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## The Liminal Space between Feminism and Misogyny:

### Introducing Playwright Nina Raine's *Rabbit*

MARCIA EPPICH-HARRIS

Hélène Cixous's famous call for women to write has been heard among women playwrights, and their work, indeed, is acting "as a springboard for subversive thought, the precursory movement of a transformation of social and cultural structures" (879). In the United Kingdom, women are subverting the hegemonic tradition of androcentricism in the theatre, both as writers and directors. About half of the most recently produced plays at the Royal Court Theater, the premier theatre for burgeoning playwrights, were written by women.<sup>1</sup> Playwright Polly Stenham notes in an interview, "It's a very good time to be a girl generally. It feels good. I feel the power at the moment. I really do" (Auld). Janelle Reinelt says that there is "cause for some optimism about the presence of significant women's writing" in British theatre; however, she goes on to say that the successful women playwrights<sup>2</sup> in the UK "don't speak about feminism often or (in some cases) ever, and they don't seem to act or speak collectively" (553, 555).

While Reinelt's claim that women playwrights in the UK are not speaking as a collective may be true, it is untrue that feminism is not present in their work. Nina Raine, in particular, deserves notice from feminist critics for her 2006 play, *Rabbit*. In *Rabbit*, Raine tackles the ambivalence that Millennial women feel toward feminism, highlighting the entitlement of equality that Millennials both take for granted and do not actually enjoy. The main character, Bella, struggles with her father and her friends over questions of her own self-worth, particularly because she is a woman. Bella's difficulties reflect the broader personal and political questions about the relevance of feminism in the

twenty-first century. At issue are recent claims by postfeminists, which state that women have achieved the aims of second-wave feminism, rendering their struggle no longer applicable. Catherine Orr explains:

Postfeminism assumes that the women's movement took care of oppressive institutions, and that now it is up to individual women to make personal choices that simply reinforce those fundamental societal changes. Put this way, "feminist" practices become matters of personal style or individual choice and any emphasis on organized intervention is regarded as naïve and even oppressive to women. (34)

In *Rabbit*, Raine shows how crucial feminism still is through Bella's liminal subjectivity, as a person who hovers between the binaries of feminism and misogyny. Raine demonstrates that it is because of liminally situated women like Bella that we need to remain vigilant in feminist causes. Bella is all too ready to capitulate to the idea that women are not as good as men because women have not dominated in politics or the arts, for instance. Moreover, Bella does not feel in charge of her own life. In other words, to Bella, women have not provided enough evidence of their worth on either a personal or a global scale to be considered equal, in her mind, to men. But Raine makes it clear that Bella's oscillation about women's worth and significance is one of the many problems we need to continue to address in contemporary feminism if women are to achieve true equality.

The issues aired in the play – women's own uncertainty toward feminism, continued insidious sexism, and women's bewilderment about identity – mirror the problems that feminism faces in popular culture. Pamela Aronson studied young women's attitudes toward feminism and gender relations and found that a majority of participants in her study believe that "Feminism is primarily a way to redress workplace discrimination, in contrast to confronting issues that are central to basic survival as a woman" (918). Aronson also claims

that “[s]tereotypes against feminists have been powerfully advanced by the antifeminist movement and the media, which may have influenced these women’s views” (917). As an example, CNN reports that some women in the Millennial Generation (born after 1980) reject feminism outright, and they even blame women for not working hard enough. One twenty-six-year-old woman is quoted as saying, “If you have enough time to label yourself a feminist or complain about the injustice you receive as a female, then you aren’t working hard enough at your job, whether it be homemaker or corporate employee” (Weinberger). Implying that women should work so hard and so constantly that they do not have time to think critically about whether or not they are oppressed sends the wrong message to young women—that their opinions aren’t worth considering. Nonetheless, about a quarter of the women in Aronson’s study also express that they “had more pressing daily issues to worry about than feminism” (917). Additionally, Toril Moi notes that right-wing conservatives like Pat Robertson have scored a victory by alienating young women from their own cause: “Because equal rights have become generally accepted, Robertson implies, that demand can no longer define feminism” (1736). If people believe that gender equality is something they can take for granted, they fall victim to Baudelaire’s proverb: “The cleverest ruse of the Devil is to persuade you he does not exist!” After all, as Orr says, “How powerful is a sense of entitlement in a work (or any other) culture that has yet to recognize it? Is a sense of entitlement enough? Certainly the answer must be no” (33).

Many young women have been persuaded to see contemporary feminists as radical social climbers who want superiority, not equality. Another pressure on younger would-be feminists is that they don’t believe in the insidiousness of sexism, instead thinking it to be harmlessly ironic. Annadis G. Rudolfsdottir and Rachel Jolliffe explain that “[s]exism is dressed up as fashionably ‘retro,’ ironic and tongue in cheek, so that any criticism invites counter-criticism of humor failure and prudishness” (270). Nina Raine notes that feminism is associated with

having “no sense of humor,” which further undermines the way women are perceived in multiple aspects of their lives (Eppich-Harris 236).

In her own life, Raine says that as a young woman she and her friends did not want to call themselves feminists because feminism seemed to be a dirty word (Eppich-Harris 236). However, feminism as an “f-word” is not an exclusive problem in *Rabbit*. *The Telegraph* reports that other contemporary women playwrights were reluctant to call themselves feminists when interviewed about being women in the theatre: “Indeed, among all the writers I found a general unease with the word feminism. Not that they rejected it, but they found it difficult to define” (Auld). Nonetheless, Raine believes that the trends are shifting: “Feminism is a lot more fashionable now actually than it was when I wrote [*Rabbit*]” (Eppich-Harris 236). In Raine’s native England, Kira Cochrane called 2006, the year *Rabbit* hit the stage, “A good year for the F-word,” stating that women protested inequality all over the United Kingdom (20). The bad-news-good-news was that “[u]nfortunately, in 2006, a widespread, active feminist movement was as necessary as ever. Fantastically, there were millions of courageous, vital, and angry women worldwide who were more than happy to commit to it” (Cochrane 21). It is critically important that commitment to gender equality continues, since, as Myra Marx Ferree and Aili Mari Tripp caution, “The possibility that anti-feminist pressure could roll back important gains made by the women’s movement remains real, including in areas such as Scandinavia where cultural and institutional arrangements would appear at first glance to make political progress irreversible” (4). In the United Kingdom, there is still a 17% wage gap between men and women, despite the passage of the Equal Pay Act in 1970 (Cochrane 20). None of these problems can be solved through postfeminist rhetoric claiming total victory.

Despite feminist gains, ambivalence about contemporary feminism in the popular imagination resonates throughout *Rabbit*, which keeps the audience thinking about the play long after it is over. It’s worth noting that *Rabbit* is light

on plot, but in nearly every scene in the play, Raine presents gendered commentary. Bella is in the midst of a depressing rite of passage. She faces the imminent loss of her patriarchal father who is dying from a brain tumor. While grappling with the fact that she and her father have had an uneasy relationship for much of her life, Bella tells her friends that much of the tension between them comes from the fact that she is a woman. She believes her father prefers her brothers over her, deep down, and that he thinks women are inferior to men. While we do not meet Bella's brothers or her mother, we do see several flashbacks of combative conversations between Bella and her father. One of the many reasons Bella and her father clash is because he treats her like she is an irresponsible, incompetent child. Meanwhile, it's also Bella's twenty-ninth birthday. She feels her youth slipping away from her, and with her accompanying grief about her father, she has to face the responsibilities associated with being an adult child of dying and/or aging parents. Near the end of the play, she asks, "What am I going to do without him telling me what to do?" (58). To avoid her grief, Bella throws herself a birthday party, inviting her friends Emily, Sandy, and Richard to meet her at a local bar where she also runs into an ex-lover, Tom, and asks him to join their party. Wavering between staying at the bar or leaving to be with her dying father, Bella struggles to know where her loyalties should lie—to herself or to her overbearing patriarch.

Early in the play, Bella confides to her friend Emily that her father is dying. When Emily says that Bella should go to her father's side, Bella flashes back to a fight she had with her father, which reveals a hierarchy in Bella's family that is substantially influenced by gender. Bella is behind a closed door, and her father is yelling at her from the other side:

FATHER: Listen to me. You are not qualified to pass judgments on things in this house, things you know nothing about. This arrogance. . . . And this aggressiveness . . . I'm going to say one thing. One thing. I pay for everything in this house. I don't see

you paying for anything. I suggest you have a think about that next time you feel a lecture coming on. Lecture your mother if you want but don't think you can lecture me. If you're not going to come out, then I've got nothing more to say. (17; original emphasis)

The audience is given no background about this fight. However, the way he addresses her suggests that this scene represents Bella as a younger woman who is still living at home, and that this disagreement is emblematic of all their past disagreements. The father's speech is infused with gendered assertions – Bella is not allowed to be arrogant or aggressive, two qualities stereotypically used to describe strong women negatively. Also, as a non-paying member of the household, she is not allowed a vote in how it is run. She is not allowed to question her father, his decisions, or his behavior. The father's comment that Bella can treat her mother in this disdainful way reveals the little regard he has for his wife. And finally, if Bella will not submit to him and relent, then he will cut off contact with her. What may pass as a typical parental rant at first glance becomes a statement about gendered power in this relationship, which could account for some of Bella's ambivalence toward women, as well as her father. Bella's father is the ultimate patriarch, and as such, he treats the women around him like subservient vassals who must bow to his wishes.

In her life outside her family of origin, Bella has a good job in PR, plenty of money, close friends, and men who still want her, despite having their hearts broken by her. Like many young women, Bella is ambitious and sexually liberated, but she is also always on the defensive. She surrounds herself with combative relationships – fighting intensely with, first, her father and, second, her ex-boyfriend, Richard, two characters who parallel each other in both their treatment of Bella and their opinions about women. Bella's attitude alternates between defiant feminism and shocking misogyny, making her identity uncomfortably liminal. Rather than embracing the openness and complexity of

third-wave feminism, Bella allows her greatest fear, that women are in fact inferior, to creep into her interactions with her peers. Part of Bella's struggle with her identity is that her friends, with the exception of feminist Sandy, all dislike women. Her father, of course, hates them too. Early in the play, Bella's friend, Emily, chats with Bella about her coworkers and goes so far as to comment, "I just hate the fucking women" (12). Bella replies, "Course they're the worst" (12), one of several instances in which Bella demonstrates misogynist apologies.

Bella's liminal identity is demonstrated most immediately through her interactions with her ex-boyfriend, Richard, but the Freudian etiology of this relationship can be found in the relationship of Bella's parents. Bella symbolically takes on the role of "beleaguered woman," like her mother, who was treated "like shit" by her cheating husband, Bella's father (52). Bella rejects marriage as an institution because of her parents' obvious unhappiness, saying, "... I saw my mother wasting her whole life on other people. Mainly my father. And I don't want to do that" (55). Bella's anger toward her father is not solely the result of the way he treats Bella and her mother, though. She also considers his refusal to undergo treatment for cancer to be selfish and cruel. She has begged him to reconsider; however, he prefers to die on his own terms. In other flashbacks we see Bella and her father sparring about Bella's failures, one of which is the fact that she did not go to law school. She constantly defends herself against her father's criticism and condescension, yet she also internalizes his contempt and does not have the confidence to dismiss it altogether. Especially with Richard echoing much of her father's pronouncements, like his reiteration that Bella should have gone to law school and that she's wasting her life with a meaningless career in PR, Bella is brow beaten to the point that much of the dialogue in the play results from her arguments with her father and Richard.

Unhappy with both of her parental role models, Bella struggles to pin down an identity within which she can live. She desperately tries to be her own

person, rather than a corrupted reproduction of either of her parents. At one point, Bella recalls: "I can remember my mother holding me up in front of the mirror. Saying, 'Who's that? Who's that?' I can see her, see her face. But I can't see me. My reflection in the mirror" (57). This Lacanian memory conjures the claim that "the process of infantile self-discovery serves as a paradigm for all subsequent relations; the self always discovers more about itself through the eyes of the other" (Tong 143). Here, Bella unconsciously acknowledges that her own self-regard is heavily influenced by the gaze of many individual "others," with the negative influence of her mother's unhappy life strongly formulating her feminist identity. As a result, Bella refuses to succumb to traditional gender roles. But also, her continued friendship with Richard, whose patronizing and borderline abusive comments mirror Bella's father, shows, too, that Bella has adopted the role of martyr, like her mother. The only difference is that Bella refuses to get married, saying, "I don't see what's in it for me" (52). In the end, Bella's inability to self-actualize ties in to her failure to fully come to terms with her feelings about her parents. Feminist psychoanalytic criticism addresses this very issue:

... to free herself from what is holding her back, a woman must do more than fight for her rights as a citizen; she must also probe the depths of her psyche to exorcise the original primal father from it. Only then will she have the space to think herself anew and become who she has the power to be. (Tong 170)

Bella's relationships with her friends bear out her struggle to free herself from her family of origin, particularly her domineering father, with roles cast to represent Bella's past paradigms (Richard as domineering male; Emily as mistreated woman) and future aspirations (Sandy as self-actualized feminist).

One wonders why Bella would participate in the combative relationship she has with Richard when it makes her question herself so deeply. She could easily walk away from him, and in fact, she does hide in the bathroom for a time

in Act 1 after he tosses underhanded compliments at her, saying she's too good for her job. Bella recognizes this assertion of her "goodness" for the put down that it is – he thinks she was a coward for giving up on law school (29). In support of Bella, Sandy hates Richard almost as much as Richard appears to hate women. Sandy's stance is that Richard should have no say in Bella's life:

I can't bear this Bella. You're not allowed to be brainwashed by him anymore, you're not allowed to be bullied by him anymore, you're not sleeping with him anymore. You've got a mind of your own. He doesn't know the way your head works. *You know the way your head works.* (31; original emphasis)

When Bella protests that Richard does know her – almost better than she knows herself – Sandy retorts that Richard simply feels "[v]ulnerable" and "proprietary" because he still loves Bella and wants to have ownership of her life (31). This desire for ownership may result from an insecurity foisted on Richard for being a two-time loser in love. Not only is Richard Bella's "dumpee," he has also been married and divorced before his relationship with Bella. Sandy ridicules him behind his back to Emily, saying,

Sandy: He'll sit next to you and he'll tell you all about his ex-wife. I bet you. I bet you a scratchhead. He's always going on about having been married. I think he thinks it makes him sexy. You feel like saying, look, mate, we've all had our marriages. You're nothing special.

Emily: Oh have you been married too?

Sandy: Not yet but you know what I mean. (32)

As predicted, Richard mentions his wife to gain sympathy, and he also wallows in the fact that Bella cheated on him – with Tom, no less. But even more baffling is the fact that Richard still has a foothold in Bella's life, despite how he upsets her.

As a heartbroken romantic who tries to hide his pain with sparring wit, Richard challenges Bella's feminism by striking the pose of "victim" himself. Richard tries to recruit Tom to his cause, asking him to corroborate that women oppress men by treating men like sex objects and belittling their relationships. Richard replies that women objectify men through their sharing of sexual details, such as their partner's penis size, with their friends (42). His point is proven, unbeknownst to Richard, by the fact that Bella described Tom's genitals in graphic detail to Emily earlier in the evening (10-11). Richard goes on to say that women "... trivialize. That's what you lot do. You trivialize sex. Well, sex isn't trivial. It's important. It's . . . potent" (45). Bella and Sandy protest that they do not trivialize sex because it is one area in which women have the same amount of power as men. Richard snaps,

Oh don't let's start on this one. *Everyone* knows women are much more powerful than men. Oppression, oppression, blah blah blah. No. It's *men* who are being oppressed. By chauvinist women. Look at you. You're oppressing me right now you bitches. (46; original emphasis)

Richard believes that the feminist cause "*rewara[s]*" qualities in women which you would punish in men!" – qualities like aggression and ambition (46; original emphasis). He also claims that women are narcissists who, if they really wanted to be treated equally, would "shut up about it" (47). The implication of Richard's stance is that women should be seen and not heard, but his claim – that equality would follow women's silence – completely fails in its logic.

Nonetheless, Richard berates Bella about her self-righteousness, citing the fact that she always thinks that she's right and everyone else is wrong, not only because she's a woman but also because she's just like her father. She responds that her father's self-righteousness is entrenched in gender:

Bella: Do you know *why* my father always thinks he's right? And that I'm wrong?

Richard: Because he's your father?

Bella: No. Because I'm a woman and he's a man. Deep down, privately, he doesn't think women are as good as men. Nearly as good, but not quite. That's why he reminds me of you. So my mother will *never* be as important as him. . . . And my father thinks – he loves me very much, he loves us all very much – but deep down he thinks – my brothers are the talented ones. The clever ones. They're the ones he's proud of. Not me. (54; original emphasis)

What's worse is that Bella's identification with her father makes her question whether or not he and Richard are right about women after all. After a long argument with Richard, Bella finally admits her inner questioning:

Where are all the great women? Last night I realized – all my favorite authors are men. Why aren't any of my favorite authors women? (*Beat*) And it's not just writers. Composers. Conductors. Artists. I just don't think they're as good as the men. I don't think women are as good as men. (55)

Bella has held her own with the men, fighting them with vigor and clarity. Yet she cannot see the strength within herself. Bella has benefited in no small way from the feminist cause, and yet, after fighting with Richard and defending women throughout Act 2, Bella capitulates: "I don't know if I even like women. If I'm honest . . . I think I've got a prejudice against them" (55).

Raine specifically uses these moments to shock the audience, as she said in a recent interview:

This is so taboo, so taboo. I've got a woman who's set up as this absolute strong role model for women, I think, and then she pisses on it by the end of the play. She crumbles. I just thought it was so outrageous for a woman to stand up and say, "I just don't know; where are all the famous women conductors? Where are

the famous female Piccasos?" You know. There just aren't as many as men and why is that? Because they're just not as good? It's such a big deal and what was weird was the reviews really didn't pick up on that. (Eppich-Harris 234)

Raine calls this moment a revelation of Bella's deepest fears. In this climax of feminist ambivalence, one must ask, why do the reviewers fail to notice, or at least mention, the gendered critiques inherent in the play? Is our culture so entrenched in its sexism that audience members nod in agreement with Bella, believing, "She has a point"?

To agree with Bella is to miss Raine's genius entirely. Bella's prejudicial assessment of women only comes forward when she's reacting to others – in reaction to Emily, when she complains about her co-workers; and in reaction to Richard, when he complains that Bella is arrogant. Throughout the rest of Bella's arguments, she seems true to the belief that women are equal to men. The evidence in the play suggests that Bella's defensiveness is a key factor in her overarching ambivalence. But even Bella's reactionary behavior cannot stop Sandy from challenging Bella's attack on women. Sandy gets the final word in the argument, emphasizing the danger inherent with women who denigrate other women:

Sandy: . . . it shakes me up when you say you don't think women have got it in them. I don't ever want to hear you say that again.

You don't say that stuff.

Bella: Why not?

Sandy: (*Forcefully.*) Because there are people who are *waiting* to agree with you. (56; original emphasis)

To this point in the play, the question of women's equality has been a theoretical question among friends, but Sandy's argument is that applying this question to one's own life and personal philosophy has far deeper implications than Bella credits. The claim that women are not as good as men, Sandy would argue, plays

into the hands of those who would happily hold women back from fulfilling their potential. It's not that questioning feminism is forbidden; it's that women who undermine strides toward equality are complicit in their own backsliding, if not oppression. In fact, Sandy thinks they're worse than the most sexist men.

Bella's views about women are important because, with the impending death of her father, she will soon be patriarch-less, and by her own admission, lost. The passing of old, out-of-touch ideology is a good thing, but when that ideology is embodied by one's own father, there's certainly no satisfaction in losing it. Bella wonders what she'll do when she doesn't have her father around to tell her what to do anymore. It frightens her to think that without her father around to put her down, she'll finally have a chance to become a fully independent, self-actualized adult — one who can ultimately jettison Richard if she so chooses. Orr points out that a woman who struggles to define her feminist identity against the backdrop of parental influence, especially in third-wave feminism, “constructs feminism as a coming-of-age issue. In other words, figuring out her own feminism may become more and more a girl's rite of passage” (42). *Rabbit*, Raine maintains, is partly about losing one's childhood, and by extension, one's innocence (Eppich-Harris 221). As unlikely as that statement may seem when Bella and her friends unaffectedly relay intimate details of their sex lives, there is some truth to it. Bella's ambivalence toward women, influenced by the death of her father, shows a unique coming-of-age struggle for the third-wave generation. At the age of twenty-nine, Bella realizes that she can no longer take anything for granted. She feels the loss deeply, saying, “I'm twenty-nine. I'm never going to be twenty-eight again. I'm never going to be eight again. And I miss it. I've left so much behind. And it all gets lost” (57). As an adult whose patriarch has died, Bella will have to move on with her life knowing more fully what is actually at stake.

While the entirety of *Rabbit* unfolds in conflict and verbal combat, the last scene provides a touching glimpse at what Bella *has* lost as an adult in a

relationship with an imperfect father. Bella finally tells all her friends that her father is dying, and she decides to go to the hospital, hoping it's not too late to see him once more. As the lights go down on Bella's party and come up on her father, we witness a flashback in which he is speaking to a much younger Bella. The audience cannot hear or see young Bella, but we infer from his monologue that she has imagined seeing a monster in her curtain. Naturally, her father can't see anything. The scene recalls the opening of the play, when Bella can't see what her father is seeing — a diamond-shaped pattern on a table — and brings their relationship full circle. Here, for the first time in the play, her father comforts her, calling Bella by her pet name, “Rabbit,” and saying that there's nothing to worry about. To distract Bella from her fear, he advises, “Think about tomorrow. Think about tomorrow morning” (59). The father leaves the door open and a light on for her, and then says goodbye: “See you in the morning. Night sweetheart. Night night” (59). The tenderness at the end of the play shows a striking contrast with the former representation of their relationship. We finally see Bella's father not just as a misogynist or a cad. In this moment, he comforts her, and becomes the man who, Bella tells us, used to read her Dickens novels. As her father is dying, Bella's silence suggests an acceptance of reality that we heretofore have not seen. In this childhood memory, Bella advances through the rite of passage encapsulated in losing a parent, having faced her fears and accepted the inevitable.

That said, the end of the play has not unequivocally resolved Bella's feminist ambivalence.<sup>3</sup> As complicated as her feelings toward women have proven to be, it would be trite to resolve Bella's fluctuation with a smart buttoning up of the gender wars. Instead, Raine prefers to leave the question of women's equality spinning, much like the candleholder that Richard gives Bella as a present. He bought her an angel chimes candleholder that, when lit, causes the angels mounted on it to spin. At some point the angels start moving so fast that one cannot tell if they are moving clockwise or counterclockwise. The ends



of both Act 1 and Act 2 include a contemplation of the angel chimes, with the characters trying to decide which way the angels are spinning. Raine asserts that the uncertainty of the optical illusion is meant to be a reference to Tolstoy's novella *The Death of Ivan Ilyich*, in which Tolstoy describes the sensation of pulling out of a train station and not knowing for a moment which direction one is actually traveling – backwards or forwards – and the perception is bewildering (Eppich-Harris 218). Tolstoy's description connects not only to the slippage of time that we see in *Rabbit* but also to the liminal space we see Bella inhabiting as a woman and to the liminal moment between life and death as Bella's father is dying. Bella's feminist identity never becomes unequivocally solidified, but unlike her father, Bella lives to contemplate her ambivalence another day. Bella's survival symbolically suggests that women need to continue to interrogate their own ambivalence toward other women, as well as contemplate the role of feminism in our culture with fresh eyes. Our problems may not be magically solved through that introspection; however, it helps to be prepared for conversations that inevitably occur when we hear young women say the liminal phrase, "I'm not a feminist, but . . ."

## NOTES

1. Recent women playwrights at the Royal Court include Nina Raine, Vivienne Franzmann, Abi Morgan, April De Angelis, Kate Tempest, Rachel De-lahay, Clare Lizzimore, E.V. Crowe, Lucy Kirkwood, Bola Agbaje, Stella Feehily, and many others ("What's On" *Royal Court Theatre*). *The New York Times* reports that women like Carrie Cracknell, Anna Mackmin, and Lucy Bailey, among others, are succeeding as directors in London, as well (Wolf).
2. Reinelt mentions Alia Bano, Polly Stenham, Anupama Chandrasekhar, Anya Reiss, Molly Davies, and Debbie Tucker Green as British women playwrights who have had notable success. She does not mention Nina Raine, despite the fact that Raine has won

awards for her work, including the Evening Standard Charles Wintour Award for Most Promising Playwright in 2006.

3. Many of the questions raised in the personal relationships in *Rabbit* make their next logical step to the professional world in *Tiger Country*, Raine's epic hospital drama. While *Tiger Country* is outside the scope of this paper, it is worth mentioning that Bella's friend, Emily – who is a medic – is a central character in *Tiger Country*, which takes place a few years after *Rabbit*. Emily, a woman who hates "the fucking women" at work, struggles to become a fully competent doctor who not only can trust her instincts but can also grow the thick skin it takes to survive her job. Raine's *Tribes*, whose central character is deaf, also has its roots in *Rabbit*, which not only discusses Emily's work with a deaf doctor, but also illustrates, symbolically, people who are "deaf to one another" (Eppich-Harris). Raine's works, thus, form an unintentionally conceived trilogy of plays that intertextually interact with each other. Further study of *Tiger Country* and *Tribes* will show that their roots are found in Raine's first play, *Rabbit*.

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## A Conversation with Nina Raine, April 5, 2014

By Marcia Eppich-Harris

**Marcia:** How long has it been since you thought about *Rabbit*? You wrote that a while ago [2006].

**Nina:** Well, actually, they did it in San Paolo [Brazil] about a year or two ago, maybe like a year and a half ago or so.<sup>1</sup> I revisited it then because I went and saw it, and it was in Portuguese, but I got sucked right back into it. And that was really interesting because they went to town on my father scenes. They had some very well-known actor playing the dad, and they went with the surreal. It was just like the boldest production I've ever seen of that play because I wrote it thinking, "Oh I want to write something I can direct so I'm going to keep it really simple and it's going to be over one night basically," and I always just envisioned that the father scenes would just play out around the periphery of whatever you had making the bar or the restaurant set—that the father scenes would be quite stark and you'd just do it with lighting and they didn't need a set. And in this production they really had thought so much about the play and what it meant and they had a quite conceptual set. The bar was—they'd gone with the idea of childhood and how the play's partly about lost childhood—like that bit where Bella says, you know, "I was special, and I'm not special anymore" (*Rabbit* 56), so their bar set was like . . . . You know that sort of playpens where children play in little inflated plastic balls? They sort of swim, almost like a dry swimming pool with lots of balls?

**Marcia:** Wow.

**Nina:** Yeah, and so they'd imagined that it was a very trendy bar—that the theme in the bar was [a] playground and so [the actors] had to wade through these balls and then the table was like a little merry-go-round thing that you could spin