
- 30 Interview with Christine Delphy: "On Representation and Sexual Division: an Interview with Christine Delphy" by Lisa Cartwright, *Undercut*, no.14/15, (Summer 1985), pp.19-20.
- 31 Kristeva's account of the third category of the abject is described by Elizabeth Grosz in her book, *Sexual Subversions* as the revulsion at sexual difference, p.76.
- 32 Sarah Daniels, *The Gut Girls*, (London: Methuen, 1989), p.59.
- 33 A point made by Elaine Aston in her paper, previously cited, note 25.
- 34 See Chapter Two, page 86 of this thesis.
- 35 Richard Schechner, *Performance Theory* (London: Routledge, 1988), p.13.
- 36 Augusto Boal, *Games For Actors and Non-Actors* (London: Routledge, 1992), p.125.
- 37 Elizabeth Grosz discussing Lacan on sexual relations in, *Jacques Lacan: A Feminist Introduction* (London: Routledge, 1990), p.132.
- 38 Quoted by Meena Alexander, *Women and Romanticism* (London: Macmillan Education Ltd., 1989), p.127.
- 39 Barbara Creed, "Horror and the Monstrous-Feminine: An Imaginary Abjection", in *Fantasy and the Cinema*, ed. by James Donald (London: British Film Institute), p.67.

- <sup>40</sup> See Elizabeth Bronfen on *Dracula*, Note 14 for details.
- <sup>41</sup> This is Lacan's account of the transitional stages of development. See Elizabeth Grosz's introduction to Lacan for a further account of this in *Jacques Lacan: A Feminist Introduction* (London: Routledge, 1990), pp.31-43.
- <sup>42</sup> Barbara Creed, "Horror and the Monstrous Feminine: An Imaginary Abjection", in *Fantasy and the Cinema*, edited by James Donald (London: British Film Institute, 1989), pp.69-91 (p.69).
- <sup>43</sup> Elizabeth Grosz, *Sexual Subversions*, p.75.
- <sup>44</sup> Ilona S. Koren-Deutsch, "Feminist Nationalism in Scotland: *Mary Queen of Scots Got Her Head Chopped Off*", *Modern Drama*, vol.xxxv. no.3, (Sept 1992), pp.424-431.
- <sup>45</sup> This kind of Fool figure (La Corbie) seems to be a familiar motif in feminist adaptations. Elaine Feinstein in her adaptation or revision of *King Lear* called *Lear's Daughters* also includes a fool who has a similar, if less powerful role, to La Corbie as an ironic commentator on the dramatic action and perhaps on the process of adaptation itself. This Fool figure is at least a reminder of the process of adaptation.
- <sup>46</sup> Elizabeth Grosz, *Sexual Subversions*, p.72.
- <sup>47</sup> See Chapter Two, page 83 of this thesis.
- <sup>48</sup> Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations*, ed. by Hannah Arendt and translated by Harry Zohn, (London: Jonathan Cape Ltd., 1970), pp.149-157.
- <sup>49</sup> Walter Benjamin, "What is Epic Theatre?" in *Illuminations*, pp.149-156 (p.153).
- <sup>50</sup> Jan McDonald, pp.101-2.
- <sup>51</sup> Mentioned by Jan McDonald in this context, p.101.

CHAPTER FIVE: FRAMING THE POLITICAL ACT  
AND GENRE: A CASE STUDY OF CLAIRE DOWIE.

CLAIRE DOWIE started off as a poet  
became a comedian  
ran out of punchlines  
so started writing plays<sup>1</sup>

In this chapter I wish to examine more closely the ways in which women's theatre constitutes an ideological theatre when it is explored in terms of form with reference to alternative political theatres. I wish now to move away from a theatre practice specifically and traditionally defined as "playwrighting" and the issues explored previously in relation to the "classic realist" text for instance, an emphasis upon naturalism. This move leads me to consider in more detail the relationship between materialist-feminist criticism and genre through an analysis of the inter-generic work of stand-up and playwright and poet, Claire Dowie. In this study of Dowie's work a focus upon genre is developed that serves to challenge the notion that women's theatre is a genre in itself.<sup>2</sup> I will use this exploration of genre, in particular the emphasis upon a comparison between theatre and stand-up comedy, as the basis for revising certain assumptions concerning a definition of ideological theatre in the 1990s, and seek to place contemporary women playwrights within that definition. A central part of my argument depends upon an analysis of the relationship between genre and the recognition of sex differences, given the significance of sex differences in relation to the class position of women in the previous chapters.

In its study of genre the existing body of materialist-feminist criticism draws from poststructuralism and postmodernism in order to illustrate the extent to which traditional terms of describing genre have been collapsed. Peggy Phelan, for example, has outlined how American performance artist Rachael Rosenthal has created a conceptual performance art based upon the integration of postructuralist theory into feminist practice.<sup>3</sup> What is interesting about this, and Phelan points this out, is that these performers invariably work in traditional and commercial theatres as a way of generating income with which to fund their radical practice. This gives rise to a significant paradox in the lives of performers involved in avant-garde practice and demonstrates what is

unfortunately perhaps a discrepancy in a materialist-feminist theory. This is, that first, performance practice may be designed to show, in terms of representation, the interaction of materiality, language and ideology. And second, performance is now seen to involve those issues as also to do with presence and the processes of performance, that is, the physical presence of the performer on stage. The paradox lies potentially in the fact that, whereas being able to perform so-called political statements on stage is empowering for women, at the same time the issues of materiality, language and ideology as explored in performance may exclude other very basic material conditions of production - the fact that the performer is doing this not just as a political act but also simply to earn a living. In view of the focus of this thesis on British political theatres Claire Dowie's shift from stand-up comic to playwright stands to highlight the nature of that paradox most clearly.

If Dowie's work is defined as "performance" there are, I would suggest, several variables related to the genre of stand-up that require some consideration: one being that the performer is intensely vulnerable to audience reception when, rather than being simply spectacle, she is involved in a directly interdependent exchange between spectator(s) and performer.<sup>4</sup> As the short poem above suggests, Dowie is concerned with genre because she has made a transition through several genres in the development of her career; the career shift might also be read as being determined by material conditions related to genre. My aim here will be to use a similar analysis to that I have elaborated so far in this thesis, focussing on the classed/gendered subject and the relation of this subject to "text". In Dowie's case, the body of the performer can be read as a "text", as can the performance be read as "text", and to an extent these have been collapsed where the performer as "text", has changed dependent upon her career shifts. The body as "text" therefore, I would argue, has been subsumed by the shifts in generic "text", making it important to consider Dowie as subject, her career choices, and the ambiguous generic category of her performances in conjunction with each other. By examining the conflation of these points I am able to address the problematic of genre for the feminist playwright and practitioner.

Ralph Cohen's recent work on genre and postmodernism, although not specifically related to the study of drama, throws up some interesting ideas with which to approach it:

Postmodernist critics have sought to do without a genre theory. Terms like "text" and "écriture" deliberately avoid generic classifications. And the reasons for this are efforts to abolish the hierarchies that genres introduce, to avoid the assumed fixity of genres and the social as well as literary authority such limits exert, to reject the social and subjective elements in classification.<sup>5</sup>

The blurring of generic boundaries is indicative of what can be described as a Derridean desire to accommodate both high and low, popular and elite forms, as part of a common text. Such a text refuses the limits of genre, and is in a constant process of the revision of genre because as one text revises or incorporates another it immediately becomes a different text. This description of genre bears some similarities to my account of adaptation in Chapter Four. Claire Dowie as practitioner, playwright and stand-up, similarly crosses and recrosses the boundaries of genre: her "text" is the written text and the performed text - she has been at any one time the author of a gendered performative self, a lesbian/bisexual performer, a female resistance fighter, an abused child in the presentation of various theatrical personas.

It is the relationship between stand-up and playwrighting that I am most interested in here, particularly where generic boundaries meet, work together and where feminist interventions confront those boundaries. This relationship involves issues of narrative structure and audience expectation that are dependent upon generic conditions. Dowie's stand-up has its roots in what is called "Alternative Comedy", a form first developed at the Comedy Store in Los Angeles and New York, where comedians offered their own brand of comedy that constituted an alternative to the racist and sexist material of the earlier club comedians, representations of whom are explored, for example in Trevor Griffiths' play, *Comedians*. Roger Wilmut and Peter Rosengard in their study of the rise of alternative comedy, *Didn't You Kill My Mother-in-Law?* point out that in addition to providing an alternative to club comedy or television comedy:

'Alternative' comedy is simply a rejection of the preceding fashions in comedy - just as each generation of comics has sought to build their own style rather than stay in the well-established mould. In this sense the latest generation of comics, who came to prominence in the early 1980s, can be seen as another

stage in the continuing story of British comedy since the birth of widespread and organized popular entertainment in the form of the Victorian music-hall.<sup>6</sup>

*Wilmot and Rosengard's description is in itself now dated because the tradition of alternative comedy and stand-up has changed considerably since the writing of their book in 1989. However, what is apparent is that alternative comedy as a tradition relies upon a relationship to preceding forms. Thus, a feature of its genre is a continual reference to what went before; consequently the stand-up is labelled according to specific categories within that genre and the performer is expected to make references to previous comedians, or at least is compared with them.*<sup>7</sup>

Dowie's own words affirm her experience of shifts in genre and set up a context of continuing frustration with the rigidities of expectation and boundary, which we confidently label genre, that she takes as the premise and subject of her work. Wilmot and Rosengard cite Dowie on her own generic labelling, saying that she has specifically been identified with lesbian material, to which she adds:

I started with a non-sexual act, then it was a heterosexual act, then it was a sort of lesbian act - now its getting back to being just sexual, not any one thing. I did do a full-blooded lesbian act before, but not so much now. It just changes as I change, I think.' (p.203).

In 1990 she performed her play *Why is John Lennon Wearing a Skirt?* at the August Edinburgh Fringe Festival in a reputed avant-garde venue, the Traverse Theatre.<sup>8</sup> The play is a one-woman show concerned with the a child growing up against a backdrop of sixties music and the feminist movement; the contrast of the two worlds prompts a lack of certainty in the protagonist as to her sexual preferences. I saw the production at the Traverse, and again when it toured nationally at Sheffield's art centre, The Leadmill. A comparison of the two performances illustrates something of the nature of the audience and reveals the issues that inform Dowie's ambivalent and inter-generic "texts".

The performance at the Traverse had an audience comprised of the usual critical Edinburgh fringe cognoscenti - performers, students, a few tourists and the inevitable critics and journalists. Whilst specific to that time, and the nature of the Fringe, it was a fairly mixed and uneven bunch of people. In contrast, the Leadmill audience included

more students of drama and literature, but on the whole the familiar Leadmill audience for women's only events and performances. The expectations of the latter audience were largely focussed upon the idea of a 'lesbian feminist performer', and the nature of the feminist "bildung" which in effect is a part of this play. This was evident in the build-up of expectation (and thereby suspense) which was released in the cry of pleasure and approval when Dowie uttered, "sing if you're glad to be gay, sing if you're happy that way, hey" roughly about four fifths of the way through the play. In eliciting such a release Dowie was fulfilling certain generic expectations, yet she was to withdraw this statement of a gay identity - thus creating and maintaining a degree of suspense - by later articulating a continuing refusal to conform to gendered stereotypes and saying above all that she would rather be a boy. The transition of the character from one job to another runs parallel with the narrative of feminist "bildung", in that she describes gaining entry into a world of gender-related issues by finding employment in an arts centre cafe. This is precisely the world in which the performance is taking place, and Dowie's ambivalent gender finds it a medium in which such ambivalence is not entirely welcome, because it threatens the security of the world - reflected in the audience expectation and desire for confirmation and recognition by labelling her a lesbian. By challenging these sorts of expectations the performer sets up an iconoclastic stance in relation to the generic expectations of her as bisexual/lesbian stand-up, and in addition her choice of venue.

- Hence, she explores the nature of theatrical communication when the signifying codes rest upon reaffirming, for instance, lesbian identity - or the identity of a repressed and marginal group - by doing so only to break down the moment of confirmation later. The nature of her own work acts to disrupt the expectation of genre that the selective audience imposes upon her. Moreover, there is a security in the traditional play form that stand-up is not granted, a security to play with adopted identities as opposed to being seen to "show herself"; this is an issue to which I will return later.

What should emerge from an exploration of this case study is a continuation of the existing analysis of this thesis but with an emphasis upon the integration of pertinent points in a new way. As I have made clear, the imperatives of the "classic realist" text debate are of less immediate concern here: first, because in the actual performance of

these plays the primarily monologic form denies naturalism, and second, because the material conditions of production are so manifestly different. Hence, in a study of the interrelationship of status and class narratives - seen for the time being as mutually exclusive - two principal avenues are opened: one, how far the narratives are incorporated into the stories Dowie imposes upon stand-up material, and second, how those are influenced through the features of performance peculiar to a theatre incorporating stand-up.

The way in which ideology and political theatre are framed is central in discerning the play of inter-generic conditions here. The subject of feminist theatres and theory is an integral to Dowie's comic material, and therefore, while Sarah Daniels take what is contemporary as a determining element of the discourse of feminism and the women's movement, Dowie chooses to entertain the very process of continuing that discourse, by playing with the conventions - and implicit urge to the security of genre - that it encourages. In view of the directly non-naturalistic emphasis of the plays I would argue that it is no longer necessary to address the political frame in quite the same way as I have previously. Consequently the reasons I have for so far identifying individual scenes for analysis are less secure and many of the patterns of status exchange and ritual are embedded as part of the text here - the difference being in the division between internal narrative arrangements and spectator/performer relations. In so far as the games and structures of the scenes of childhood have more prominence in these plays it as if Dowie were accounting for the social construction of the subject through an exploration of the childhood scene, specifically because she works outside of the conventional structures of naturalism, where causal relations are invariably implicit.

## THE DUAL DISCOURSE OF STATUS AND CLASS

I have chosen to look at Claire Dowie's play *Why is John Lennon Wearing a Skirt?* as the focus of this section in which I examine the dual narrative of status and class that is the subject of the play itself. Through an examination of what can be described as a feminist "bildung" (see below for a relevant definition), and through the construction of



elements of fantasy, connections between these two narratives are made which reflect upon the construction of gender and its apparently performative nature.

*Why is John Lennon Wearing a Skirt?* involves the an exploration of identity for its protagonist who finds herself unable to accept "femininity", preferring instead male gender identity and traits of "masculinity". In choosing the male working-class hero of John Lennon as a role-model she effects what might be comparable to a dual "bildung" in that the figure grows up according to both a male narrative and a female one: the first identified with the notion of the "working-class hero"; the second congruent with the growth of the women's movement. Hence, the character's, who I will refer to as "Dowie" in that she is otherwise unnamed, thus making subject definition in itself problematic, own experiences and recollections as the shaping forces of her identity as a woman - to be expressed primarily through sexuality - are defined by the emergence of a politicised women's movement on the one hand, and on the other, an identity rooted in a specific class background . The former would seemingly identify her with a status-group (the class of women) and the latter with a social class, and whilst this is a fairly consistent distinction throughout the play, at the same time, in moments of fantasy the two narratives tend to be somewhat blurred. Whilst her experience as a woman, and therefore the status narrative, is focussed upon her sexuality, her experience as a classed subject is charged with the adoption of a male gender. Ultimately the ambivalence of the latter position is mediated through fantasy; and the emphasis upon sexuality takes her into a world dominated by a middle-class ethos.

### A feminist bildung

Conventionally "bildung" refers to a narrative structure based upon self-discovery; knowledge provides the key turning point as a normally youthful figure makes his way out into the social and potentially dangerous world. This is traditionally a male narrative shaped by shifts in perspective as the protagonist moves towards maturity and stability. As a form in women's literature it has only recently emerged and this time it defines a feminist trajectory. I described in my chapter on Sarah Daniels what is basically a feminist bildung for women, both working and middle class, as consistent with a consciousness

raising experience. In Timberlake Wertenbaker's play *The Grace of Mary Traverse* there is a bildung perhaps more consistent with male ones in that Mary, the youthful protagonist, born into an eighteenth century bourgeois household, has no mother and must enter a sordid and sexual world from which her experience has previously excluded her. This play indicates a sexual awakening and the awakening of a social consciousness based upon hardship and mental suffering - it is thus an inversion of the conventional narrative. Rita Felski, in her book *Beyond Feminist Aesthetics* delineates two kinds of feminist "bildung", a description of which follows as a means of identifying the nature of the "bildung" that Dowie is using. The two, according to Felski, are:

- (1) Characterized by a historical and linear structure; female self-discovery and emancipation is depicted as a process of moving outward into the public realm of social engagement and activity, however problematic and fraught with difficulties that proves to be.
- (2) Depicts self-discovery as a process of awakening to an already given mythic identity or inner self and frequently occurs in nature of a generalised symbolic realm from which the contingent social world has been excluded.<sup>9</sup>

The development of Dowie's protagonist follows a similar pattern from childhood, through school years and to various jobs. The 1960s provides the wider social context and the women's movement parallels her adolescent years, shaping historical and discursive structures. For example, the relatively recent phenomenon of the arts centre, where she finds work, is itself part of a linear and historical development of specific social conditions. Historical specificity is first deployed in the opening scene of Dowie's own production of the play, resonant with the sounds of John Lennon's song, "Working-Class Hero". The first line of the song promises a trajectory of hope and optimism, and also an affirmation of class roots: "a working-class hero is something to be". Dowie comes on stage miming the words, dressed in a standard state school uniform; mimicry is her only access to the gender-specific role of the working-class hero. The scene will recall 1950s and 1960s culture to the audience, where for the first time the image of the angry young man acknowledged the needs of the young and the working-class. It was a motif soon to become commonplace in both literature and on the stage and in itself its problematic in that it has nostalgic and ambivalent connotations which Dowie may be establishing.

The paradox for "Dowie" rests in her limited access to the world that this image denotes: it is a world to which her class background grants her access, yet she becomes simply an adolescent schoolgirl projecting her desires upon her favourite popstar with whom she can only have a relationship of mimicry (emulating a subject position) and of objectification through sexual fantasy. The very distance of the "star" defines him as object because he is unattainable, yet the female fan is not in a position of desiring mastery over the objectified hero/star but instead sees the hero as one to whom she can subject herself. Hence, I would point out, the familiar swooning, screaming and sexually vulnerable image of the teenage female fan. In contrast, Dowie's character wishes to defy the containment of female sexual identity that this relationship to the hero/star entails by seeking to construct her own sexual/gendered identity, and so class, sex and song augur a narrative development, the configurations of which constitute the first *mise-en-scene*. Dowie is replacing exposition with a subject formation determined by character as token representation of a classed and historical context that is defined as much by the mood of spirited lyrics than any specific incidents, like those in earlier plays such as John Osborne's *Look Back in Anger* also characterised by mood rather than specific incidents. As such, the scene is effectively a search for a social myth or icon; the cultural icon and myth of John Lennon fulfills this role perfectly, his is the ideal myth.

This character is not only marginalised from a received and established class identity (one that the "working class hero" denotes), but is deliberately acting "against the grain" to the extent to which she declines the gender attributes which her earlier life has bestowed upon her, claiming in doing so that the imposition of gender was without her permission. She rejects peer group conditioning and is a subject attracted to both the notion of a class hero, believing that if there is a place for a male hero there is equally room for a female, and later feminist, icon. Dowie thus begins to show gender as performative and a process of signification to which some agency can be accorded, so she takes as her right the claim to choose: deliberation and retrospective consideration shape the interchange between the two narratives and result in her final act of resistance where she states herself as being a boy.

It is the issue of pregnancy and motherhood that finally confirms for "Dowie" the position of "boyhood" she has long desired. As a boy, not a man, not a hero and absolutely not a woman, she is able to step outside the state of motherhood, thus avoiding its melodrama and the secure position of the mother in relation always to her child, by destroying through abortion the child which she describes as a stone, a sign of oppression that weighs her down. To have the child would alter her perceptions of the nature of being a hero:

And then I'd have to accept that I could only be a hero to myself, a silent, self effacing hero only then, after nine months, then at the moment of birth and that's it, there's the heroics, and expect no acknowledgement from others except perhaps a pat on the head and the words "Good girl" like an obedient dog (p.16).

The status of victim is soon bestowed upon "Dowie" as shown through the oppression of childbearing, and it is this ostensible weakness of the female body that prevents her aspirations to feminist hero. Rather than having a woman's body of similar strength and stature as a man's, one with which to "bash" men who are harmful to women, she has a woman's body which is far from the contained and resilient body she desires but one which is ultimately subsumed into the temporality of maternity. The pregnancy reflects Julia Kristeva's interpretation of the pregnant body of the mother as being exclusive of human agency or subjecthood, and as Elizabeth Grosz has pointed out, the implication of Kristeva's theory is that, "Her (the mother's) 'identity as a subject is betrayed by pregnancy; and undermined in lactation and nurturance, where she takes on the status of the part-object, or breast for the child'.<sup>10</sup> Dowie's character shows the denial of the subject through pregnancy and refuses to allow herself to become a "part-object" by seeing the foetus as simply lacking in corporeal being, its life is no life. When entering into the temporality of "maternity" the woman loses her place in the class narrative and becomes identified solely with motherhood, as was Brecht's eponymous mother in *Mother Courage* for instance, despite his attempts within the text at alienation and the distancing of the woman from the state of motherhood.

This lack of agency defined by motherhood shows maternity to be a temporality of somewhat indeterminate region, somewhere not clearly defined by either the status or class narratives I have so far looked at. Dowie furthers the ambivalence of the subject by showing the protagonist as going through various incarnations of gender but never fully resolving any. I would argue that part of the lack of clear status or class structure arises from the issues thrown up by the status improvisations described in the first part of this thesis. For example, Dowie works through a series of positionalities reminiscent of Sande Zeig's exercises (see page 87) to demonstrate the arbitrary nature of gender distinctions and the degree to which they can be adopted.

### Gender impersonations

It is interesting that Dowie uses the acceptable face of gender inversion in the play, that of the "tomboy". Such acceptability is conditional on the child's pre-pubescent sexuality and as soon as her sexuality is awakened she must shed this identity. Throughout the play she fulfills the criteria of Zeig's impersonators in being the male self of a female being, but demonstrates that rather than learn this process she is able to choose herself the traits she desires because she shows the development of the subject through her formative years. Monique Wittig, in "One is Not Born a Woman", outlines why women must step outside pre-conceived notions of gender and develop a lesbian group instead.<sup>11</sup>

"Dowie's" refusal to conform to heterosexual and feminine labelling follows this path towards a lesbian identity; yet as I pointed out earlier, in her subsequent rejection of the label lesbian she demonstrates a desire for a gender-free existence, and a desire for choice in gender construction.

I would argue therefore that a subsequent and central issue unfolds as a result of this constant flux of identity, and that is the notion of authenticity. Up until this point the lesbian subject has provided the locus around which "camp" and playful gender impersonations are based. Hence, in much recent feminist performance, gender positionalities have been adopted as and when desired and almost flaunted in their inauthenticity. In this play, symptomatic of the class/status disjunction, I would argue that the issue of authenticity is critical. It becomes part of a class project as well as a feminist

concern for throughout the play the exploration of self-identity is done in the context of a social identity. Dowie collapses sex and gender in the retrospective study of the childhood scene, when, at the ages of seven and eight the child desires a role model.

Class and historical context confirm the turn to pop culture of working-class children in particular, a context in which the personality and classed background of the role-model are crucial. Alan Sinfield in his book *Literature, Culture and Society in Postwar Britain* discusses how far class background has determined the success and failures of media stars and the complexities of the star system for figures like Lulu and Cilla Black noted for their working-class background and distinct localised accents.<sup>12</sup> Sinfield points out that some people have questioned the veracity of Cilla Black's politics and origin in Liverpool. Such doubt implicates the authenticity of the woman artiste as a classed subject. Although it is a question of class highlighted by the inauthentic voice, the constructed nature of woman sheds further suspicion onto the idea of a woman as artiste or performer. But this was a condition of the female pop-star system and barely one which enhanced or reduced the invulnerable working-class ethos of the Beatles. In the style of the Rolling Stones and reminiscent of the teddy boys of the fifties, the "fab four" as "Dowie" calls them, were able to indulge a lifestyle of decadence, outspokenness and libertarianism. A distinction emerges here between male and female stars that contrasts a collective with a single subject position: the male category explore group oriented ideas such as sex, drugs and more deviant behaviour, where the women are under a greater scrutiny to perform in an appropriate manner, and even their class backgrounds are open to doubt.

In the play the character considers her potential role models of female pop-stars, standing pretty and vacant for the camera, not speaking their own language but simply one developed for them, and instead she turns to the empowering model of the Beatles and becomes John Lennon - and by way of parallel and implication - the working class hero she tells everyone she is: "My dear girl, I am not a boy - I am John Lennon!" (p.12). It is only through this process of emulation that she is able to move towards the conventional structures of the "bildung".

Authenticity is thus critical in defining class roots and inauthenticity is only acceptable when stated with the confidence "Dowie" has just shown. The protagonist is thus shown to share contact with both the class and the status world, she therefore becomes "bi-lingual" according to the definition of bell hooks and Mary Childers - black and working-class in origin respectively - who in conversation have discussed the bi-lingualism of being born of one experience and living in another, offering a strategy to deal with this that effectively involves constructing through language and behavioural strategy a dual-discourse.<sup>13</sup> In coining the term "bi-lingualism" they demonstrate this strategy to be confirmation of a performative existence. This is reflected as central to the play. The difference is that Dowie demonstrates how the expectations of class are at odds with the expectations of feminism.

I will now turn to consider the framework of the play and the material conditions of the performer's experience for further confirmation of the issue of authenticity. Not only is this an issue in the play but also something which has emerged through the limited critical study of Dowie's career in performance. Morwenna Banks and Amanda Swift in their book, *The Joke's On Us: Women in Comedy From Music Hall to the Present* present a rather elliptical study of Dowie.<sup>14</sup> This includes a photograph: she is smiling, looking away from the eye of the camera, and holding her hands provocatively at the top of her jeans. That Dowie is wearing casual clothing suggests some ambiguity in her performance/authentic self because this outfit could also be a costume for the play. The photograph caption reads: "Question: When did you start performing on your own? Claire Dowie: When I came out of the womb, I think." One wonders what question she is answering and may interpret it as being every question she is ever asked about her identity as a woman and as a performer.

The hint of her frustration at generic labelling simply according to gender, and the ambivalence of a performed gender, is shown in a further example from *The Joke's On Us* where the authors include excerpts from interviews with contemporary women performers in a section entitled, "Male/Female Humour: Is there a Difference?": "Q. Do you think your kind of stand-up comedy is any different from male stand-up? A. Well, I don't know many men who stand up and say 'I'm a lesbian'."<sup>15</sup> It is the implicit urge to

label and to categorize, to define the trajectory of one's life through that process of labelling (and defining by genre?) that is the subject in her plays. As part of this process of labelling and defining generic conditions of performance the recent history of theatre criticism has sought to label feminist theatre, socialist theatre, theatre for the working-classes and so on.

### Staging fantasy

I will now examine more closely the point at which the issues of class and status meet, that is, where a seemingly clear trajectory of class development is conditioned by aspects best understood with recourse to psychoanalysis. It is first, in the construction of the subject through language, and second, through fantasy, that this coincidence is most clear. Jean Laplanche and Jean-Bertrand Pontalis in their essay, "Fantasy and the Origins of Sexuality" elaborate their discussion of fantasy thus:

By locating the origin of fantasy in the auto-erotism, we have shown the connection between fantasy and desire. Fantasy, however, is not the object of desire, but its setting. In fantasy the subject does not pursue the object or its sign: he appears caught up himself in the sequence of images. He forms no representation of the desired object, but is himself represented as participating in the scene although, in the earliest forms of fantasy, he cannot be assigned any fixed place in it (hence the danger, in treatment, of interpretations which claim to do so. As a result, the subject, although always present in the fantasy, may be so in a desubjectivized form, that is to say, in the very syntax of the sequence in question.<sup>16</sup>

In so far as the class and status narratives can be seen as discrete units then, the class narrative charts the development of the impersonator, the male self, and the status narrative charts the development of the female and feminist self. The prominence of fantasy in the construction of the narrative of growth indicates that there is a deliberate interplay, in that in order to gain entry to the class narrative the protagonist must project that male self into structures of everyday living, give it a social context. This is aimed to highlight the vulnerability of existing gender systems and to observe the discursive structures of the women's movement, class movements and gender construction in process. As Laplanche and Pontalis point out, the subject is seen off-centre in her fantasies, and this is how Dowie assumes male experience; as both the impersonator and



as a lesbian subject she takes such a place, and for the time being sexual anxieties are displaced onto social anxieties and structures to which she would otherwise have no access.

The play's character goes through an experience of shifting social class on two levels: one, as a female whose access to this cultural formation is as a hero-worshipper through the sensual rhythms of music; and two, as the male impersonator in her fantasy world. Each of these is illustrated with reference to the imagined stage presence or autonomy of other actants, sufficient to determine a status exchange. As a young girl, in experiencing the crudeness of early sexuality channelled through school life, the protagonist enjoys the liberating and sensual pleasures of music, pleasures regarded usually as inappropriate.<sup>17</sup> Dowie uses this motif throughout the play as narrative intervention, and it is illustrated through the liberating lyrics and rhythms of Marc Bolan records through which she demonstrates her own freedom. Dramatically the music breaks the continuity of narrative and enhances the pleasure of the audience: it is loud and Dowie as the single performer is the focal point of the spectator's gaze. On the one hand, we may take pleasure in the autonomy of dancing as narrative intervention, and on the other, we are shown how music is channelled into gender identity by affirming conditional behaviour in the scene of a simulated school disco. In the former scenes she is alone and both character and performer may be seen to take pleasure in dancing. In the latter she mimes the formation of the young girl who requires a partner at the institutional school disco. When she enjoys the impersonator role she is able to enjoy autonomy but when simply a girl, she is seen to be more dependent and involved in showing the mimicry implicit to femininity. Given the familiarity of this gender specific role she is staging a mimetic theatre where the subject is the centre of the image; otherwise - as will be detailed subsequently - she loses agency by being caught up in her fantasy. Here, the notion of status exchange is virtually redundant for it requires a degree of certainty, and the exploration involves the spectator and performer rather than any other characters.

Conventionally the male protagonist of the *bildung* encounters the social world, the pursuit of knowledge and sometimes romance. Dowie's character also does this, but at

the same time the flexibility that being an impersonator affords means that she shows a series of different selves. First, in a childhood fantasy she is one of the Beatles and second, she is John Lennon himself. As John Lennon she is simply envying the privilege and social prestige of the pop hero and has a vicarious pleasure in her male self's contact with the social and the political world. The fantasy is consistently ruptured when other people mediate and become involved, as though it is inadequate that she pursues her projected desires through fantasy and instead is placed within a narrative by an additional character, or indeed the spectator. Laplanche and Pontalis also indicate the rupture involved when the analyst imposes a reading - thereby figuring and constituting the subject and source of trauma - in a narrative. Typical to the *bildung* are the cultural, sexual and work fantasies of the adolescent male, and I would suggest that in Dowie's reworking of the fantasies it is their roots in sexuality which provokes the rupture of which I spoke earlier. This is where the impersonator is apparently most vulnerable, even where sex-differences are emphasized as being crucial. The impersonator works first in an office, and later in a factory. Within this a framework of cultural and class relations is established, within which context our protagonist nurtures a fantasy life that is basically militaristic. The arbitrary relations of the military world, the mock order and excess of its hierarchies provide a plentiful resource for her fantasy: in the office her neutral shorts and heavy boots become the sign of military clothing, and her bureaucratic boss is her sergeant. Life, in this fantasy of what is essentially a game of pretend warfare, takes on significance for the woman seeking to free herself from the confines of domesticity.

The second fantasy to take her away from femininity is set in her second place of work, a factory. She sees herself as entering into the evasive world of espionage and intrigue that is (was) the cold war. In this second choice the character is assuming a different class identity; for the thoughts of subterfuge were characterized during the sixties by an upper-class ethos exemplified in the mythic figures of Burgess and MacClean. Like them, she has joined forces with the communist regime, and effects within the socially and physically restricting confines of factory life a world of secrecy and espionage. Her identity as male is stimulated by the intrigue with a woman in the canteen at work who clearly thinks she is a man. "Dowie" reflects on the eroticism of the experience in

knowing that the woman mis-recognises her as a man. This game-playing, and the artifice of this fantasy shifts significantly away from any sort of social realism, that might have potentially been explored, in the factory experience.

This moment of fantasy also indicates a rupture in the narrative of "Dowie" as male hero in that it elicits an inversion of fetishistic scopophilia which according to Laura Mulvey can "exist outside linear time as the erotic instinct is based on the look alone".<sup>18</sup> The look of the woman is based on the assumption that Dowie as male is returning her/his gaze. In fact she is exploiting that exchange, for the woman assumes her to be male, and in fact fetishizing the woman's look and disrupting the narrative of attainment which would follow such an exchange in normal heterosexual relations.

As Sande Zeig's performers were invited to create and elaborate their male selves, so does this character share the experience of her impersonator through a fantasy world. This undermines a simple conjunction of class and cultural reality because she consistently refuses the identity that the label female bestows upon her. As an impersonator she wants to experience everything that the male world can offer, not changing it, but making life more exciting for women. Hence, the play is effectively an inversion of the feminist *bildung* in that the feminist revolution she wishes for, and the projection of a mythic self are both shaped by male and upper-class myths of the sixties. The social masquerade is furthered by the insistence upon male identity and the insistence on being called a boy, for whilst Dowie shows gender to be performative, she does not restrict the character to womanliness, but extends the metaphor of masquerade to include any chosen gender identity. Significantly the choice is determined by "Dowie's" self-definition as boy rather than a man when the latter would immediately denote stable and referential phallogentrism.

Two points emerge from the interrelationship of status and class narratives. (1) That defining a "*bildung*" is infinitely more difficult when gender is an unstable construct. (2) That not only is gender unstable in *John Lennon* but shown to be indeterminate in the earlier play *Adult Child/Dead Child* where the sex of the protagonist is never made clear and all exchanges are constructed with only one actant. These two points are examined further in the next section.

## A FAMILY NARRATIVE: CAUSAL RELATIONS

Claire Dowie's 1987 play, *Adult Child/Dead Child* traces the development of a child, abused by her father, from childhood to adolescence. This child is shown to develop strategies for dealing with the isolation and fear of those early years, specifically the creation of an imaginary friend. The ensuing conflict with society as a result of the creation of the imaginary friend is seen to be symptomatic of the general social inadequacy in dealing with such an unusual strategy. Dowie reiterates this by delineating the experience of the child through various social institutions - the family, school, the mental institution.

In conjunction with the exploration of cause and effect relations insofar as causal relations are central in defining naturalistic theatre, that is, showing the cause of a situation- the abuse makes the child mentally ill and so on - there is a further important structure to the play. Cause and effect implies a consolidated understanding of the processes of ideology; its common theatrical form is naturalism. However, Dowie never uses naturalistic forms and therefore the relations defined within the play work according to narrative strategies tangential to the family narrative shaped as naturalistic. As the title suggests, the protagonist of the play is a subject held by a double bind; the construction of the adult as child is counterposed with the alternative of death. In Chapter Three I discussed Laura Mulvey's definition of a "sadistic narrative" with reference to Sarah Daniels' play *Masterpieces* and suggested a reading of this narrative formation that was both metaphorical and literal (see page 124). If this analogy were to be taken as indicative of a specific narrative trajectory, towards death that is, then the positionality of the subject within narrative is one that leads to or culminates in death; perhaps if the child is an adult then that child is also a dead child, and the childhood scene is implicated; in addition the adult in the child suggests that the child is all but dead.

Moreover, where, in Chapter Two, I used the conjunction of class/status conflict with ritual, I suggested that the extent to which feminist plays have dealt with the issues of sadism in narrative has been largely dependent upon the construction of new sets of social

relations and sex/class systems of a feminist form and analysis. Significantly, in each play looked at so far, the outcome of events is invariably subdued by loss and suffering, as if these were endemic to that narrative structure that arises primarily from a conflict between class and status. As women are moving towards a new class formation or sensibility which we term a status group (or slave group) this loss reflects the ambivalent relationship of time to narrative we have seen to be problematic in several of the plays so far. This is in effect an example of "explosive" time that Gurvitch delineates in tabula form at three levels. The first he says is defined by "revolutionary ferment and collective creation"; the second by "present and past dissolved into a transcendent future; and the third a social formation of "revolutions and radical transformations of global structures".<sup>19</sup>

It is established then, that some catastrophe befalls the classed/gendered subject in the conclusion to narrative; this is either firmly placed at the conclusion to the plays or shown as part of the narrative development. In Sarah Daniels' play *Masterpieces* for example, there are degrees of difference in violence against women but the act of violence that dictates the trajectory of the play is an act of violence against a man witnessed in an early scene. Georges Bataille has developed a theory of eroticism and narrative in which he is interpreting the master/slave relationship first considered by Hegel; Bataille shows narrative trajectory move ultimately toward death in a play between self and an other through eroticism and sadomasochism.<sup>20</sup> The specifics of this relationship have been transcribed to status interactions in theatre, those upon which at least two bodies on stage is conditional. In Dowie's play self is defined with reference to others who are physically absent from the stage. In *Adult Child/Dead Child*, in the first instance, the other is an imaginary friend and therefore not staged either as bodily or autonomous. Thus my inquiry into the nature of that relationship of self to other is dependent upon the already marginalised position of the schizophrenic or disturbed child.

Not only is the subject position marginalized but also determined by an underlying ambiguity of gender. In her notes to the Methuen edition of the play Dowie describes the disquiet caused by the androgynous positioning of the character in a reception by vastly different audiences of psychotherapists or women's groups. In describing the symptoms

of lovelessness: "You become aware of your lack of love - the lack of love you had as a child - you are aware of the lack of love as a child", Dowie shows this loss to be the condition of childhood for both male and female and this makes her refusal to grant the condition "femininity" to the child by not being clear about its gender, an illustration of emotions that create and condition male and female gender and circumscribe pain and introversion. The implicit argument here of the enculturation of gender is enhanced by the androgynous and eponymous figure of the play, neither specifically male or female and dead to certain essential formations of that process of enculturation.

If lack of love and lack of understanding, inform the creation of the subject, this single position is created androgynous in a narrative in which "she" (I shall use the generic "she" with reference to the sex of the performer) is the sole participant. In terms of its structure *Adult Child/Dead Child* can be described as a dramatic monologue. It is a blending of poetic language and free indirect speech (used to introduce other figures with whom the child engages) that enforces an incantation of loss, fear and mourning sufficient to reintroduce the childhood scene. The poetic language is characterised by repetition primarily in order to emphasize the ways in which the child is isolated; this serves as a kind of alienation. It is primarily the spectator who perceives a discrepancy in the character/spectator structure in that she/he hears what can be vaguely described as naturalistic discourse only when "Dowie" uses the voice and free indirect speech of other characters. Hence, the poetry acts as a distancing device which encloses and makes the child's world autonomous. A consistent removal from conventional sentence construction and its temporal ordering of subject, verb, object lends itself to psychoanalytic interpretations of the fragmented language and sentence constructions of the schizophrenic, whose own conception of time is not consonant with either simple sentence construction and more importantly its implied time.<sup>21</sup> Such distancing strengthens the alien frame of reference that naturalism provides by simply using it to indicate the outside world of the institution. The play stages a single subject position in formation and therefore created and shaped internally - the child/adult is formed in relation to a subjectivity dependent upon memory and isolation. The single body of the performer is the privileged locus of address and of language, and the family (as critical in

the conditioning of childhood) is cited as the main point of reference. This relationship is worth considering in depth as it demonstrates shifts from naturalized relations to ritual and the displacement of the subject in which she is staged more as part of a fantasy than a recognizable and mimetic world.

Bearing in mind the main focus of the family is the figure of the father, Dowie challenges the nature of the relationship of child to father when that child's sex is ambiguous. Hence with reference to the childhood scene in relation to the father I borrow Freud's terminology and generalisation of the male/female child. Dowie's discrepancy in not allowing the spectator to identify the child as either male or female constitutes a provocative development in the play; such a refusal to determine concrete gender relations functions as Dowie's main intervention in a dualism of psychoanalytic discourse and Marxist/sociological relations, which she plays off against each other in the form of the androgynous subject. For without a clear indication of the sex of the child, issues of Oedipal relations are raised but left uncertain and unanswered. For instance, we are never sure whether the demands of perfection of the child by the father shape a competition or a desire between them. Dowie's concern with the image of the father is similarly reflected in her 1987 play, *Cat and Mouse*, a text dealing with the relationship between a father and son and a corresponding sexual abuse. This image enables us to locate patriarchy or the symbolic order through the sign of the father:

My father was an actor  
 professional pretender  
 pretended to be a father  
 pretended to have feelings  
 pretended enthusiasm  
 demanded perfection  
 demanded perfection  
 100% do it right, do it the best  
 be brainy, be sporty, be talented, be  
 good  
 academic athlete  
 well mannered, polite, know it all, do it  
 all  
 100% do it right, do it the best  
 I cried, I would cry  
 I would cry & I failed  
 always failed

for my professional pretending father  
& his daughter, the apple of his eye  
who could do no wrong (p.52).

The law of the father is used as a weapon of control over the child. He establishes extreme measures of attainment by setting up the notion of the "ideal" and provoking our character with the image of her perfect sister. This "ideal" sister is intelligent, sporting and personable. As Freud points out the (un)successful transition through childhood augurs the (un)successful move towards the adult world and the symbolic order, and yet this transition must rest upon a clear notion of sex-difference. Dowie uses the image of childhood relations and the family experience as instrumental in determining that success; the means by which the unnamed child develops strategies of success against the failure signified by death and self-abuse come through fantasy and psychological measures. The expectation of the father is a central motivating issue for her.

The scene is set for the development of neuroses: the Father, other sibling (sister) and absent mother are the main actants in this scenario. Whilst the attention is solely upon the father as demanding and expectant, the mother is effectively absent. She simply provides crisps and a Mars bar on the occasions of abuse as the child is locked away in cupboard or closet. She also is described simply as a carer whose own expectations of a "squeaky clean floor" are defined with reference to the perfectionism of the father, and whose relationship to the child is shown to involve giving only that which can be bought.

\* The consistency of abuse - the closet and later the cupboard under the stairs - serves as a form of ritual in the child's experience, so much so that her development is not shaped by the linear development that her father's expectation demands of her, but instead is characterized by his habitual action of locking the child away. This routine shifts into ritual in that its rhythm is inexorable and the child in turn seeks to maintain its structure by performing badly, that is consistently failing expectation, as a means of making and maintaining contact with the abusing parent.

In his 1909 essay "Family Romances" Freud outlines the child's growing awareness of its family set-up, derived in part through comparison with peer groups:



For a small child his parents are at first the only authority and the source of all belief. The child's most intense and most momentous wish during these early years is to be like his parents (that is, the parent of his own sex) and to be big like his father and mother. But as intellectual growth increases, the child cannot help discovering by degrees the category to which his parents belong. He gets to know other parents and compares them with his own, and so comes to doubt the incomparable and unique quality which he has attributed to them. Small events in the child's life which make him feel dissatisfied afford him provocation for beginning to criticize his parents, and for using, in order to support his critical attitude, the knowledge which he has acquired that other parents are in some respects preferable to them.<sup>22</sup>

In *Adult Child/Dead Child*, as in *Why is John Lennon Wearing a Skirt?* Dowie makes reference to social factors, thereby implicating class. The family makes a transition in sociological, economic and geographical terms, thus centring the narrative in a specific social climate and context. This emphasis upon the family enables Dowie to demonstrate the significance of relationships outside of the family, relationships more conventionally naturalistic. Parents, teachers and psychiatrists are her main source of adult contact, and only twice is she able to develop an external and independent relationship: once with a neighbour and later with Peter, a social worker at her institutionalised home. The family makes a move to London, a hundred miles from their previous home and the geographical location reinforces the isolation of the child within the family unit for she is never fully able to establish and build upon an external relationship. In their new home, the individual kindnesses and attentions of a neighbour, whose name she never learns, but whom we come to know as "my lady", and her dog Benji, constitute the main focus of the child's daily walks to school and the genesis of her wanderings in search of attention. And as the lady moves house the first incident of clash with the parents arises, for the child steals money in order to buy the lady a leaving present.

Thus the closure of the geographical and spatial reference reinforce the narrative attention to the individual and disarms her wider perspective, moving her focus inwards to self and to the creation of an internal referent, the imaginary friend. The androgynous subject is set up in relation to two different figures: the father and the imaginary friend, and in the relationship with each there is set up a dynamic of exchange and interaction that may be read with reference to status for it is through this interaction that the narrative

structure of the play is worked. This will become clear in a study of the interaction of characters through games.

#### Games and status: the rituals of childhood

Both plays trace child development and integrate into its structural formation a series of childhood games and interactions that I would suggest involve status interactions. The family narrative that I have described above and the temporal structure locate development and the centrality of childhood experience both through a traditional psychoanalytic model and the formation of the subject position, and in addition with reference to historical and social determinants. As an expression of childhood experience and as the outlet for the manifestation of neuroses and childhood dilemma the "game" assumes considerable importance. Therefore, it is taken as a means of structuring the narrative - drawing together the two perspectives and yet highlighting their discrepancies.

I have quoted elsewhere Richard Schechner describing games as subsuming a wider system and set of structures, a reality principle.<sup>23</sup> Assuming this as a premise, the move from games to ritual, where games take on more symbolic significance, is fairly direct. Dowie incorporates two types of game: (1) Games related to the father and his ethos of retribution and expectation, and (2) Games arising from the child's interaction with her imaginary self/friend. I shall look at these in turn, addressing the relationship with the father as central in the childhood narrative of the play, and the relationship with the imaginary friend being dependent upon a similar mutuality. Both relationships are performative in that the single position of the performer uses the voice and language of each whilst remaining on a solitary stage. Hence, the issue of the dyadic coupling of the status exchange is raised.

The father/child relationship is based on antagonism and him setting her unrealizable goals and tasks which she must fulfill. As a result a fluctuating relationship develops, akin to a status interaction in which the partner, in this instance the child, is constantly in the low status position and impaired. She becomes the dependant in their pattern of exchange, and any sadism of the trajectory is controlled by this father figure who takes the upper hand by being master to her as slave. His acts of punishment

determine how this relationship works. The fact that he is also attached to the absent mother and the ideal child (the sister) further indicates that his dependency is not confined to the relationship to the subject and where this acts as a catalyst in the developing trajectory, the child's need to find strategies for survival precipitates the construction of the independent imaginary friend. The (symbolic) order that her father exerts is reinstated each time through the games, thus abusing the conception of games as at the same time abusing the child herself; punishment is not seen simply to match the crime committed but rather is ongoing and ritualized. Hence, the exchange relies upon patterns of suspense and repetition, shown in Chapter Two to be a significant part of developing ritual. Retribution characterizes this structure that is first demonstrated in her description of a game of cowboy and indians:

This was a cowboy hat & gun & holster & a tin star with the word 'sheriff' on it & an indian feather thing with a band on it for a hat & a tomahawk & my dad said let's play with it & first he was the cowboy & I was the indian & everybody was watching & I ran at him with my tomahawk but he shot me so I lost & then we changed round & I was the cowboy & my dad was the indian but before I could shoot him he threw the tomahawk & hit my head & he said it was Custer's last stand & everybody laughed (I thought he said 'custard' & I didn't understand) & he said I was hopeless because I died twice & I didn't want to play with my cowboy & indian set anymore but later on that night I decided to be the indian & sneak up on him quietly but when I sneaked into their bedroom & jumped on him with my tomahawk he woke up. Didn't act like a cowboy, acted like an angry father (p.53).

The parameters of the game are not sufficiently clear for the child because of the demands and inconstancy of the father - because his need is not as great as hers - and when the status position is reversed and the child too steps out of the boundaries of the rules of the game by continuing to play her part at an inappropriate time, a transgression she infers from his own behaviour and one to which his response is in itself exclusive of rules. So when she attempts to extend the rules in the same way that her father had, she is met with difficulty and fails to communicate. "An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth" characterizes the relationship and it is this archaic system of retribution which constantly blocks their communication and finally is instilled in the child as the means by which she must establish the boundaries of contact with an other. The play maps this pattern

throughout the course of her breakdown and problems - when she wrecks the living room, he wrecks her bedroom; when she smashes the radio he smashes her record player, and so on. Finally she invents a new line of defense in attack, an extension of this basic rule to their ritual. When she is unable to continue attacking him, because he stops attacking her after the signs of her mental breakdown, she turns the frustration and the anger inwards - she hits herself with the hammer.

I have suggested in my study of the relationship of self to other, developed from the master/servant exchange, that part of the developing narrative that arises from the ritual of exchange depends upon the intrusion of the external world onto that relationship. Where Lea and Isabelle in *My Sister in This House* and Mary and Claire in *Blood and Ice* and Mary and Elizabeth in *Mary Queen of Scots Got Her Head Chopped Off* have their relationships made public or problematic is where class issues begin to conflict with relationships constructed initially upon more the internalized ground of status. When this rift occurs, the relationship soon becomes characterized by a violence inflicted upon the other as a means of preserving the initial relationship. Jessica Benjamin in her study of eroticism and literature points out that violence, "...is a way of repudiating dependency while attempting to avoid the consequent feeling of aloneness. It makes the other an object but retains possession of him or her".<sup>24</sup> The relationship and exchange between the child and her father is denoted by violence. As the child hits her father she seeks to continue the game according to the unspoken rules he has set up but not according to the social rules that govern the games and ritual of normalised father/child relations. The relationship is in a sense self-perpetuating but social norms intervene and she seeks to continue that exchange but with other targets. When she hits herself we must ask if she is seeking to inflict violence upon the imaginary friend in order to assert a more dominant position rather than the existing subordinate one. She has not been able to maintain the relationship with the father upon a shared status group because of an assumed sex-difference and the fact that this relationship is not a means of preserving unity against the outside world but one allowing the transition into the outside world.

The acts of violence committed by the child serve to transform the flow of narrative which would otherwise shift towards the inevitable conclusion of death. At this

stage the rules of the game change, because on the surface there is an absent participant in the exchange. The father steps out of the relationship to leave the child alone, still practising the pattern of interaction as she is used to, but in a scenario where she is the sole participant. Where before it might have appeared to be "normal", now it is socially inscribed as "abnormal". That is, apart from the imaginary friend whom she refers to as Benji. Assuming that in the early stages of childhood this friend was absent, the two main participants in the exchange would have been the child and her father, Benji being created mainly from the failure of the original transaction. Now there is the added dimension that she created another participant in the exchange who was in fact imaginary. Whilst it was acceptable for the child to have an imaginary friend with whom she shared her secrets when she was young, as she grows older it becomes necessary for her to hide the relationship. The increasingly secretive nature of the relationship is coincidental with the anti-social acts that Benji urges and enjoys - swearing, throwing stones, stealing and so on - all acts of a deviant adolescent. If this is the case how far can the absent body be a real figure in the status exchange? In effect they cannot be and as I said earlier the child is forced to internalise the acts of violence towards her own body.

#### Absent bodies, status exchange

Benji, the child's imaginary friend can be interpreted in two different ways, as demonstrated in the acceptable status of having such a friend that her parents see in the early years, which subsequently comes to be seen as a threat when the imaginary friend replaces the father. At this point the issue becomes a social issue and with the involvement of social workers and psychiatrists Benji is interpreted with reference to the condition of *schizophrenia*, where established description indicates: "Frequently termed 'voices', they often 'speak' in the third person and may offer comments on the person's action or thoughts, make accusatory suggestions or instruct the individual in some way".<sup>25</sup> This is in effect the means by which the child is related to the imaginary friend, whom she perceives to be independent of herself; it is only later that with the aid of a supportive social network and a mock family grouping she is encouraged to understand Benji as a part of herself which she must of necessity repress with the use of drugs. This

is the conception she usefully holds onto as an effective strategy for dealing with the social order; yet on the other hand, this part of herself - that which directs her in anti-social and subversive acts - is still there for her in a sense, still independent, for as she says when she is safely confined to a ritualistic life without contact with other people because of the drugs, a conclusion which is truly indicative of a socially perceived notion of her condition:

I'd also like Benji to come back just one more time, just for the last time, because I feel I want to apologise to her, I feel I need to say sorry, cus I know now that it wasn't Benji really, I know now that it was me really, my anger, my emotion that caused all that trouble, all that wasted time, & I just feel I want to say sorry for blaming her. Cus it wasn't her it was me & I feel awful for blaming her, I mean she was my best friend & I blamed her all those years, so I would just like to say sorry (p.65).

In this speech the protagonist is seen to have a conception still of Benji as autonomous, and not simply the expression of her own anger and frustration; rather, it is that anger and frustration that causes the rift in the relationship by heightening its imbalance of power. The notion of exchange, the belief that the two have autonomy is continued.

That Benji is imaginary and without bodily presence challenges the received idea that two participants are necessary for the staging of status exchange and transaction. If the child is androgynous or female it might be the case that there is always an additional persona there encouraging or prescribing the nature of that exchange, that is, a gendered self. And it is possible that we can formulate a system in which status as gendered concept is conceivable under a different set of terms. The next set of games develop more as ritual than the innocuous exchange of games, for they involve the child and her imaginary friend creating pleasure through antagonisms to the external world. However, there is conflict both internally and externally: internally they argue over the ethics and morality of their activities, and can only counter this division, which we might conceive of as between id and ego, by transgressive acts: "Benji loved words like outlaw, hooligan, gangster, delinquent, vandal - she thought they sounded good, romantic, exciting." In a search for acts of outrage, attention seeking, each act and word indicates a move towards the transgressive behaviour of people deemed to be at the margins of society. Just as at the time that "Dowie" finds the dog at the home, a discovery that makes her feel like a

real hero, there is an urge to establish this sort of status position in an otherwise complicated and understated existence, in that a similar structure of mutual dependency develops between the protagonist and the dog.

Where I have shown the subject to be involved in two sets of status exchange - between herself and the father, and between herself and Benji - narrative is subject in itself to the conditions of the social order. The first relationship is broken by the appeal to the social order, and the second to conventions and norms which govern that, and in effect a reliance upon a continuing "reality principle" emerges that affirms the existing status quo by repressing the energy that Benji affords. I suggested earlier that the relationships established here rely on different dramatic conventions, and it is the single performer who takes both parts in the status exchange - the performer voices additional figures in the narrative of her experience. For her father and for Benji she uses free indirect speech and for other figures she uses reported speech. The play is devised as monologue which I indicated at first as incantatory and repetitive, but consistently establishing a single subject position. In each of the other plays I consider the relationship of subjectivity as conditional upon at least two figures, and these are given theatrical space by each being played by separate performers. In Dowie's plays there is a single performer, and the main device is the monologue.

Sarah Daniels also introduces characters having schizophrenic experiences in her new play *Head-Rot Holiday*: in one scene Clean Break Theatre Company use voice over to demonstrate the disembodiment of voice when those voices are alien and intrusive to self; in another the play includes a surreal interaction between a character and an angel who feels the hurt this character inflicts upon herself. Thus Daniels will use either disembodied voice or surreal body to represent the relationship of self to internal other. The confusion between self and other is shown as related to language formation and the dramatic monologue in that temporal reality is similarly confused in the insistence of habitual or ritualised actions. There is conflict at the point at which this temporality clashes with a linear reality in *Adult Child/Dead Child*, for instance, when the child is unable to take the present of a china dog to her unnamed 'lady' from along the road, because her parents prevent this; when she is finally able to fulfill her promise she does so

knowing that the lady has already moved. In completing the action the child is able to maintain the pattern she has established for herself.

I shall now turn to consider aspects of both *Why Is John Lennon Wearing a Skirt?* and *Adult Child/Dead Child*, and addressing how far each of them is to be assimilated into the relationship between the performer and the text, the relationship between performance and theatricality, and finally to genre. Central to this will be an examination of specific aspects of the material conditions of performance. I shall approach this by directly considering the generic conditions of stand-up comedy, specifically where these might be addressed by the critic interested in the relationship of women to comedy and performance issues and concerns. Where Dowie's creation of the relationship of exchange differs from traditional structures of the dramatic monologue is that she fluctuates between isolating that exchange within the relationships of the play, and broadening it to embrace the relationship of exchange in which the spectator is an active participant - as is convention in stand-up - thus returning me to the question of generic conditions again.

#### NARRATIVE INTERVENTION AND THE UNSTABLE SUBJECT

Dowie's transition from stand-up to a more rigid framework of theatre indicates a deliberate act of closure in that theatre imposes boundaries which had previously been more ambiguous, or entirely absent, in her stand-up. It is my intention to show stand-up techniques and convention as a reference point in her plays and to suggest that such techniques serve to disrupt narrative. The emphasis of this section is on a return to considerations of form. In making these suggestions I maintain that the conflation of the generic conditions of stand-up and theatre reflects issues that recent critical theory has brought to the term "performance", first mentioned at the beginning of this chapter and explored in detail in Chapter Two (see page 70). I would suggest that this conflation of genres results in two levels of instability: (1) The instability of conventional relationships between performer and audience, narrative and narrative disruption. (2) The instability



caused by the place of the unstable referent (the performer/character) in the exchange between spectator/character/performer and the discomfort with which such an instability fits into narrative formations.

Three areas emerge as significant in this study which have a bearing on the themes I have introduced to my thesis so far: (1) The relationship of the performer to character, and the notion of an unstable gender; (2) The transient gazes of performer and spectator; and (3) The cross-generic study of narrative and stand-up. These include and address further: issues of realism and affect; a psychoanalytic appraisal of the dyadic unit of spectator and performer - the body as fetish, and the relationship with reference to status; humour of stand-up within the strictures of narrative, the issue of suspense (and again, affect); and finally the material conditions of production. In further study of genre and the interactions between stand-up and theatre it is necessary to examine these points more closely.

#### Performer/character: Dowie's timely honesty

The relationship between performer and character is generally seen as coincident with generic expectation. Thus, the relationship will be expected to differ if one is looking at women's cabaret, stand-up comedy or an orthodox play. The first obstacle to an easy description of the relationship lies in the ambivalence of name and gender in Dowie's plays. In both *Why is John Lennon Wearing a Skirt?* and in *Adult Child/Dead Child* there is an unnamed character. This character remains unnamed despite the detailed narration of interaction with mother, father and a socioeconomic framework, each of which points to a naturalistic and causal frame of reference, the (un)eponymous figure is never acknowledged by the naming process which would facilitate the manoeuvre into the symbolic order, which would in turn facilitate and guarantee an easy transition to a secure sexual identity. The only name she will acknowledge in *John Lennon*, one which she at first keeps hidden is that taken from her hero, John Lennon. Dowie thus effects a displacement of an insecure sexual identity (female) through a process of (mis)naming onto the "real" eponymous figure - sexually secure because John Lennon has a high social profile - thereby introducing the interdependent issues of class and gender.

In order that I might begin to draw comparisons between Dowie's stand-up and plays it is necessary to consider the performance technique introduced in Chapter Two concerning female subjectivity and sexuality, that is, a performance rhetoric based upon the slogan "personal is political". The binary opposition upon which the women's movement was first built - private and political - and for a time sustained, comprised a structural and structuring device of early plays and performance pieces contingent upon the use of theatre as a platform for expression. Implicit to these processes was the vulnerability of performance positionalities, the collapse of Brechtian style distancing devices popular in seventies political plays, and performance based upon empathic processes. Herbert Blau points out this relationship as one of affect, that is, a relationship designed to elicit emotional response.<sup>26</sup> Blau is specifically talking about strategies of performance art and therefore, rather than identifying the relationship of the realist performer as the agency of bourgeois system, a relationship we most commonly associate with naturalism and playstructures per se (the relationship between naturalism and the bourgeoisie being the target of Brecht's invective), Blau supposes a further side:

The actor may not, after all, contain multitudes, but there are some for whom the powers of empathy are such, or the sympathetic imagination, that it can register not only the minutest behavioural forms of an apparently foreign psychology, but also the nuances, shadows, vagaries, the particle physics of difference, including its illusions, as they are grounded in (or ungrounding) the ideological categories of race, class, or age. Or, for that matter, the self, which the better actors know as the most elusive, unattainable, or illusory difference of all (p.141).

Blau's comments serve to highlight the many issues that the woman performer faces, leaving her always in a complex relation to affect. For women, the notion of accessibility to "self" is more difficult than for men, for women performers not only play the character part but can also be seen to play the part of femininity. At least they have less access to a consistent and unified self. On the other hand, and in conjunction with a psychoanalytic approach, the female performer is more experienced with a fragmented self than her male counterpart, for it is she who, according to psychoanalytic descriptions of femininity, must use the devices of masquerade throughout her own life. Therefore she

is able to present fragmentation more easily and this is reflected in the kind of plays comprised of a series of monologues for example.

Further complexities arise where a narrative imposes a structure and theatrical closure onto performance. For instance, we cannot simply view Dowie as the protagonist of *Why is John Lennon Wearing a Skirt?* presenting herself (the performer) as we might if this were clear stand-up material, because the "persona" is sustained throughout a narrative as if she were the character from a play. In effect this transforms the relationship from being a single unit of exchange or status transaction to make it subject to narrative development. This tendency to impose a narrative framework upon stand-up material has only a recent genesis amongst stand-up comedians and performance artists. Mark Steel's *Russian Revolution* and Sean Hughes' *One Night Stand* are two examples of British stand-ups doing this; Blau names American performance artists who have similarly played with cross-overs with theatre. Conventionally for the performer to assume a stage persona has been an acceptable convention of comic performance in music hall or variety but it works slightly differently in stand-up: the transition must be registered, I think; whilst Peacock discusses the status exchange between the comic persona and the spectator in music hall his argument is weakened by the fact that music hall is in fact itself a redundant dramatic form.<sup>27</sup> The kind of exchange to be found on the stand-up circuit is one with which audiences are more familiar now - if not on the club scene, at least on television.

### Character Acting

Women, from stand-up to music hall and television comedy, are assumed to feel more comfortable as "self" is subsumed in the form of character acting. This assumption has an interesting similarity to that made about women being better novelists than poets, in that their chosen form is less revealing of self and subjectivity. Character acting serves to set up a defence by blocking the vulnerability of the performer/spectator exchange. With stand-up the relationship is less clear-cut. If we assume the performer/character distinction to be already collapsed, in effect the stage persona constitutes the signifier through which the signified can be traced. This is a condition determined by the nature of

"performance" when the constraints of "theatre" are always already absent and there is some implicit acknowledgement that the performer is manifest through character. This begs the question of how material is mediated through the practice of stand-up, and what are the sources of that material. There is a tendency to assume that the stage persona we are watching is actually the real person, thereby forgetting that the events, situations and observations of the performer are tailored and adapted for the stage. Jokes and situation thus become part of the performative act making the referent indeterminate, even irrelevant because the style of delivery and its rhetoric is more important.

Moreover, if this constitutes part of the masquerade of womanliness, it is a masquerade dependent upon established stand-up convention, for the projected female persona is one dependent upon previous tradition. As Bryony Lavery has commented, it is common for a woman to adopt a "persona" for the stage, and this is traditionally what they do.<sup>28</sup> They choose to make that specific rather than playing with the ambivalence of character and performer that their male stand-up counterparts are wont to do.

What is beginning to emerge here is a shift in focus of the status exchange away from characters within the play or performance toward an exchange more directly inclusive of the spectator. In addition to the theories of spectatorship borrowed from film studies I wish to consider a psychoanalytic reading of theories of humour which aims to demonstrate differences between the relationship of women to humour compared with men. This in part accounts for a stage relationship and also addresses how far humour is significant in shaping those relationships.

David Zippen in his article, "Sex Differences and the Sense of Humour" (1966) suggests that the distinction between sexes depends upon the recognition that women have no phallus.<sup>29</sup> Hence, a male and aggressive stance of the female persona shows the woman masquerading as male, pretending to have a phallus and thus signifying a phallic woman. This, he suggests, will elicit different sex responses in the spectator: men with superiority, knowing that in fact the performer is without phallus, and women with an internalised confirmation of knowing that this can also be a threat, as at the same time acknowledging their own lack, and therefore enjoying some pleasure in the knowledge of this threat to the male spectator. As a consequence the notion that there will be a mastery

in the gaze of the male spectator over the objectified (and observed) female performer will be potentially challenged by the shared knowledge between the female spectator and the female performer. The feminist stand-up will thus be categorized according to absence of phallus but also by adopting some of its implied power by presenting her own "sexist" jokes, both demonstrating that women can do without this power yet are always defined in some relation to it. Where affect is conditioned by the uncertain confluence of the personal and political the female performer/persona in stand-up is in a privileged position because, as I suggested, although the expectation of the spectator is to be shown what is personal, actually the persona recreates and embroiders material which is not necessarily personal. This lack of certainty, I would suggest, shows a new relation to what is real, by deliberately uprooting the generic conventions to which we turn for the consolidation of our beliefs.

As I mentioned before, D.W. Peacock maintains that character acting entails a submissiveness to the audience when the performer assumes a comic persona. An alternative psychoanalytic reading would show the spectator as analyst and the performer as analysand. Randi S. Koppen makes the point that, "the task of the analyst, as set forth by Freud in "Constructions in analysis," is to construct a narrative and communicate it to the subject of analysis "so that it may work upon him." ".<sup>30</sup> Surely it is the case that the scene of stand-up offers this as a potential relationship more than any other form in its possibilities for intervention - heckling especially. If we recall that one spectator made such an intervention through heckling, thereby affirming of the narrative she (as analyst) had constructed - cheering her song, "I'm glad to be gay". For this spectator the narrative was deemed to be a "coming out" development to which the posed ambivalent identities were mere deviations, symptomatic perhaps of confusions.

### The gaze, stand-up and theatre

In *John Lennon* Dowie widens the framework of the single unit of exchange to include the formal framework of the stage as theatrical. She also makes use of properties which inhibit the direct looking, and deflect the gaze by theatricalising a female masquerade in process. For example as she applies elaborate make-up in one scene she is

demonstrating the application of aspects of masquerade. At this point we must ask whether at any time she looks back at the audience looking at her in order to challenge their perceived mastery. The answer surely rests upon a distinction between character or stage persona, play or stand-up; what if the performance "text" incorporates both?

The Scottish stand-up Gerry Sadowitz concludes each of his lines with an unavoidable closure: "I thank-you". This follows the inevitable punchline of the joke. This point about Sadowitz establishes the interaction between spectator and performer as not being simply one of observation, passivity and activity. It is a condition of performance that there is a process of interaction, and a key term of this is "heckling".

Dowie then (in character) invites a study of the representation of sexuality and the female body as that which is observed. Gender is constructed, gender is performative, and also, importantly, a feminist stance becomes performative. Judith Butler explores the notion of gender as performative with reference to the theories of phenomenology and concludes that as a result it is subject to variables and open to change.<sup>31</sup> In the performative exchange I am describing in terms of status interactions, the body is centralized, gestures are foregrounded and class issues are displaced onto the body. Dowie's classed (the working-class hero) and gendered (female) subject seeks to define sexuality through a conflation of gestural language conditioned by a dual language. They are both Brechtian in that geste externalizes social issues, and "performance" based in that conditions anterior to theatre are inscribed on the body. Herbert Blau suggests that the body of the performance artist is the site at which Brecht's social inscription is synonymous with Artaud's inscription of cruelty in that the cruelty inscribed on the physical body is inseparable from the cruelty of the social law.<sup>32</sup> The female stand-up seems to include both notions because even the performance artist sets up conditions of performance which include the framing of the spatial boundaries that condition the theatrical exchange. The law here is dependant upon stage codes and the semiotics of staging convention.

The spectator watching *John Lennon* is confronted with two issues related to voyeurism and the "gaze". These are: (1) The "knicker factor"; (2) The elaborative

process of striptease. Both visual images hold internally, thus raising the issue of the internal reality, and also depend upon arrangements extended to embrace the spectator.

The "knicker factor" discriminates for the child/Lennon figure an early social conditioning experienced as curricular and extra-curricular school activity. It is through an elaboration of the "knicker" motif that Dowie explores gender difference and the perceived age at which the adolescent becomes a sexualized being. This is based upon the implicit assumption that there is a time when sex becomes dangerous. She constructs the "knicker factor" as a knicker fetish, and the issue of early sexuality is displaced onto the garment of clothing which in fact covers the genitals. The cloth serves to cover the woman's lack, the absence of the phallus. It is this which school teachers *wish to hide*, which her friends seek to hide, and to which "the boys" are continually casting their gaze. And so too the audience, the performance itself reveals *Dowie's costume* as highlighting the body of the performer. Clothing takes on its significance and part of the covering process involves her wearing synthetic tights, and shorter skirts:

They've taken the Knicker Factor to extremes. They've made it so that they're almost showing their knickers all the time, but we never actually see their knickers again. Ever. Because for some reason the boys go nowhere near them, the boys avoid them like the plague, the boys are *suddenly* scared stiff of them (p.2).

In this instance the "knicker factor" denotes a "knicker fetish": the codes of unlawful adolescent sexual awakening are transferred to the knicker, the item of clothing which highlights what is hidden by that - lack of the phallus. The standard navy blue knickers with which all schoolgirls are dressed is used in the play to demonstrate an universal fetishization; to them are added, layer by layer, stockings and other clothes.

The second aspect of the text which draws attention to the physical body is the habitual act of dressing and undressing. This act resembles a striptease to the extent that it is ritualistic. One staging instruction is: "[Stripping off the hidden personality]" (p.12), thus indicating costume as reference point of social identity or personality and showing costume and personality to be collapsed into one, literally transforming the materiality of

the body into the garments that adorn it. Roland Barthes exposes striptease as one of his cited bourgeois mythologies, saying,

Striptease - at least Parisian striptease - is based on a contradiction: Woman is desexualized at the very moment when she is stripped naked. We may therefore say that we are dealing in a sense with a spectacle based on fear, or rather on the pretence of fear, as if eroticism here went no further than a sort of delicious terror, whose ritual signs have only to be announced to evoke at once the idea of sex and its conjuration.<sup>33</sup>

The transitions in the play move from childhood costume, school uniform, the costume of adolescence - jeans and so on, through to the clothing of "Dowie's" early working life. At this point, the childhood fantasy borne out in the identification with John Lennon is extrapolated into the symbolic (social) order as denoted by workplace. Thus, her costume - khakhi shorts and big boots - is on the one hand deemed slightly out of the ordinary at work, but on the other is interesting for some of her male colleagues because of the novelty factor (the hint of sexual liberation also is suspect to fetishising the clothes), becomes for her the means of enacting a fantasy world. Thus, the signification of clothing may be interpreted in different ways, and a discrepancy arises between denotative and connotative for the internal world and for the spectator. Throughout the play she wears the uniform of work through to the uniform of the dyke and each will have certain codes and govern affect in that whilst characters within the world may see her outfit as provocative in that it does not conform to everyday clothing, some spectators may register the outfit as making a particular statement. I mention this with respect to the notion of affect in that the ambivalence of the costume may also reflect the ambivalence of genre in that there is no clear distinction between the internal world established by a play and the more fluid form of stand-up comedy. As a result therefore, Dowie, dependent upon venue may be seen as at any one time she is a lesbian, a freak, militaristic, or wearing casual clothes. At any one time she shows a different social self, and a different sexual identity - social and sexual positionalities are read through the dress codes and seen as plural and open to negotiation for character and for the collective spectator.

As a means of highlighting the very process of performance itself - either the performative nature of gender, or the physical and theatrical staging of text - Dowie



chooses to focus upon the signs of costume. Costume changes in the play act like the music breaks as features that are both internal to the play and also function extra-diegetically. Costume conventionally plays a significant part in highlighting gender distinction, and if developed in conjunction with the gestural system of non-verbal communication there is a shift towards an understanding of sign systems that effectively is a kind of visual melodrama that works without the spoken text. Meaning is seen to be constructed through images which foreground a social context. The elaboration of striptease, for instance, shows visual cues in an exaggerated way, sufficient to elicit affect and to show the performer. All this represents a challenge to the understatement characteristic of naturalistic performance.

Below is a table describing the costume changes throughout the performance of *John Lennon*. In the second column I have included some comment on the social and gendered codes that these items of clothing signify.

(1) school uniform	focus on the skirt (knicker factor) and the androgynous school blazer
(2) tights on	invading external threat: "until these walked in Paul's legs"
(3) skirt	female adolescence
(4) jeans	adolescent group identity
(5) underwear and make-up	vulnerability and masquerade
(6) pretty dress & heels	"femininity"
(7) removal of make-up,	plain androgynous jeans and shirt
(8) khaki culottes	outfit of fantasy role
(9) heavy duty shirt, large jacket, Russian cap	phase as resistance fighter
(10) jeans, plain clothes	again, an indeterminate image: perhaps the performer coming out of character,
highlighting narrative	stand-up material as intervention in play

Dowie consistently took off and put on clothes as if it were the performer in her private changing room. The precision and simplicity of the exercise additionally suggest an ambivalence between this action as staged/public and as private. As the character reaches the climax of her fantasy life - which in turn shifts the narrative to a linear and

naturalistic world - she introduces the striptease scene. The striptease is performed to John Lennon's "Woman is the Nigger of the World", and she removes first her bra, then both the "Burma" and the "Russian" outfits. She is temporarily left in vest and knickers. This interestingly functions in a purely Brechtian sense as demonstrating the performer as distinct from character rather than establishing the underwear as in some way fetishistic. She then goes on to "sexily" put on her jeans, thus inverting the pleasure of striptease by stressing the pleasure of dressing. The issue of costume and body image later returns to the text as she hides her breasts and discusses the shame and fear of her body being perceptibly womanly, a fear commonly held by the anorexic:

I get dressed and undressed in the dark because I can't stand the sight of my own body, I hate it, its pathetic, I want to hit it, want to beat it up, want to disfigure it, want to destroy it, want to kill it, its weak, second rate, second best, second class, its passive, its apologetic, its guilt ridden,...(p.15).

At this point the body of the performer reflects the issues of the text. She mimics the shame of a physicality which she later articulates as weakness, as lack, in that she is unable to do the things she wishes such as demonstrating the expression of male violence. In effect this acts as a *gestus* in that the body shows us what the written text cannot, and moreover, what her body cannot be - she lacks the physical strength and power of the male physique, and what she would be if she were the impersonator. The relationship to her body is one of brutality and masochism. In the fantasy role of male hero she is able to *displace the congruence of body with subjectivity, and simply view her body as absent, "keep it covered up and ignore it, pretend it doesn't exist."* I would suggest also that the knicker fetish also is used as *gestus* in that it illustrates the extent to which women are fetishized and therefore only take their part in the spectator/character/performer exchange as part-object, because the female performer has a dual nature. This is an illustration of Elin Diamond's description of the discrepancy in the triumvirate of performer/character/spectator when the performer is female, because the female performer is playing at a presentation of self.<sup>34</sup> This is evidence of the lack of clear gender analysis in those early descriptions of performing status.

Different spectators will entertain alternative readings of her sexuality. Dowie is the pretty adolescent and she is also a dyke, and therefore observed as part of a marginal and subcultural group. In addition she is viewed as a woman dressed as a boy, and this is both internal and external to textual narrative and the narrative that the spectator constructs (as analyst). Within the narrative she is on three occasions (mis)taken for a boy. The first time is by the little girl on a bus (this involves no pleasure in looking); the second time involves a misconception of her as a boy. The character is being observed by a group of girls seated passively on a park bench whose gaze is of the collective subject, supposing her a boy like the other boys. She, because of her bi-lingualism, is able to cross boundaries and talk with the girls because she shares the language of each; thus she becomes actively involved in the exchange when she had previously been inactive, and it is only when she is betrayed (by another boy) as a girl that gender barriers are resurrected, and it is the male (the boy) who interpellates her as a gendered subject. It is as though the boy betrays her because his group/status identity is threatened by this impersonator, or "other". The third incident is at her workplace where she develops an unspoken sexual exchange of glances with a woman. The latter initiates the look and their coming together is reenacted as they move spatially across the staff canteen. It is only when the woman's friend (female) identifies her as a woman rather than a man that the girl removes her gaze, and once more the bi-lingualism of gender is perceived as freakiness.

In each of the three incidents there is the notion of deception and the looking requires her to look back knowingly in order to maintain the condition of misrecognition. The situation is a reversal of looking from man to woman and instead requires one woman to look at another woman assuming this is a man; it is not simply a case of cross-dressing for as I have previously established the dress codes of jeans and a plain shirt denote androgyny rather than masculinity. So Dowie disrupts a looking which requires the woman seeking confirmation in male recognition - an extension of woman defined by man looking at her for she is actively seeking to engage in a sexual viewing process, and she does so knowingly.

### Suspense and heckling as narrative interventions

I have subdivided this section in order to consider further both sides of the spectator/performer dichotomy given a performance with a narrative structure. As I have pointed out, the notion of "theatre" defines the parameters of performance; the dimming of lights, stage boundaries and the use of a set confirm this marking of boundaries. But my thesis has involved reflection on cross-generic formations, and in this section I shall explore how far these conditions of performance warrant a set of criteria of performance the parameters of which are not fully clear. I shall address both the disruption of narrative internally, and the disruption of the conditions of performance as they constitute a similar narrative.

### Expectation and suspense

Key terms in the generation of humour are expectation and suspense. The structure of the joke according to one theory rests upon incongruity and the reversal of expectation - suspense is thus a key factor which may be used finally to disrupt expectation with a challenge to prior knowledge or convention. Freud's theories of humour suggest that at the release of tension which the punchline of a joke brings, there is a moment of relief. Theories of humour which impose an ideological reading of the joke indicate that in the punchline the comedian will confirm expectation and reinforce existing prejudice and stereotypes. By implication these are the expectations that the spectator will have.

Take then the concept of the play: the social and class context of a girl growing up within a given set of circumstances and social expectation; counterpose this with the male bildung which the character (female) assumes as a proto- John Lennon figure, and put into the performance context. If we rely upon a familiarity with the performer as lesbian and associated with stand-up then the spectator may expect certain narrative conventions to be broken by stand-up intervention. And again, if this is the case, then the performance will use as narrative strategies, aspects of the performer. Dowie does this by including jokes and references to the performance framework in which she is working. As a convention of joke formation, suspense is critical and with that the expectation of reversal. Assuming that the character's burgeoning sexuality is to elicit a crisis of gender

and sexual identity identifies the narrative as a feminist consciousness raising and at the same time the male bildung. Thus, when "Dowie" declares her gay identity she is warmly met by the audience expectation and what is a narrative strategy becomes a statement of acknowledged gay identity. She plays on this by exploring the ramifications of meaning, by gaining employment in an arts centre (where many of the performances take place). One of the jokes she familiarly has used as part of her stand-up routine is, as she says, her own "invention of carrot cake for a joke". And on one level the narrative of development interprets this as closure. On the other hand, she denies the closure of suspense, and twists the narrative according to the structure of the joke by reversing meaning. She reintroduces suspense by not accepting this and establishing a lesbian identity based upon a desperation still to have the characteristics of male gender. Thus narrative convention is as blurred as the sexual identity which refuses the interpellation it suggests.

### Heckling

Generally, work on heckling derives from anecdotal information, and little is recorded. Any information obtained from performers themselves will be subject to their own censorship because invariably material around heckling is incorporated into a set itself. I would describe heckling as a condition of stand-up performance: it acts to disrupt the gaze, as it does to challenge and disrupt the relationship (exchange) which emerges between the spectator and the performer. It may be that we can read this with reference to the notion of transference, whereby the heckle indicates a moment of intensity in which the spectator is seeking to reinforce the submissive role of the performer, in turn the response in itself is contingent upon the "heckle" and stands as counter-transference, for the performer readjusts the balance and denies their submissiveness and reestablishes herself as the source of power. The submissiveness or masochism of the female performer is replaced with the power or sadism of the phallic woman, and perhaps the rapid exchange between performer and heckler is an exchange of sadomasochistic potential. However, in each case the stand-up is repeating a "set" which she will have worked on and dependent upon different venues she will perhaps have a set stock of responses. In Dowie's Edinburgh performance she established this early by kicking away

from the stage a bag belonging to a woman journalist; this was effective in ensuring that stage boundaries were well-defined, at the same time as diffusing the stand-up atmosphere of the event. For the spectator, an action such as this is a clear indication that heckling is inappropriate to the performance event itself.

In concluding this section with an anecdote about one specific performance, I hope to have enforced my early points about the peculiar vulnerability of the female performer to material conditions when that performer stages stand-up comedy. Dowie shows that relationship to be much more dependent upon displayed recognition of the audience and the presentation of persona. Furthermore, the performer is here no longer distanced by the framework that a play structure provides, and Dowie's own *career move* reflects a transition towards that framework that in turn can be interpreted as the transformation of one genre as it moves into another. More than this, she demonstrates the ways in which multiple positionalities of gender can be used as a performative strategy to the extent that she works through to a recognition of sex-differences. Significantly the final recognition of that coincides with her pregnancy and the hint of irony in her *ultimate* statement that she is a boy seems to be a rejection of femininity which is based upon the acceptance of difference:

Being told you're in control now, you can do anything you want, but stay feminine and stay guilty and smile and watch the men because men are important, men are the heros and women can't be heros. They can't be heros because women have to smile and protect their wombs and attract the sperm to carry creation, to keep the future. And I thought "Nah, I'd rather just drop my womb and be a boy, much more fun" (p.17).

It is this examination of the move to accepting difference that is an acknowledgement of the need for sex-differences stressed in Chapter One.<sup>35</sup> This is a critical issue in Dowie's work where it is seen to be intimately linked to the conjunction of class and status differences. It is as if Dowie, in her conflation of generic features, is seeking to foreground that conflation as an easily recognizable act in order that content and form are not simply collapsed as part of a deconstructivist "performance" but are seen as there to be addressed and where necessary be transgressed. The same can be said of the certainty

with which sex-differences are considered in that having them as a basis provides a framework for transforming the nature of each. Thus it seems that Dowie's place as part of contemporary women's theatre practice is one for which theatrical form or genre is central, if only if that provides a basis for explorations of form and of content and resists the move towards formalism in deconstructing and collapsing form and content fully

## CONCLUSION

### Form and content revisited

In summing up the key points which have emerged from the second part of this thesis it is significant that the genre that proves most politically strategic, in that it satisfies critical demands for transgressive and shifting positionalities, is one derived from a traditionally male form: stand-up. It is my contention, therefore, that feminist interventions into form are effective when they combine with structures of theatre, and also engage with existing male-dominated forms. I would argue that the material conditions affecting current theatre production, fringe especially, are such that the demise of small-scale theatre companies affords the opportunity for work such as Dowie's to generate a new "politicized" theatre that has its roots in a traditional British form. This may account for the fact that it is only in small-scale performances, such that the stand-up circuit allows, that the opportunity for interventionist or politically exploratory performances exists.

Thus it seems crucial to point out the extent to which contemporary British women playwrights and performers respond to, or are identified with, a wider context of British theatre. This, it seems to me, is fundamental in identifying contemporary women's theatre practice as implicitly ideological. Hence Dowie's strategies of subverting conceptions of gender rest, as did Liz Lochhead's and Sarah Daniels', on retaining and showing a relationship to existing theatrical structures or theatrical conventions. These they could challenge not only through subversion and inversion, but also through reference to the revised social relations that have arisen as a result of the Women's Movement and feminist epistemology. Dowie in particular seeks to revise genre, and yet to retain it, and even foreground it by working only tangentially with the "play". More specifically she uses her background in stand-up, when stand-up figured as a prominent form for making political statements to eighties audiences, to create a political feminist "performance".



Having outlined the importance of contemporary women's theatre practice in creating new genres and responding to previous genres, I would point out the importance of feminist transformations of social relations, or the ways in which we understand social relations, in interpreting contemporary theatre. In response to the slogan "the personal is political" I have attempted to examine the means by which such transformations were deployed in theatre by both the representation of issues and also the "processes of performances". One of the key stages, I would argue, that reflects these transformations was the development of improvisation exercises based upon "status". These have provided both an indication of aspects of acting and issues surrounding the female performer, and also a way of reading plays in terms of specific issues to do with presenting "self", authenticity, sex and class relations.

Thus, both the "processes of performances" and theatrical genre are brought together with reference to the phrase the "personal is political". And this phrase then, must take its place as a crucial indicator of historically situated, but also ongoing, aspects of contemporary women's theatre as an ideological practice.

- <sup>1</sup> Short poem included in playwright's notes to *Adult Child/Dead Child*, in *Plays By Women, Volume Seven*, ed. by Mary Remnant, (London: Methuen Ltd., 1988), p.67. This edition of the play will be referred to throughout this chapter and page references made accordingly.
- <sup>2</sup> This point was discussed in Chapter One where I cited Lizbeth Goodman's description of possible subgenres of women's theatre. See page of this thesis.
- <sup>3</sup> Peggy Phelan. "Feminist Theory, Postructuralism and Performance", *The Drama Review*, vol.32, no.1 (1988), pp.107-127.
- <sup>4</sup> In Chapter Two (page 70) I introduced the distinction between "theatre" and "performance" and located that with reference to the influence of critical theory. Further useful distinctions will emerge in this chapter. For instance, that spatial boundaries of the stage do not exist in the same way in performance as in theatre. I will elaborate upon this difference but also will suggest that Dowie's work combines elements of both and is therefore interesting as a case study in genre.
- <sup>5</sup> Ralph Cohen, "Do Postmodern Genres Exist?" in *Postmodern Genres*, edited by Marjorie Perloff (Norman and London: University of Oklahoma Press, 1989), pp.11-27, (p.13).
- <sup>6</sup> Roger Wilmut and Peter Rosengard, *Didn't You Kill My Mother-in-Law?* (London: Methuen, 1989), p.xiii.
- <sup>7</sup> Lizbeth Goodman also makes this point about women comedians relation to previous performers in "Gender and Humour" in *Imagining Women: Cultural Representations and Gender*, edited by Frances Bonner, Lizbeth Goodman, Richard Allen, Linda James, Catherine King (Polity Press Oxford University Press, 1992).
- <sup>8</sup> Textual references will be made to an unpublished script provided by the author. This can be found in the appendix.
- <sup>9</sup> Rita Felski. *Beyond Feminist Aesthetics* (UK: Hutchinson Radius, 1989), p.126.
- <sup>10</sup> Elizabeth Grosz, *Sexual Subversions*, p.79.
- <sup>11</sup> Monique Wittig, "One is Not Born a Woman", *Feminist Issues*, 1:2 (1981), pp.47-54.
- <sup>12</sup> Alan Sinfield, *Literature, Culture and Society in Postwar Britain* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell Ltd., 1989), pp.156-157.
- <sup>13</sup> Mary Childers and bell hooks, "A Conversation about Race and Class", in *Conflicts in Feminism*, edited by Marianne Hirsch and Evelyn Fox Keller (London: Routledge, 1990), pp.60-81.
- <sup>14</sup> Morwenna Banks and Amanda Swift, *The Jokes On Us: Women in Comedy From Music Hall to the Present* (London: Pandora Press, 1987), p.38.
- <sup>15</sup> Banks and Swift, *The Joke's On Us*, p.51.
- <sup>16</sup> Jean Laplanche and Jean-Bertrand Pontalis, "Fantasy and the Origins of Sexuality", in *Formations of Fantasy*, edited by Victor Burgin, James Donald and Cora Kaplan (London: Methuen & Co. Ltd., 1986), p.26.
- <sup>17</sup> Alan Sinfield discusses the implicit and provocative pleasures involved in music in *Literature, Culture and Society in Post-War Britain*, p.155.
- <sup>18</sup> Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema", *Screen* 16 (Autumn 1975), p.17.

- <sup>19</sup> G. Gurvitch's account of temporality in relation to shifts in social structure quoted by David Harvey in *The Condition of Postmodernity* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell Ltd., 1980 and 1990), p.224-5.
- <sup>20</sup> Theories discussed by Jessica Benjamin, "Master and Slave: The Fantasy of Erotic Domination" in *Desire: The Politics of Sexuality*, edited by Ann Snitow, Christine Stansell and Sharon Thomson (London: Virago Press Ltd., 1984), pp.292-311.
- <sup>21</sup> See Fredric Jameson, "Postmodernism and Consumer Society" in *Postmodern Culture*, edited by Hal Foster (London: Pluto Press, 1985).
- <sup>22</sup> Sigmund Freud, "Family Romances" in *Sigmund Freud: Collected Papers, Volume Five*, edited by James Strachey (London: The Hogarth Press, 1950, 1971), pp.74-78, (p.74).
- <sup>23</sup> Richard Schechner, *Performance Theory* (London: Routledge, 1988), p.112 and p.119. He discusses notions of authenticity, ritual and theatre and introduces the idea of governing principles and also the symbolic order.
- <sup>24</sup> Jessica Benjamin, "Master and Slave: The Fantasy of Erotic Domination", p.296.
- <sup>25</sup> *Schizophrenia: An Integrated Approach to Research and Treatment*, edited by M.J.Birchwood, S.E.Hallet and M.C.Preston (London: Longman, 1988), p.4.
- <sup>26</sup> Herbert Blau, *To All Appearances: The Ideology of Performance*, (London: Routledge, 1992), p.138.
- <sup>27</sup> See Peacock on status interactions in Chapter Two, page 67 of this thesis.
- <sup>28</sup> Quoted by Susan Carlson in *Women and Comedy: Rewriting the British Theatrical Tradition* (Michigan: Ann Arbor University of Michigan Press, 1991), p.225.
- <sup>29</sup> David Zippen, "Sex Differences and the Sense of Humour", *Psychoanalytic Review* (1966), pp.45-50 (p.50).
- <sup>30</sup> Randi S.Koppen, "The 'Furtive Event': Theorizing Feminist Spectatorship", *Modern Drama*, 35, (1992), pp.378-394, p.389.
- <sup>31</sup> Judith Butler, "Performative Acts and Gender Construction: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory", in *Performing Feminisms: Feminist Critical Theory and Theatre*, ed. by Sue-Ellen Case, (America: The John Hopkins University Press, 1990), pp.270-283.
- <sup>32</sup> Herbert Blau, (p.96).
- <sup>33</sup> Roland Barthes, "On Striptease" in *Mythologies*, (p.84).
- <sup>34</sup> Elin Diamond, "Brechtian Theory/Feminist Theory: Towards a Gestic Feminist Criticism", *The Drama Review*, vol.32, no.1 (1988), pp.82-94.
- <sup>35</sup> See for example Rosi Braidotti and Julia Kristeva, Chapter One, pages 15 and 36.

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