

Acting the Part
Gender and Performance
in Contemporary Plays
by Women

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Declaration

I declare that this thesis has been composed by myself,
is the result of my own work and has not been included
in any other thesis.

..... Julia Rösler
Julia Rösler

Contents

<i>Acknowledgements</i>		IV
<i>Abstract</i>		V
<i>Abbreviations of Plays</i>		VI
Introduction	— Staging the Other	1
1	— The Performance of Language	22
2	— The Art of Playwriting	73
3	— Playing with History	124
4	— Spectacle on the Stage	175
5	— No Laughing Matter	222
6	— Limits of Representation	269
Exit	— Threatening Theory ?	316
<i>Bibliography</i>		323

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Abstract

Acknowledging performance as a process through which gender identities are constituted, the thesis explores attempts in women's theatre to subject these very constructs to creative deconstruction. It offers a study of plays by Caryl Churchill, Sarah Daniels and Timberlake Wertenbaker. Setting their work in the context of prevailing discourses of representation, the analysis delineates the ways in which plays by women interrogate the Western tradition of meaning and perception. The thesis proposes theatrical performance as a strategic engagement with the very means by which women's position is constituted. Therefore, it argues that in women's dramatic work, the possibility of resistance, of agency and choice occurs in the playful adaptation of dominant discourse, allowing for new figurations of subjectivity. Exploring the difficulties and limitations involved in this strategy, the study evaluates how plays by women release a potential for transgression which dislocates the structures of representation.

Abbreviations of Plays

Plays by Caryl Churchill

<i>CN</i>	<i>Cloud Nine</i>
<i>MB</i>	<i>A Mouthful of Birds</i>
<i>TG</i>	<i>Top Girls</i>
<i>TS</i>	<i>The Skriker</i>
<i>VT</i>	<i>Vinegar Tom</i>

Plays by Sarah Daniels

<i>BH</i>	<i>Beside Herself</i>
<i>BR</i>	<i>Byrthrite</i>
<i>DG</i>	<i>The Devil's Gateway</i>
<i>HRH</i>	<i>Head-rot Holiday</i>
<i>MP</i>	<i>Masterpieces</i>
<i>ROD</i>	<i>Ripen Our Darkness</i>

Plays by Timberlake Wertenbaker

<i>AD</i>	<i>After Darwin</i>
<i>LN</i>	<i>The Love of the Nightingale</i>
<i>MT</i>	<i>The Grace of Mary Traverse</i>
<i>OG</i>	<i>Our Country's Good</i>

**I believe that today
more than ever
we need our own theater,
the theater whose stage is our heart,
on which our destiny and our mystery are acted out,
and whose curtain we see so rarely rise.**
(Hélène Cixous)

I want to play myself.
(Our Country's Good)

Introduction:

Staging the Other

'The theatre leads to threatening theory', one of Timberlake Wertenbaker's characters in *Our Country's Good* states, revealing an anxiety about the power of theatre to unsettle dominant modes of thought and perception. This observation emphasizes the subversive possibilities of performance, anticipating effects which go beyond the temporarily limited theatrical event. It is, moreover, a promising statement for women playwrights. Dealing with questions of subjectivity, women writing for the theatre use the performance space to articulate experiences not previously presented, shedding a critical spotlight on the discourses which determine and limit women's subject position. Their dramatizations expose these discourses as depending upon exclusionary processes which position women as other in the binary logic of identity. Plays by women set in motion a process of undermining the decisive logic of identity, opening up alternative possibilities in the field of sexual difference. Certain themes have emerged repeatedly in women's theatre. Key issues are the positioning of the subject within systems of signification, questions concerning women's sexuality and the body,

and the complex issue of language and its function in the formation of (inter)subjectivity. At the same time, plays by women explore the possibilities of alternative modes of representation which do not rely upon the marginalization and exclusion of female being.

The question of marginalization is also an issue for women working for the theatre. That women playwrights continue to be under-represented is widely acknowledged. Jane de Gay emphasizes that from a historical viewpoint novels and poetry were considered more suitable media for women writers. Women's work in the field of drama has remained the most obscure aspect of their aesthetic achievement. One of the various reasons is that dramatic work written by women was often produced and distributed anonymously; therefore, the full history of female playwrights is still to be written.¹ However, Elaine Aston points out that the attempts of feminist theatre scholarship to discover achievements of women playwrights, have led to the emergence of a historico-theatrical map that significantly differs from that established by the traditional canon.²

During the last decades, theatre made by women has changed its forms and styles considerably, exploring the representation of self and gender in a variety of ways. In their introduction to *Rage and Reason*, a collection of interviews with women playwrights, Heidi

¹ Jane de Gay, 'Naming Names: An Overview of Women in Theatre 1500-1900', *The Routledge Reader in Gender and Performance*, ed. Lizbeth Goodman (London, 1999), p.28

² Elaine Aston, *An Introduction to Feminism and Theatre* (London, 1995), p.23

Stephenson and Natasha Langridge acknowledge that the changes in British theatre are nothing short of a revolution: 'from a point where the woman playwright was almost an anomaly, to the present, in which more women are writing for the stage than ever before'.³ However, despite this development, women nonetheless continue to occupy largely secondary roles in the theatre and even today, a position of male-female parity has still not been achieved, whether in the theatrical workforce or in the balance of emphasis in the content of plays. Jennie Long's survey 'What share of the cake now?' underlines that women are still in the minority as far as staging plays is concerned while the technical side of theatre work remains very much a male-dominated area.⁴ The typical theatre production is, Sarah Werner confirms, still 'a male-authored play directed by a man, for a male artistic director, with male board members giving their approval'.⁵

This bias has consequences for the subject matter of plays. Most plays written this century represent a view and counter-view firmly embedded within a system of aesthetic thinking in which the male is the norm. On stage, the traditional subject has been the

³ Heidi Stephenson and Natasha Langridge, *Rage and Reason: Women Playwrights on Playwriting* (London, 1997), p. IX

⁴ Jennie Long, 'What Share of the Cake now? The Employment of women in the English Theatre', *The Routledge Reader in Gender and Performance*, pp.103ff
In 1987, Caroline Gardiner's survey 'What Share of the Cake?' commissioned by the Women's Playhouse Trust provided an overview of the employment of women in the English theatre. A comparative survey was undertaken by Jenny Long in 1994 to assess how the position of women working in English Arts Council funded theatres has developed. The survey also examines the productions being staged by these theatre companies.

⁵ Sarah Werner, 'Notes on Sharing the Cake', *The Routledge Reader in Gender and Performance*, p.109

male subject as a locus of identification. Sue-Ellen Case argues that examining the masterpieces of the theatre, women are asked to identify with 'Hamlet, Oedipus, Faust and other male characters imbued with specifically male psychosexual anxieties'. The idea of universality that correlates with this presentation represses, however, the gender inscription in the notion of self.⁶ The marginalization of the female voice in the theatre is also manifested by their under-representation in the theoretical canon. Standard works on British theatre pay scant attention to women's writing. Werner confirms that there is still a strong sense that theatre is male: 'Pick up any anthology designed as an introduction to drama, and only a few of the plays will be by women'.⁷ Consequently, the canonical values are acknowledged as part of the patriarchal belief-system determining society and its cultural production.

However, while women's theatrical work is still not adequately represented in the traditional canon, there is a growing body of theoretical work which concentrates exclusively on the achievements of female playwrights. The work of Michelene Wandor has been a springboard for an ever-increasing amount of dramatic criticism which pays attention to the role of gender.⁸ Dealing with post-war political theatre, Wandor's analysis is concerned with the relationship

⁶ Sue-Ellen Case, 'Towards a New Poetics', *The Routledge Reader in Gender and Performance*, p.145

⁷ Sarah Werner, 'Notes on Sharing the Cake', p.111

⁸ Michelene Wandor, *Understudies: Theatre and Sexual Politics* (London, 1981); *Look Back in Gender: Sexuality and the Family in Post-War British Drama* (London, 1987)

between sexual politics and the process of production. Gender is acknowledged as an important variable in the creation of theatrical meaning and communication. Wandor emphasizes that the aesthetic and social meanings generated by a dramatic text will vary according to the gender focus and bias of the work itself. Showing gender to be a powerful determinant of the dramatic action, her approach has opened up the way for new possibilities for the interpretation of plays.

This study offers an analysis of the representation of gender in relation to questions of performativity and theatrical performance. In this context, the term performativity designates the understanding of gender as being constructed iteratively through complex citational processes. Judith Butler emphasizes the need to rethink gender categories outside the metaphysical concept of substance. She takes as point of departure Foucault's view of power as producing the subject it controls and claims to merely represent.⁹ Butler's analysis recognizes that power is, therefore, not imposed externally but works as a process which involves and forms the subjects. In this context, she argues that the formation of gender positions, as other ritual social dramas, requires a performance that is constantly repeated. Therefore, there is no stable identity behind the expressions of gender, but that identity is performatively constituted by the very

⁹ Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble : Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (London, 1990), p.2

expressions that are signified as its results.¹⁰ However, these processes are located within a normative framework determined by constraints and prohibitions. Language is identified as constituting the contemporary field of power. Butler proposes that there is no position outside these normative structures, but only a critical genealogy of the legitimating practices of the signifying economy. The performative dimension in the formation of subject positions locates both the legitimization of and the emancipation from these restrictive discourses *within* the very process of repetition. The possibilities of gender transformation are to be found in the arbitrary relation between the various acts. However, how does re-enactment become subversive? And what are the implications of this understanding of gender for the representation of female identity in the context of theatrical performance?

The female body as subjected to objectification and constraint is one of the key elements of the analysis. The body is placed centre stage in order to challenge both authoritative social theories as well as women's traditionally ascribed roles within the context of mainstream theatre. Stanton B. Garner highlights that women are subjected to a dual form of appropriation. Traditional stagings of the female body have been criticized since they de-realize the female body as subjective presence, while at the same time re-materializing

¹⁰ *ibid.*, p.25

it as a sexualized object in the economy of desire.¹¹ In the dramatization of the ways in which women's bodies are disciplined within restrictive discourses, attempts to reclaim the feminine body have played an important part in feminist theory as well as in women's dramatic writing. The question of such a reclamation, however, proves to be problematic. Does it not presuppose a notion of the body as the passive ground, surface or site of cultural inscription? This approach seems to indicate a possible return to a body that has not been interpreted by cultural meaning, existing before the structuring of patriarchal law in a prediscursive reality. Is the body in women's theatre seen as a basis on which gender and systems of compulsory sexuality operate? Or is it itself revealed to be already constructed by political forces, aimed at keeping it bounded and controlled by the markers of sex? And how, then, do power relations work in the very formation of sex and its materiality?

The conditioning of text and performance by the media requires to look at how the theatrical forms themselves work to represent gender positions. Writing and working within a system of representation that traditionally - as Cixous puts it - 'encourages the double perversion of voyeurism and exhibitionism'¹², stagings of the female body always risk the re-creation of the traditional images of

¹¹ Stanton B. Garner, *Bodied Spaces: Phenomenology and Performance in Contemporary Drama* (Ithaca and London, 1994), p.188

¹² Hélène Cixous, 'Aller à la mer', tr. Barbara Kerslake, *Modern Drama* 17 (1984), p.547

women as objects of the male gaze. From a feminist perspective, the image of woman on stage participates directly in the dominant ideology of gender. Case confirms that the conventions of the stage produce a meaning for the sign woman, which is based on their cultural associations with the female gender. Woman as other is mythicized into just another version of the Same, functioning as the reflection and reassurance of masculine identity.¹³ What are the implications of this for women's theatrical creativity? Challenged by the premise that 'women do not have the cultural mechanisms of meaning to construct themselves as the subject rather than the object of performance'¹⁴, how can women playwrights use and subvert the defining and structuring role of the stage/audience relationship? Involved in the codes and reception assumptions of performance, how can they undermine the repressive dramaturgy of the Oedipal tradition, generating an idea of (theatrical) representation that escapes commodification? How - if the gaze, as control of language and symbol is male, and if language itself is phallogentric - can the sentences or performances on stage which are directed at challenging the hegemony of patriarchy, avoid speaking from the ideology of the masculine culture?

This study evaluates the ways in which women playwrights use the restrictive theatrical discourse to open up spaces in which the

¹³ Sue-Ellen Case, *Feminism and Theatre* (London, 1988), p.120

¹⁴ *ibid.*, p.120

rearticulation and redefinition of women's position can take place. However, a change in the subject matter of plays is not sufficient but in this context, the deconstruction of the forms of representation, dialogue and modes of perception is regarded as a necessary precondition. Therefore, the investigation does not focus exclusively on the dramatic text but takes into consideration existing forms and styles of women's drama in order to highlight different approaches to performance theories and theatrical interpretation. Raising questions concerning the political nature of traditional art forms, it illustrates issues of visual presentation, body, language, voice, structure, use of time and space. Evaluating plays which are concerned with the gendered politics of representation, the aim of this study is to indicate different approaches of dramatists to transform and extend the concept of theatrical performance in order to find a form that is appropriate for the representation of women.

The plays dealt with in this study are marked by an awareness of the processes of objectification involved in (theatrical) representation. Yet if the deconstruction of women's position in society and on stage involves a (re)construction, the question arises concerning the terms in which this construct is effected. Defining a specific subject position for women, feminists are easily accused of undertaking an essentialist strategy which merely reinforces the traditional power structure. The accusation of essentialism continues

to be employed against claims made by woman-conscious theorists and writers alike. Diana Fuss proposes that 'few other words in the vocabulary of contemporary critical theory are so persistently maligned, so little interrogated, and so predictably summoned as a term of infallible critique'.¹⁵ However, is not the devaluation of essentialism effectively employed to demobilize collective action, weakening women's position in the political struggle? This study examines the ways in which plays by women attempt to articulate a political position for women while at the same time unsettling the very discourses within these positions are negotiated. Moreover, dealing with the interplay subject/other, the thesis offers an exploration of the structuration of difference in theatrical practice. How do the plays figure difference? What kind of being is at issue in women's theatre?

In this study, the concern is with dramatic work in which female being is the problematic motive for play action, expressing possibilities of breaking down limiting gender constructions. Caryl Churchill, Sarah Daniels and Timberlake Wertenbaker offer very different approaches to the question of gender politics. They have been selected because they share a deep critique of the discourses through which Western thought has claimed to discern reality and which contribute to the disciplining of the female subject. Each

¹⁵ Diana Fuss, *Essentially Speaking: Feminism, Nature, and Difference* (London, 1989), p. XI

playwright envisions distinctive modes of resistance and movement beyond the cultural inscriptions and signifying practices which determine women's subjectivity. The reading of these plays is determined by a definition of woman-conscious drama offered by Rosemary Curb: it may be called 'feminist, lesbian, lesbian/feminist, or post-modern, or it may eschew labels. It may be called theatre of the oppressed, disloyal to civilization or obscene'¹⁶. Woman-conscious theatre unravels women's collective imagination in a psychic replay of myth and history. However, in this analysis, the term 'woman-conscious' is not employed as a unifying sign but as a space for critical negotiation.

Exploring the various ways in which the three playwrights under discussion both politicize and historicize the very representations which determine our understanding of the female subject, the study refers to their potential to address its specificity without lapsing into an insufficiently material consideration of the multiple ways in which that subjectivity has been constructed. In this context, the aim of the discussion is to indicate the playwrights' attempts to transform and extend the concept of femininity. Since the three playwrights have written over 40 works of drama, the thesis focuses its discussion on selected texts in order to avoid a merely superficial reading of each work. The following chapters

¹⁶ Rosemary Curb, 'Re/cognition, Re/presentation, Re/creation in Woman-Conscious Drama: The Seer, The Seen, The Scene, The Obscene', *Theatre Journal* 37:3 (1985), p.302

address questions of subjectivity and the other, identity and difference, representation and perception, historicization and history, all in relation to the female subject in representation and performance and all with a view towards developing a productive critical practice in (women's) theatre studies.

Rather than apply one interpretative model to these plays, the study aims at exploring them from multiple perspectives, taking into account sources ranging from feminist theory to recent linguistic, psychoanalytical and philosophical research. The analysis engages with the sexual dynamics and exclusionary processes at work in discourses which have been criticized for their phallogentric and logocentric biases. Tracing understandings of women in the formation of Western intellectual tradition, the interrogation focuses upon the continuing impact of these discourses on women's positioning in the social and political context. However, the thesis intends to deal with these discourses in a way anticipated by Jo Anna Isaak who observes Freud's concern regarding the intentions of H.D.: the poet was supposed *not* to engage on behalf of Freud's work since the psychoanalyst feared that this investigation would proceed like the 'inevitable course of a disease once a virus has entered the system'.¹⁷ This, however, indicates that the analysis attempts to

¹⁷ Jo Anna Isaak, *Feminism and Contemporary Art: The Revolutionary Power of Women's Laughter* (London, 1996), p.6

move *beyond* what is offered by these positions, working out various points of departure for alternative interpretations of the subject.

Evaluating existing theories of sexual/gender politics and their active representation in the performance space, the theoretical debate about the nature of language and its ideological implications will be the starting point of this study and one of the constant focal points of the analysis. Barthes stresses the necessity to engage with language in order to effect change in social relations: 'how absurd it is to try to contest our society without ever conceiving the very limits of the language by which we claim to contest it; it is trying to destroy the wolf by lodging comfortably in its gullet'.¹⁸ In plays by women, language as a set of values is revealed to be one of the most significant factors in the production, maintenance and change of relations of power in society; it is often dramatized as just another means through which man objectifies both the world and women's subject position. Many positions confirm that language is a social contract; everything that is represented and thus received through language, is already loaded with meaning inherent in the conceptual patterns of the speaker's culture.

Evidence that language exists as a subject in women's dramatic writing includes not merely direct references to discourse, but also

¹⁸ Roland Barthes, *Empire of Signs*, tr. Richard Howard (New York, 1982), p.8

references to the act of speaking, keeping silent, as well as discussions of women's and men's patterns of speech, expression and use of language. The debate on sexist language is taken up in Daniels' plays: as Julie, one of the characters in *Ripen Our Darkness* points out, she 'cannot respond to any essay with the word *mankind* in it. Because it has the kind of alienating effect that really fucks me off' (*ROD* III:18). This and many other scenes in women's dramatic work focus on the bias concerning the lexicon of language, drawing attention to the ways in which linguistic inequalities may be related to social inequalities between women and men. While addressing the customary linguistic subordination of women into the inclusive but repressive power of the universal 'he', plays also emphasize the ways in which derogative terms are used for women's speech. Moreover, they dramatize the ways in which language strategies in mixed-sex interactions serve to silence or depreciate women as interactants.¹⁹

The fact that women's and men's social roles do not have equal value in our culture also has its parallel in language and many critics have argued that it is through language that much of women's continued subordination is structured. Moreover, claiming that language is 'man-made'²⁰, for it encompasses the meanings of men who have arrived at a definition of the world from a position of

¹⁹ Research by Donald Zimmerman and Candance West indicates that in mixed-sex pairs, up to 97% of the interruptions are men interrupting women. See: Mary Crawford, 'Gender and Conversational Humour', *New Perspectives on Women and Comedy*, ed. Regina Barreca (Reading, 1992), p.29

²⁰ Dale Spender, *Man-Made Language* (London, 1990), p.11

power, feminists emphasize that there are systematic gaps in language which make it difficult or rather impossible to express women's experiences. Dale Spender comments on the semantic practices that assume the masculine as the universal form by claiming that for women, the only semantic space is negative. Language is not neutral: 'it is not merely a vehicle that carries ideas. It is itself a shape of ideas'.²¹ From this point of view, language functions as a rigid framework; it is the idiom of male power which determines that women can only experience themselves through a form of representation that inferiorizes them.

However, this view of language as being controlled by women's oppressors neglects the complexities of how oppressive gender ideology is unconsciously inscribed in language and thus determines what is perceived as reality. While acknowledging the disadvantageous position of women in language and the constraints determining this position, this study reassesses the ways in which power operates in and through discourse. Chapter One – *The Performance of Language* - sets out the theories of language that will be employed throughout this study. The analysis of Wertenbaker's *The Love of the Nightingale* and *The Grace of Mary Traverse* interrogates relations of language to power and of agency to performance. Looking at the ways in which these plays identify in language the oppressive structures of meaning and signification as

²¹ *ibid.*, p.139

well as the potential to deconstruct these schemas, this chapter evaluates the attempts to re-position them in different non-repressive ways. The issue of performativity is further explored in Chapter Two. *The Art of Playwriting* takes Wertenbaker's *Our Country's Good* and *After Darwin* as examples for plays which are determined by the self-reflexive investigation of the issues of representation involved in theatrical practice. Evaluating theories of theatre and performance, the study illustrates the interaction of written text, actor, audience and theatrical production in the meaning-making process. The interrogation of concepts of mimesis and repetition are linked to questions of subject formation. From this perspective, the study delineates the ways in which Wertenbaker's plays adopt the strategy of performance as a means of subverting restrictive discourses.

The analysis of how plays by women disclose repressive structures of thought and representation is continued in the third chapter. *Playing with History* focuses upon Churchill's *Cloud Nine*, *Vinegar Tom* and *Top Girls* to evaluate the implications for the understanding of history as a constitutive discourse of subjectivity. Apart from using the distancing effect of historicization, plays by women frequently use the past to explore the present. Whether by re-performing, adapting or re-telling plays from the past, the attempts to make visible those others obliterated from history has

been a fertile ground from which the universalism claimed by phallogentric knowledge is questioned. However, the participation of women in history is in itself not unproblematic since the construction of narrative works within the circle of ideological reflection. Any attempt to confront the politics of existing histories should, therefore, entail a consideration of the problematizing of history, exploring its processes of marginalization and exclusion.

Communication and meaning in theatrical representation are closely related to questions of the gaze. Female performance on stage stands as theatre for public consumption by a spectator. Traditionally, the dramatic action unfolds in a world where the gaze is the privileged medium through which the stage expands to encompass the audience. In order to open up new spatial possibilities for the theatre, this process inevitably involves a (re)definition of the spectator's role and of the dynamics of audience perception/participation present in text and performance. *Spectacle on the Stage* offers an analysis of the ways in which Daniels' dramatic work attempts to (dis)engage the spectator in the play of gazes which constitutes representation. Evaluating the processes through which Daniels' *Ripen Our Darkness*, *Masterpieces* and *Head-rot Holiday* attempt to unsettle the spectator's gaze, the study considers the implications of the gaze for the constitution of identity

and difference, looking at how the relationship to the other determines the formation of subjectivity.

Daniels' plays are determined by the strategy of attempting to inscribe the audience in a more active role, challenging its seemingly secure position as onlookers. However, if plays are to enter into a dialogue with the audience, what kind of spectators do they assume? Jill Dolan examines the ways in which identification processes are structured and limited by the framework of representation. Her analysis highlights the gender-specific nature of theatrical representation. The traditional theatrical apparatus works to constitute an ideal spectator, 'carved in the likeness of the dominant culture'.²² Therefore, performance addresses the male spectator as an active subject, asking him to identify with the male hero of the narrative; however, the same representations 'tend to objectify women performers and female spectators as passive, invisible, unspoken subjects'.²³ Dolan highlights the necessity for subversive performance practices to acknowledge heterogeneity, to take into account a range of 'spectatorial communities, separated and differentiated by class, race and ideology'.²⁴ In this context, the study investigates whether the plays ask their spectators to complete, to co-produce the play in their

²² Jill Dolan, 'The Discourse of Feminisms: The spectator and representation', *The Routledge Reader of Gender and Performance*, p.288

²³ *ibid.*, p.289

²⁴ Jill Dolan, 'Epilogue to "Desire cloaked in a Trenchcoat"', *Acting Out: Feminist Performances*, eds. Lynda Hart and Peggy Phelan (Ann Arbor, 1993), p. 113

own historically/culturally/sexually specified position, thus allowing for a polyphony of voices.

To make women's voices heard, playwrights attempt to unsettle the seemingly stable position of the male subject and the pretended seriousness of phallogentric language. The analysis of Daniels' plays *Beside Herself*, *Byrthrite* and *The Devil's Gateway* in Chapter Five – *No Laughing Matter* - discusses the implications of laughter as performative for a concept of subjectivity that shatters the foundations of Western metaphysics and closure, thus making possible new perspectives on the construction of gender positions. This approach does not necessarily presuppose that the dramatic writings dealt with are funny through and through. Umberto Eco states that one laughs only, and especially for very serious reasons;²⁵ for Arthur Koestler, laughter may be entirely mirthless and humourless.²⁶ In the introduction to her study of contemporary feminist artists, Jo Anna Isaak explains that she uses laughter as a metaphor for transformation, for thinking about cultural change.²⁷ Taking this definition as a starting point, the thesis investigates the ways in which the bacillus of laughter unbalances set categories of thought and representation which continue to determine women's subject position. Does laughter offer possibilities of rethinking the

²⁵ Umberto Eco, *The Limits of Interpretation* (Bloomington, 1990), p.172

²⁶ Arthur Koestler, *The Act of Creation* (London, 1989), p.61

²⁷ Jo Anna Isaak, *The Revolutionary Power of Women's Laughter*, p. 5

very concept of transgression and transformation, allowing for a strategy that moves beyond mere reversal and opposition towards a creative potential for cultural change?

The study aims to highlight a variety of communicative functions of humour in theatrical representation in order to demonstrate possibilities of redefining the interplay that takes place between audience and stage. The themes dealt with include the particular comical and critical function of parody as subversive repetition. Moreover, the study investigates the connection between humour and power in social interaction and, finally, looks at the relevance of carnivalesque discourse for women's dramatic work. Relating its theoretical insights to the question of comic performance and to the use of humour in woman-conscious theatre, the thesis intends to open up new perspectives on the creative potential of laughter and on the critical dimension of the comic. The discussion of the carnivalesque as a means of subverting the fixity of logos and meaning is linked to theories of transgression and identity in the last chapter. *Limits of Representation* offers a reading of Churchill's *A Mouthful of Birds* and *The Skriker*. The plays engage with the repressive framework of signification and identity construction, dramatizing the dislocation of representational structures in a heteroglossic play of language and performance.

However, what is the critical potential released by the heteroglossic play of discourses? The preoccupation with the subject's self-liberation from oppressive discourses leads to an increasing awareness of the necessity to redefine the structure of meaning and (inter)subjectivity which allows for alternative configurations of the subject. How can the subject be rethought, in its diversity, in terms quite other than those implied by various dualisms? Where is the point of departure for a redefinition of subjectivity and representation? The plays dealt with in this study reflect in very distinctive ways the contradictions constitutive of women's position. This analysis takes these difficulties not as obstacles which must be negated, and which have to be overcome but rather, acknowledges them as part of a productive process. Investigating the processes of how plays by women negotiate between deconstruction and transformative politics, the aim of this study is to reveal performance as a politically empowering strategy, a tactics that leads to 'threatening theory'.

1 The Performance of Language

But the one alive that cannot speak,
that one has truly lost all power.
(*The Love of the Nightingale*)

Women are not allowed to speak...
otherwise they challenge the monopoly of discourse
and theory exerted by men.
(Luce Irigaray)

Taking language as a starting point for a new kind of thought on politics and the subject, much of Timberlake Wertenbaker's writing focuses on the analysis of the process and conditions of a language production dominated by the phallus as transcendental signifier. This chapter addresses questions of language, gender and power in Wertenbaker's plays *The Love of the Nightingale* and *The Grace of Mary Traverse*. Interrogating the role of speech and silence in the constitution of subject positions, the study critically evaluates possibilities for women to define themselves and their experiences apart from the signifying potential of dominant discourse. In the context of subjectivity, the questions of agency and performance are two central issues of the analysis. Raising the issue of the relation between subject and object, the investigation proceeds to offer a thorough analysis of the status of self and other in dominant

discourses and a critical re-evaluation of the problem of dialectic sovereignty.

Exposing the values embodied in patriarchal society both *The Love of the Nightingale* and *The Grace of Mary Traverse* explore the possibility of defining a specific identity/language for women. The question of how and why women and men identify with language differently and how this identification determines their respective relationships to the construction of social/sexual power is a key element in Lacanian psychoanalytic theory.¹ His theories have generated a large amount of woman-conscious criticism. In the Lacanian model, the acquisition of the linguistic elements of language is dominated by the metaphor of the phallus since it coincides with the child's first encounter with the male-dominated rules of culture. The process of subject formation and language acquisition is inseparably interwoven with sexuality; the subject acquires a speaking position only by confronting the question of castration and difference. This process takes place in the transposition from the Imaginary to the Symbolic. The 'Imaginary' is the pre-Oedipal world of imaginary identifications which enable the child to gain a coherent sense of identity. The experience of fragmentation, insecurity and lack of bodily boundaries is replaced by a sense of self as unified whole. This process is, however, based

¹ The Lacanian ideas dealt with in this paragraph are drawn from several sources: Jacques Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis*, tr. Alan Sheridan (London, 1977), pp.53ff; *Ecrits*, tr. Alan Sheridan (London, 1977), pp.2-7; Elizabeth Grosz, *Jacques Lacan – A feminist introduction* (London, 1990), pp.148ff

upon a misrecognition since the child always realizes itself in the image of an other.

For Lacan, the subject comes into being – that is, begins to posture as a self-grounding signifier within language and thus takes up a culturally recognizable place - only on the condition of a repression of the pre-individualized pleasures associated with the maternal body. Castration is the final step in the process of separation that posits the subject as signifiable, which is to say separate, always confronted by an other. What Lacan refers to as *castration* is, therefore, the loss in sexuality resulting from the inevitable mediation of desire by signification. Losing access to the mother's body, the child is caught up in the constant search for linguistic substitutes. Words stand for objects; they only have to be spoken when the first object becomes unattainable.

In the Lacanian model, the phallus is the first sign which the child encounters; it constitutes the *a priori* condition of all symbolic functioning and allows access to all the other meanings symbolized in the same way in language. Only difference makes sense: the signifier does not stand for the thing, but meaning is acquired only in relation to another signifier. The 'real' is conceived by Lacan as the *unspeakable*, that element of the unconscious that exceeds representation, a world of unmarked space and time that cannot be mediated by signs. It is both the effect of representation and also its

excess, that which remains outside discourse as potential trauma, always threatening to rupture representation.

The Grace of Mary Traverse dramatizes the constraints determining language; the play explores the ways in which patriarchal control over discourse prevents Mary from attaining autonomy and self-knowledge. In the course of the play, she enters a Faustian pact for knowledge and power, crossing gender and class barriers to explore the patriarchal value system. Mary's search for autonomy leads to an investigation of gender and its configurations of power. During this process, she realizes that her identity, which is based upon a concept of femininity, is determined and effected by cultural and political discourses. The focus on language and its role in the constitution and restriction of subjectivity interacts with a critique of political institutions and class hierarchies. Mary joins and initiates radical political protest; however, her campaigns for liberty fail. The end of the play does not leave the audience with any ready answers but it highlights the implications of the dominant power structures for identity formation and social existence.

The play opens with an image of Mary who practices discourse '*facing an empty chair*' while her father – Giles Traverse – '*stands behind and away from her*' (MT I/1:59). 'What is nature ?' asks Mary but immediately checks herself: 'No that's a direct question' she says, having recognized discourse as being restricted by a social structure which determines that this topic is not to be 'part of the conversation'

(MT I/1:60). Monique Wittig argues that even though it has been accepted that there is no such thing, there remains within culture a core of nature which still resists examination. This aspect is defined as the heterosexual relationship, the obligatory social relationship between man and woman:

These discourses speak about us and claim to say the truth about us in an apolitical field, as if anything of that which signifies could escape the political in this moment of history, and as if, in what concerns us, politically insignificant signs could exist.²

As a formation that denies its historicity by grounding itself in some transcendental principle, nature is not to be questioned. Being excluded from discourse, this positioning conveniently serves to defy possibilities of change on the ground of pre-given, seemingly innate qualities which appear to be inevitable consequences of a biological difference. However, while primary givens like nature appear outside discourse and function as incontestable referents and transcendental signifieds, this construction masks the genealogy of the power relations through which they are constituted. The exclusion from discursive intelligibility is only superficial. In fact, nature is a constitutive element inside the very discourse by which it is produced.

In *The Grace of Mary Traverse*, Wertenbaker re-opens the question of nature and its relation to discourse; the play's project is

² Monique Wittig, 'The straight Mind', *The Straight Mind and other Essays* (London, 1992), p. 25

to make strange that what is taken for granted and, thus, to expose the repressive mechanisms that establish it as given, natural and self-contained. Brecht demanded that what is natural must have the force of what is startling; to effect change it is, therefore, necessary to reveal the natural as part of a particular ideological world-view, serving particular interests: 'Nature is suddenly imbued with an element of unnaturalness, and from now on this is an indelible part of the concept of nature'.³ The *Verfremdungseffekt* consists of turning the object of which one is to be made aware from something ordinary, familiar, immediately accessible, into something peculiar, striking and unexpected. From this perspective, the purpose of art is to cause irritation with the 'everyday, self-evident, universally accepted occurrence'.⁴ Wertebaker's play intends to make visible the power structures which determine hierarchized relationships:

LORD GORDON. Mr Manners, I'm a different man.

MR MANNERS. What happened ? A legacy ?

LORD GORDON (*Quietly*). Power.

MR MANNERS. Ah. Power.

LORD GORDON. Isn't power something you know all about ?

MR MANNERS. Yes, but it is not something I ever discuss.
(*MTI/3:70*)

The historicization of narrative is a key element of Brechtian alienation. Even though *The Grace of Mary Traverse* is set in the

³ Bertolt Brecht, 'Short Description of a New Technique of Acting which produces an Alienation-Effect', *Brecht on Theatre*, ed. and tr. John Willett (London, 1964), p.144

⁴ *ibid.*, p.140

eighteenth century, it is not – as Wertenbaker remarks in the introductory note – a historical play. The eighteenth century merely functions as a '*valid metaphor*' which is chosen to '*free the people of the play from contemporary preconceptions*' (MT Note:57). Therefore, it allows the audience to distance itself from the characters and events on stage and, thus, to become conscious of power dynamics and representational structures which are of relevance to contemporary experience.

At the beginning of the play, Wertenbaker presents the audience with an image of the dutiful daughter who submits to the law of the father. In *The Grace of Mary Traverse*, language as subject of the dramatic action seems to already 'expect us'; entering the symbolic order, the speaking subject is introduced into a system based on fixed hierarchies in which individual expression is shaped by a pre-existing field of social practices and meanings. Being spoken by and through language itself, Mary is not the source of discourse but merely the site of its articulation. Her father functions as a teacher, prescribing the role that his daughter will play in communication and social relations. The voice of Giles Traverse represents the voice of phallic power. In Freudian thought, the introjection of parental authority occurs in the guise of the father's voice which is the superego. Lacan introduces the term *paternal metaphor* that signifies a place and a function which is not reducible to the presence/absence of the real father as such since even in his

absence, the child experiences the Oedipal crisis through cultural institutions.

The relationship between daughter and father in the play's opening scene reminds us of Hélène Cixous' claim that man works very actively to produce woman. For Cixous, the roles pupil/teacher signify the classical relationship between women and men: 'it's man who teaches woman, who teaches her to be aware of lack, to be aware of absence ... He will teach her the Law of the Father'.⁵ Wertebaker's staging of a continuous learning process seems to follow this perspective, offering an image of the female subject as an effect of social conditions. However, the personification of language in the character of Giles Traverse reopens the question of authority and power. Does not this presentation reconsolidate the metaphysics of the (male) subject in the dominant father figure, presenting language as an activity determined and initiated by a wilful person? The subject as sovereign is presumed in Austin's account of performativity which may be utilized to illuminate this problem.⁶ In Austin's theorization of speech acts, it seems as if by virtue of the power of a subject or its will, a phenomenon is named into being. This epistemological model offers the idea of a pregiven subject or agent that is postulated as the causal origin of the performative act. In this sense, performativity requires a power to effect or enact what

⁵ Hélène Cixous, 'Castration or Decapitation?', tr. Anette Kuhn, *Signs* 7/1 (Autumn 1981), p.42

⁶ J.L. Austin, *How to do Things with Words* (Oxford, 1962), p.6

it names while the success of a performative is based upon the intention governing the action of speech.

In *Limited Inc*, Jacques Derrida criticizes this value of propriety and of original authenticity; he defines power not as the function of an originating will but as always derivative. For Derrida, a performative utterance can only succeed if its formulation repeats a *coded or iterable* utterance: 'A standard act depends as much upon the possibility of being repeated, and thus potentially of being mimed, feigned, cited, played, simulated, parasited, etc....'.⁷ Austin, however, explicitly excludes 'parasitic' and the non-serious uses of language such as a play in theatre or a recitation of a poem: '[a] performative utterance will, for example, be in a peculiar way hollow or void if said by an actor on the stage, or if introduced in a poem, or spoken in a soliloquy'.⁸ Contrary to this argument, Derrida regards these examples as determined modifications of a general citationality, a general iterability of language.

Bakhtin's theory of internal dialogism confirms that every word and sentence which is heard or spoken by us is a repetition (or re-enactment) of previous uses that is saturated with earlier dialogues: 'Each word tastes of the context and contexts in which it has lived its socially charged life'.⁹ This argumentation underscores that words do

⁷ Jacques Derrida, 'Signature, Event, Context', *Limited Inc*, ed. G.Graff, tr. Samuel Weber and Jeffrey Mehlman (Evanston, 1988), p.18

⁸ J.L.Austin, *How to Do Things with Words*, p.22

⁹ M.M.Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, ed. Michael Holquist, tr. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin, 1981), p.293

not exist in a neutral and impersonal language before they are appropriated by the speaker but the word in language is always 'half someone else's'; it is a microcosmic dialogue which is overpopulated with the intentions of others. Utterances, from this point of view, participate equally in a synchronic and diachronic dimension. They are always both contextual and individual and, therefore, understood as responsive links in the continuous chain of other speech acts. Therefore, the appropriation of words always sets in motion an interplay between subject and object; discourse is revealed to be a site of conflict which operates on the boundaries between self and other. Derrida confirms that since every utterance takes place within the general iterability of language, this positioning violates the apparently rigorous purity of every event of discourse or every speech. Following from this, the category of intention will not disappear; it is still part of the speech act, but from that place is no longer able to determine the entire scene and system of utterance.¹⁰

Authority, in this sense, is always dependent on the repetition or citation of a prior and authoritative set of practices. Relativizing the notion of authority involves, however, a reassessment of how power operates in and through discourses. Developing a view of gender that is not a given social/cultural attribute but a category constructed through performance, Judith Butler concludes that there is no power that acts but merely a reiterated acting that is power in

¹⁰ Jacques Derrida, 'Signature, Event, Context' , p.18

its persistence and instability. Rather than defining gender as a product of social technologies, it is seen as part of the production process. This continuous process is confirmed in Wertenbaker's play: 'we 'll continue tomorrow with repartee and do a little better, I hope' (*MT* I/1:61), Mary's father announces. However, gender as performative, as a 'doing' is not 'a doing by a subject who might be said to pre-exist the deed' but the subject itself is performatively constituted by acts, including acts that signify a particular gender.¹¹ Butler's argumentation implies a reciprocal interpretation of the relationship between discourse and the subject. An approach whereby discourse constructs the subject is, therefore, reformulated as a *citation of the law*. The law is not given in a fixed form prior to its citation but it is the very citation of the symbolic order that is its very production.

From this perspective, gender is no stable identity or locus of agency from which various acts proceed; it is constituted in time through a stylized repetition of acts. The acquisition of being through the citing of power implies a complicity with power in the formation of the subjective 'I'. The subject is not merely a passive recipient of an identity dependent upon external elements but is itself an active part of the constitutive process. For Butler, the very concept of citationality that determines the process of gender production generates subversive possibilities in the inevitable slippage arising

¹¹ Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble*, p.25

from the enforced repetition of social performance.¹² As in the case of all citational processes, gender performance never precisely repeats the absent 'original' but there is always a rift between the culturally established concepts and their specific re-enactments. Possibilities of (gender) transformation are, therefore, to be found in the arbitrary relation between these acts. The very dependence of the law on citation produces opportunities of a resignification of this law through subversive repetition. Thus, in gender's very character as performative resides the chance of contesting its reified status. This correlates with Derrida's view that citation is never exact but can break with every given context, engendering an infinity of new contexts in a manner which is absolutely illimitable. Reiteration thus undermines and sustains both the permanence of the law and the subject's identity. Yet how can the subversive potential exceed our knowledge, alter the shape of sites and imagine new and unsuspected subject positions ?

The performative acts of gender/subject constitution are determined by a normative framework of social constraint and prohibition, controlling and regulating the shape of the production. In order 'to be agreeable' (*MT* I/1:60) and to become a social being, Mary has to place herself in a position within the symbolic order that is in essence patriarchal, one which is sanctioned by and which guarantees masculine structures of representation. When Giles

¹² Judith Butler, *Bodies that Matter : On the Discursive Limits of Sex* (London, 1993), p.15

Traverse commands that 'You're not here to express your *desires* but to make *conversation*' (MTI/1:60), he demands her submission to the oedipalization of desire, to a femininity as passive, castrated and silent, a mere 'ornate platter served for [men's] tasting'(MTI/4:71). In Lacanian thought, language hollows being (Imaginary) into desire (Symbolic); while the symbolic order separates us from the objects of our desire (unity with the mother and her substitutes) it also converts needs into desires which can never be satisfied. Based on the experience of a lack, language produces a split subject torn between the apparent fixity of the symbolic order and unconscious desires. However, following Lacan, the imaginary realm of subjectivity is always threatened by disintegration: 'So tell me how in this perfectly ordered universe you explain the chaos of the human soul?' (MT III/4:103) asks Mary, and reveals that the meaning of language is always potentially vulnerable to the unconscious disruption based on the underlying presence of desire which threatens the apparent autonomy of the subject.

The Grace of Mary Traverse shows that within a language dominated by the Law of the Father, women's experiences are marginalized and inarticulable. In a patriarchal framework, the production of subjects is determined by limitations and control while this regulation is disguised as a protective measure. This view of language as a coercive political instrument is also central to Wertenbaker's dramatic adaption of the Philomele myth. *The Love of*

the Nightingale is a play about speech and silence, truth and falsity and about the clash with an apparently legitimate authority. The Greek myth is employed to make the audience aware of the power structures embedded in language, emphasizing its impact upon the construction of subjectivities. Procne and Philomele – the two daughters of Pandion, king of Athens - are separated after Procne's marriage to Tereus, king of Thrace. When Philomele accompanies Tereus on a sea-trip to visit her sister, he rapes her and cuts out her tongue to hide his crime. Pretending that Philomele is dead, Tereus deceives Procne, preventing her from searching for her sister. In *The Love of the Nightingale*, Wertebaker dramatizes how Philomele finally manages to break her silence and to depict her sufferings during the festival of the Bacchae. The revolutionary impetus of this revelation is manifested in the killing of Tereus' heir Itys. However, at the end of the play, the characters are transformed into birds, a metamorphosis that is used by Wertebaker to address new forms of communication and subject formation.

Examining the foundations of Western thought, Wertebaker's play focuses upon the argument that patriarchy is based upon the systematic oppression of women's experiences:

HERO. Sometimes I feel I know things but I cannot prove that I know them or that what I know is true and when I doubt my knowledge it disintegrates into a senseless jumble of possibilities, a puzzle that will not be reassembled, the spider web in which I lie, immobile, and truth paralysed.

HELEN. Let me put it in another way: I have trouble expressing myself. The world I see and the words I have do not match.

JUNE. I am the ugly duckling of fact, so most of the time I try to keep out of the way.

ECHO. Quiet. I shouldn't be here at all.
(LN 9:20)

Caught in a world structured by male-centred concepts, women are not in a position to define the code and context which control their lives. Language as determining perception, as a means of thought-control, is shown to be among the most important sources of women's alienation. 'Babbling in alien and alienating tongues'¹³, women are not merely left without any possibility of knowing and representing themselves, they also remain outside the historical process.

However, the opening scenes of *The Love of the Nightingale* also indicate a form of communication between women that is located outside patriarchal structures. The play dramatizes the transition to patriarchy through the separation of Procne and her family. With the installation of patriarchy, Luce Irigaray argues, the daughter is separated from her mother. She is transplanted into the genealogy of her husband, has to live with him, bearing his name, likewise his children.¹⁴ The Female Chorus confirms that 'Procne will always be a guest there, never call it her own' (LN 4:6). In the play,

¹³ Mary Daly, *Gyn/Ecology: The MetaEthics of Radical Feminism* (Boston, 1978), p.1

¹⁴ Luce Irigaray, 'Sexes et parentés', cit., Margaret Whitford, *Luce Irigaray – Philosophy in the Feminine* (London, 1991), p.119

this rupture also involves a separation from women's specific means of communication amongst each other: 'Where have the words gone?' asks Procne; separated from Philomele in a 'strange land', she is cut off from communication:

PROCNE. My sister. (*Pause*) My friend. I want to talk to her.
... I cannot talk to my husband. I have nothing to
say to my son. I want her here. This silence ... this
silence ...
(*LN 4:7/8*)

Procne describes a specific language which enables women to generate meaning, expressing and exchanging their views and experiences: 'Everything that was had a word and every word was something. None of these meanings half in the shade, unclear'(*LN 1/4:7*). This scene illustrates a space women are able to occupy without being silenced; it is a space that is not mediated by men.

The sisters' exchange is characterized by a playfulness, an indeterminacy that defies the seriousness and restrictions of a patriarchal discourse determined by hierarchized relationship:

PROCNE. How we talked. Our words played, caressed each
other, our words were tossed lightly, a challenge to
catch. Who shares those games with her ?
(*LN 4:7*)

This exchange and/or merging of words proposes alternative configurations of subjectivity. Procne speaks as both herself and Philomele; it is not an 'I' addressing a distinct 'you', but a 'we'. It is not possible to distinguish between these two, which is one, which is

the other but they are continually interchanging. The interaction of Procne and Philomele evokes a mode of intersubjectivity in which the otherness of the other is acknowledged. The play proposes a reciprocal dialogic exchange instead of a strict dichotomous distinction between subject and object. Thus, Procne's speech does not express the subsumption of one identity into the other but a fusion without loss.

The scene dramatizes a coexistence of both speech and pleasure, identity and difference. The sisters' interaction is presented as bodily experience. Their pleasure recalls Irigaray's view of female sexuality which reveals a privilege not to the visual but to touch:

Woman 'touches herself' all the time, and moreover no one can forbid her to do so, for her genitals are formed of two lips in continuous contact. Thus, within herself, she is already two – but not divisible into one(s) – that caress each other.¹⁵

However, the separation of the two sisters signifies the violent break between women and their pleasures through patriarchy. For Irigaray, the question of language is closely connected with that of female sexuality. She argues that feminine language is determined by a plurality of meaning, a heterogeneity which negates any notion of a single, unified truth. However, in Wertebaker's play the impossibility to express woman's desires determines the dramatic action:

¹⁵ Luce Irigaray, *This Sex which is not One*, tr. Catherine Porter (Ithaca and New York, 1985), p.124

PHILOMELE. You touched my hand on the ship once, by mistake and once I fell against you, a wave, you blushed, I saw it, fear, desire, they're the same.... Take me with you.

CAPTAIN. We will ask Tereus.

PHILOMELE. We will ask the gods within us . Love...

CAPTAIN. ...your power ...

PHILOMELE. Not mine ... Between us, above us.
(*She takes his hand and puts it on her breast. TEREUS enters.*)

TEREUS. Traitor ! Traitor ! Traitor !
(*He kills the CAPTAIN*)
(*LN 12:27*)

In this scene, Philomele defies the authoritative determination of her pleasures. However, her self-assertive sexuality is to remain inarticulate in dominant discourse. The play shows clearly that what is most strictly forbidden to women is that they should attempt to express their own pleasure since this attempt would bring into question all the syntactical norms of language, undermining the underpinnings of logical discourse.

The notion of male-biased truth is confirmed in *The Grace of Mary Traverse* when Mary shows the realm of female sexuality to be one of the most revealing examples of the hierarchical oppositions which determine logic and perception:

MARY. Why don't you look and see what it's like ? When you talk of sulphurous pits, deadly darkness, it's your own imagination you see. Look. It's rich, solid, gently shaped, fully coloured. The blood flows there on the way to the heart. It answers tenderness with tenderness, there is no gaping void here, only soft bumps, corners, cool convexities.
(*MT II/4:89*)

In dominant discourse, the female sexual organ represents '*the horror of nothing to see*. [It is] a defect in this systematics of representation and desire. A "hole" in its scopophilic lens'¹⁶ writes Luce Irigaray. *The Grace of Mary Traverse* dramatizes the fact that within male imagination, woman is denied a viable presence; she is defined as lack, negativity and darkness, in short as non-being. However, Irigaray reverses the negative value assigned to feminine sexuality and locates her specificity in a multileveled libidinal energy. Mary's speech follows this argumentation and asserts a full and positive sign of sexual difference designed to replace the Lacanian lack which constitutes the basis of patriarchal structure. Her monologue reveals the psychic mechanisms inherent in the act of looking: men's misperception of the female body as lack is based upon the masculine anxiety of castration.

However, Mary's demand to '*look and see what it's like*' (*MT* II/4:89) still maintains the reliance on vision as a metaphor for truth and objectivity. This perspective supports an idea of vision as a direct, unmediated apprehension of the world of transparent objects. Her monologue confirms an irreducible materiality of the female body. Is this perception a necessary precondition for woman-conscious practice or merely a reverse-discourse which nevertheless takes the structuration of power relations and the linguistic basis of

¹⁶ *ibid.*, p. 26

patriarchy as its starting point, thus accepting and involuntarily supporting these interpretations as unquestionable facts ?

The Grace of Mary Traverse reveals an acute awareness of the gendered positions available in discourse. From this point of view, a woman 'talking about reason is like the merchant talking about nobility' (MT I/1:60) and whereas Giles Traverse presents his argument 'logically' and makes a 'brilliant speech', his daughter's role is to 'make the other person say interesting things' (MT I/1:60). Within a discourse of having/not having, and presence/absence, in language cultural intelligibility is constituted through the mutually exclusive positions of *being/having* the phallus.¹⁷ Women find themselves caught in a rather paradoxical position; they 'are' the phallus in the sense that they function as object or Other of masculine desire; reflecting that desire their role is to confirm the subject's identity. The phallus determines all the other binaries which categorize and differentiate what is perceived as reality. Derrida confirms the inherent hierarchical structure of these oppositions; one of the two terms governs the other (axiologically, logically, etc.) or has the upper hand.¹⁸ This system of meaning is seen by Luce Irigaray as the underlying structure of psycholinguistics: *activity/passivity, culture/nature, reason/chaos*, all of which signify *Man/Woman* and degrade woman by identifying her with the other.

¹⁷ Jacques Lacan, *Ecrits*, p.289

¹⁸ Jacques Derrida, *Positions*, tr. Alan Bass (London, 1987), p.41

In *The Grace of Mary Traverse* it becomes clear that the other is always the dominated. Monique Wittig confirms that societies are based upon the necessity of the different/other at every level, economically, symbolically, linguistically and politically. Without this concept, these societies are not able to function. To constitute a difference and to control it is an act of power, since it is essentially a normative act.¹⁹ However, the underlying motivation for this struggle is fear. Suggesting that difference produces great anxiety, Jane Gallop remarks that polarization, of which sexual difference is the classic example, tames and binds that anxiety.²⁰ Through women's construction within a system of hierarchical binaries that give shape to the subject's experiences and reality, male supremacy and female subordination are constantly (re)produced. 'What ? Turn female now?' asks Mary later in the play when Mrs Temptwell suggests to her that she 'should burst into tears' (*MT II/4:91*) to avoid losing her fortune to Mr Manners. Thus, Mary rejects her assigned role of being the weaker sex determined by emotions and irrationality opposed to men's strength and reasoning.

However, Mary observes that 'men have so much power and still so much fear' (*MT I/4:95*) and with this statement, Wertenbaker re-opens the discussion of male dependency on woman as reflection of themselves as coherent being. Hegel sees the appearance of the

¹⁹ Monique Wittig, 'The straight Mind', p.28

²⁰ Jane Gallop, *The Daughter's Seduction: Feminism and Psychoanalysis* (London, 1982), p. 93

Other as indispensable to the very existence of consciousness as self-consciousness: '*Das Selbstbewußtsein erreicht seine Befriedigung nur in einem anderen Selbstbewußtsein*'.²¹ Human desire is always constituted, Hegel argues, under the sign of mediation. It has as its object a desire, that of others. For Kojève, this desire is always the desire of manifestation, the desire to be recognized:

In other words, all human, anthropogenetic Desire – the Desire that generates Self-consciousness, the human reality – is, finally, a function of the desire for recognition.²²

Only the dialectical interaction with another self-consciousness transforms the subjective certainty of being into truth by attaining an objective reality. To impose the idea the subject has of itself, it engages in a struggle to the death for recognition with the other. In *The Grace of Mary Traverse*, this signifying dependence of the subject in the locus of the other as a point of self-realization is made explicit in the character of Lord Gordon, 'a man of stunning mediocrity' (*MT I/3:65*). 'Please make me noticed', he prays to God, but it is only when he exerts his power over women and rapes Sophie, that he 'feels exceptionally lively' since 'everyone pays me attention now' (*MT I/3:68*).

In Hegelian thought, otherness is incorporated as an inclusive feature of the subject's self-consciousness. Kojève stresses that in

²¹ G.W.F Hegel, *Phänomenologie des Geistes*, eds. Hans-Friedrich Wessels and Heinrich Clairmont (Hamburg, 1988), p. 126/28-30: 'self-consciousness achieves its satisfaction only in another self-consciousness'.

²² Alexander Kojève, 'Introduction to the Reading of Hegel', *Deconstruction in Context: Literature and Philosophy*, ed. Mark Taylor (Chicago, 1986), p.101

the development of self-consciousness, the 'I' begins as *Being for itself*, excluding the other which exists as an object marked with the character of a negative entity. Hegel develops a perception of the 'I' as the point of departure and arrival for the relationship between self and other:

The 'I' is the content of the connection and the connecting itself. Opposed to an other, the 'I' is its own self, and at the same time it overarches this other which, for the 'I' is equally only the 'I' itself.²³

Sartre underlines the conception of the other as the 'recognition of my being'. In *Being and Nothingness* he explains that Hegel's other is of interest only to the extent that it is another 'Me, a Me-object for Me, and conversely to the extent that [it] reflects my Me.'²⁴ The *Bildung* of self-consciousness, of the Spirit, is no true dialogue with otherness, but the presumed other is merely a different appearance of the Spirit itself.

In *The Love of the Nightingale*, the problem of dialectic sovereignty and the role attributed to the other determines the characters' relationships; it becomes evident when Tereus rapes Philomele:

PHILOMELE. I do not love you.

TEREUS. Then my love will be for both. I will love you and love myself for you. Philomele I will have you.
(LN 13:30)

²³ G.W.F.Hegel, 'Self-Consciousness', *Phenomenology of Spirit*, tr. A.V.Miller (Oxford, 1977), p.104/26-29

²⁴ Jean-Paul Sarte, *Being and Nothingness*, tr. Hazel E. Barnes (London, 1958), p.23

Seeking to find satisfaction through others, subjects establish a relation to objects secure from Phenomenology's 'pathway of doubt' and 'highway of despair'.²⁵ In Hegelian thought, dialectics establishes the social relations of civil society; behind every citizen lies the primeval struggle between master and slave. Lacan applies this process to the emergence of the speaking subject. According to Lacan, the subject begins in the locus of the other. For him, the dependency on others begins with the confusion of subject and other in the mirror stage: the first effect of the *imago* on the human being is an effect of alienation. It is in the other that the subject identifies with himself and first experiences himself. This phase is seen as the structural ground for later identifications which determine the subject's perception of identity, preparing the constitution both of ego as well as of the dichotomy between subject and object.

In the mirror phase, the 'I' emerges from a moment of specular capture when the subject is located in an order outside itself to which it will henceforth refer. In the specular image reflected back from the mirror, the subject receives a false sense of stable identity, of itself as a coherent, unified whole, as *ego ideal*. Lacan regards the mirror stage as fundamentally illusionary, a fictional act which nonetheless determines the subject's perception of itself; it is

a drama whose internal thrust is precipitated from insufficiency to anticipation – and which manufactures for the subject, caught up in the lure of spatial identification, the succession of

²⁵ Frederick C. Beiser, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Hegel* (Cambridge, 1993), p.70

phantasies that extends from a fragmented body – and, lastly, to the assumption of the armour of an alienating identity ...²⁶

Following Lacan, the mirror phase is the starting point for an intensifying 'dispossession of being' which allows the subject access to an identity residing in the field of the other. At this stage, the 'I' is both subject and object at the same time; the very image that places the child divides its identity into two. From this moment, identity is always based upon an image that is reflected back, like the reflection from a mirror.

This notion of exteriority which first appears in the guise of the subject's mirror image later intensifies through parental images and cultural representations. During this process the *moi* becomes more and more explicitly dependent upon that which might be said to be the other. This development continues in language; the specular image is maintained as the prototype for the world of objects. For Lacan, the mirror stage exhibits in an exemplary situation the symbolic matrix: the 'I' enters the symbolic order in a primordial form before it is objectified in the interaction with others (a process which involves a chain of identifications) and before language restores to it, in the universal, its function of subject.²⁷ Language, in Hegelian dialectic, is a medium of *Entäußerung* (externalization) which makes the confrontation with otherness possible: '[The estrangement of the

²⁶ Jacques Lacan, *Écrits*, p.4

²⁷ *ibid.*, p.2

self], however, takes place in language, in words alone, and language assumes here its peculiar role'.²⁸ However, the structure of communication itself shows the dependence on the other. Kristeva remarks that every discourse is destined for another: 'there is no speech without reply, even if it is met only with silence'.²⁹

The Grace of Mary Traverse and *The Love of the Nightingale* offer a dramatization of the use of the other as a means of replaying the fantasy of wholeness, exposing the mechanisms by which masculinity depends upon women as both the castrated other and externalized lack. In this process, the feminine merely reflects back and guarantees a phallogentric self-sufficiency, enabling Lord Gordon to enjoy a momentary conviction of total presence without absence or lack. 'The sword is his voice and his will' (*MTI/3:69*) observes Mary and the depiction of Lord Gordon suggests the ways in which power is wielded by women's position of 'not having', revealing their lack as essential to the construction of an apparently autonomous male identity. Cixous identifies the dialectical circular movement of subject constitution as 'the self-absorbed, masculine narcissism, making sure of its image, of being seen, of seeing itself, of assembling its glories, of pocketing itself again'.³⁰ This position is also confirmed in the *Love of the Nightingale* when Philomele accuses Tereus: 'There's nothing inside you. You're only full when you're filled with violence' (*LN*

²⁸ G.W.F.Hegel, 'Culture and its realm of actual reality', *Phenomenology of Mind*, tr. J.B. Baillie (London, 1949), p.529

²⁹ Julia Kristeva, *Language the Unknown*, tr. Anette Menke (London, 1989), p.267

³⁰ Hélène Cixous, *The Newly Born Woman*, tr. Betsy King (Minneapolis, 1986), p.94

15:31). Only woman as nothing, as inscriptional space of masculinity, as site of man's unconscious in language allows him to look like something – positive, potent and meaningful.

Irigaray confirms that representational, cultural and social structures are products of what she calls a fundamental ho(m)osexualité: the male desire for the same which places women outside representation. She criticizes philosophical interpretations of (inter)subjectivity which manifest the attempts to privilege unity at the expense of plurality and difference. Irigaray interprets the binary subject/other as nothing but the phallogocentric erasure of the female sex. Sexual difference is eradicated between the sexes in systems that are self-representative of a masculine subject. Within this discourse, all others are reduced to the economy of the Same and, therefore, the female subject is unrepresentable; it is the sex which, within this signifying economy, is not one.³¹ Claiming to include the feminine as the subordinate term in the dialectical relationship male/female, this economy in fact excludes it. However, the feminine has no separate or fully independent existence as an absolute outside but merely constitutes what must be excluded from discourse to posture it as internally coherent. Even though the female subject is marginalized in discourse, it nevertheless constitutes an important part of it. Or, as Virginia Woolf puts it, 'imaginatively [woman] is of the highest importance;

³¹ Luce Irigaray, *This Sex Which is not One*, p.74

practically, she is completely insignificant. She pervades poetry from cover to cover; she is all but absent from history'.³²

The Grace of Mary Traverse addresses the male bias of traditional phenomenological models and creates an acute awareness of what signifies femininity within this framework. Marginalized by language and an identity imposed by the patriarchal order, women are beyond representation; they 'dare to walk but leave no trace' (MT I/1:62). Learning her assigned role, Mary must become 'like air. Still. Weightless. Invisible', her presence 'leaving no memory', an existence that is revealed by Mary's servant Mrs Temptwell to be a living death:

MRS TEMPTWELL. She went in and out of a room with no one knowing she'd been there. She was so quiet, your mother, it took the master a week to notice she was dead. But she looked ever so beautiful in her coffin and *he couldn't stop looking at her*. Death suits women. You'd look lovely in a coffin, Miss Mary.

MARY. I don't need a coffin to look lovely, Mrs Temptwell.

MRS TEMPTWELL. No, some women don't even have to die, *they look dead already ...*
(MT I/1:63, my emphasis)

The same notion of female identity as marginalized from discourse is expressed in *The Love of the Nightingale*. In this play, Wertebaker stages a conscious-raising process of how language works to position woman as other. The dramatic action is centred around the importance of language as a political force. Tereus

³² Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own* (London, 1928), p.69

publicly declares his right to power. His definition of legitimate power structures is masked as a descriptive fiat which seems to be unquestionable; it is a dramatization of the authoritarian word that excludes dialogue:

FIRST SOLDIER. Why are we here ?

SECOND SOLDIER. What are we waiting for ?

FIRST SOLDIER. Why aren't we going home ?

SECOND SOLDIER. Why haven't any messengers been sent to tell everyone we're safe ?

TEREUS. I have my reasons...
my knowledge is greater than yours, that is my duty,
just as yours is to trust me.
(LN 10:23)

This scene gives expression to the forces working towards verbal and ideological unification. Bakhtin's exploration of unitary language and his idea of heteroglossia provide useful insights on this exchange. Unitary language controls and governs the relation between self and other; it imposes specific limits upon the workings of heteroglossia and is vitally connected with the processes of sociopolitical and cultural centralization.³³ At the beginning of the play, Philomele's incessant questioning still threatens the very basis of patriarchal authority – its monopoly of incontestable truth and knowledge. For this reason, however, questions are 'suppressed in the adult ... for the sake of order, peace' since the Male Chorus – presented as slavish conformists, aligning themselves with the institutions of the

³³ M.M. Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, p.271

patriarchal state – ' wouldn't want to live in a world that's always shifting' (LN 10:22). The view that political power also occasions restriction of thought finds its parallel in *The Grace of Mary Traverse* when Mary recognizes the power of questions: 'What is a question, Sir, but a thought that itches? Some are mild, the merest rash, but some are cankerous, infectious, without cure' (MT III/1:97).

Tereus effectively exploits language as a resource of power, creating a public space that requires the silence of the subordinates and in which any utterance is defined as disobedience to the state. Proclaiming a reality which often contradicts the evidence of the physical world, Tereus' illocutionary act causes 'the ugly duckling of fact ... to keep out of the way' (LN 9:20). Declaring that 'Procne is dead' (LN 11:25), Tereus separates the two sisters, preparing for Philomele's rape and mutilation. However, when Tereus rapes Philomele, she refuses to be 'another victim. Grovel. Like the rest of us' (LN 15:34). Realizing the signifying potential of language, Philomele makes Tereus aware of his own vulnerability:

PHILOMELE. What did you *tell* your wife, my sister, Procne, what did you *tell* her? Did you *tell* her you violated her sister, the sister she gave into your trust? Did you *tell* her what a coward you are and that you could not, cannot bear to look at me? Did you *tell* her that despite my fear, your violence, when I saw you in your nakedness *I couldn't help laughing* because you were so shrivelled, so ridiculous and it is not the way it is on the statues? (LN 15:35, my emphasis)

Philomele reveals *telling*, the act of speech itself, as an act saturated with power. With her speech, Philomele enters a scene of rivalry

where what is contested is her place in public discourse as speaker, as user of signs rather than a sign-object, an item of exchange.

Occupying the voice, insinuating herself into the voice of the father, Philomele exposes Tereus' seemingly untouchable position as potentially occupiable:

PHILOMELE. Have they ever *looked at you* , your soldiers, your subjects ?

TEREUS. That's enough.

PHILOMELE. And they obey you ? *Look up* to you ? Have the men and women of Thrace *seen* you naked? They will all know what you are.
(LN 15:35, my emphasis)

The dialogue foregrounds the power of the look, emphasizing the effects of the gaze within the constitution of self. As phallic activity, the gaze displaces the deep anxiety about women's bodies, about their castrating powers. By fixing its object, the gaze keeps it at a distance, making it controllable. The scene dramatizes Tereus' desire to perceive himself as constituted outside the reciprocal look, occupying a stable position of visual mastery. However, Philomele challenges the omnipotence of his look; Tereus becomes aware of *being-looked-at* and as such is exposed to the construction by others. Directing the gaze at Tereus (*'have they looked at you ?'*), Philomele's speech act sets in motion a process that undermines his imaginary self-presence and evokes in him the fear of losing control and succumbing to the terrifying void. This threat is manifested in the scornful, mocking laughter of the crowd which reminds us of an

incident in Pushkin's *Boris Godunov* that Bakhtin reports; he notes that Dmitry, the false pretender to Russia's ancient throne, lives through a nightmare in which 'the people swarmed on the public square, and pointed laughingly at me, and I was filled with shame and fear.'³⁴ Laughter, in this context, signifies a shift in power relations. Destroying any hierarchical distance and elevation, it delivers the object into the fearless hands of investigative experiment.

The confrontation between Tereus and Philomele dramatizes the clash of two narratives. Tereus' version insists upon the invisibility of women, on their inability to voice their experiences. However, Philomele's story challenges the very process of marginalization and silencing: 'Yes, I will talk !' (*LN* 15:35). Philomele's investigations de-phallicize and de-idealize Tereus' body and integrity which leads to the psychic disintegration expressive of the absolute annihilation of masculinity: ' Take the sword out of your hand, you fold into a cloth' (*LN* 15:35) she says and it becomes clear that Tereus cannot live up to his own image embodied in the statue, the cultural manifestation of his patriarchal power. However, where is the critical departure from that patrilineage performed in the course of the recitation of Tereus' terms? Philomele does not attempt a redefinition of patriarchal discourse neither does she offer a different set of terms. Her challenge is nothing more than a reverse-

³⁴ M.M. Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, tr. Hélène Iswolsky (Bloomington, 1984), p.XII

discourse which dialectically reinstalls the version it seeks to overcome. As Barbara Freedman suggests, woman can only look back as homogenized construct of male imagination.³⁵ To return the look would mean to return it from a male position, thus supporting the existing power structures. The question is, then, how to develop new ways of looking, of deconstructing the phallic gaze and rethinking the possibilities of representation in order to arrive at forms of alterity and difference that cannot be subsumed under the universal category of a determining masculine identity.

Tereus' reaction confirms the necessity of power to hide its own structures in order to survive: 'You threatened the order of my rule' (*LN* 16:36) declares Tereus and - exerting his power over speech - 'cuts out Philomele's *tongue*', thus defining her in a non-speech act. Irigaray points out that women are not allowed to speak since 'otherwise they challenge the monopoly of discourse and of theory exerted by men'.³⁶ For this reason, Philomele's experiences become invisible; she 'didn't exist' (*LN* 15:34) and is 'No one. No Name. Nothing' (*LN* 18:40). Now, Tereus thinks her even 'more beautiful in her silence': 'You are mine. My sweet, my songless, my caged bird' (*LN* 16:37), a description that mirrors Mary's former existence as her father's 'brightest adornment' (*MTI*/1:61).

³⁵ Barbara Freedman, *Staging the Gaze – Postmodernism, Psychoanalysis and Shakespearean Comedy* (Ithaca and London, 1991), p.151

³⁶ Luce Irigaray, 'Women's Exile', *The Feminist Critique of Language: A Reader*, ed. Deborah Cameron, tr. Couze Venn (London, 1980), p.91

From this perspective, meaning is generated through the oppression of women's experiences that merely remain 'a cry outside time'.³⁷ In dominant discourse, Philomele's rape is 'no more than an unlikely story' (*LN* 8:19), a myth, 'the oblique image of an unwanted truth, reverberating through time' (*LN* 8:19). In *Mythologies*, Roland Barthes identifies myth as a delusion which functions to naturalize history. Myth is defined as a type of speech, as a form of communication:

Myth does not deny things, on the contrary, its function is to talk about them; simply, it purifies them, it makes them innocent, it gives them a natural and eternal justification, it gives them a clarity which is not that of an explanation but that of a statement of fact.³⁸

In this sense, mythical meaning turns an arbitrary sign into a seemingly natural one, and in doing so, the mythical sign imposes itself as empirical fact. Therefore, Barthes argues, progressive thought should always take into consideration the reversal of the terms of 'this very old imposture' in order to uncover history there and finally to identify nature itself as historical.

However, in *The Love of the Nightingale* myth that functions as constitutive outside of a representational system which is based upon exclusion, is held up for critical scrutiny. This critique is voiced by the Male Chorus:

³⁷ Julia Kristeva, 'Polylogue', *The Kristeva Reader*, ed. Toril Moi (Oxford, 1986), p.10

³⁸ Roland Barthes, *Mythologies*, tr. Annette Lavers (London, 1972), p.156

MALE CHORUS. And yet, the first, the Greek meaning of myth, is simply what is delivered by word of mouth, a myth is speech, public speech.

MALE CHORUS. And myth also means the matter itself, the content of the speech.

MALE CHORUS. We might ask, has the content become increasingly unacceptable and therefore the speech more indirect ? How has the meaning of myth been transformed from public speech to an unlikely story ? It also meant counsel, command. Now it is a remote tale.
(LN 8:19)

The change in the meaning of myth from 'public speech' to a 'remote tale' is linked with the exclusionary processes determining the construction of the human subject. Derrida confirms the understanding of myth as an 'outside' of rational discourses. He identifies the processes by which philosophy excludes writing from its field, or from the field of scientific rationality, in order to maintain it in an exterior location that '*sometimes* took the form of *myth*'.³⁹ Making this connection, Derrida stresses the necessity to deconstruct the opposition between philosophy and myth, between logos and mythos.

In Wertenbaker's play, the presentation of myth reopens the questions concerning the concept of exteriority as a constitutive of identity and symbolization. To effect change in social formations involves taking a critical look at the construction of the outside in order to contest the fixity of exclusion. Butler remarks that identity is constructed through acts of differentiation that distinguish the

³⁹ Jacques Derrida, *Positions*, p.53

subject from the domains of abjected alterity, of the repressed and forgotten. *The Love of the Nightingale* dramatizes the fact that Tereus' identity has to be reinforced by Philomele's expulsion from the symbolic order:

NIOBE. Now truly I pity Philomele. She has lost her words, all of them. Now she is silent. For good. Of course, he could have killed her, that's the usual way of keeping people silent. But that might have made others talk. The silence of the dead can turn into a wild chorus. But the one alive who cannot speak, that one has truly lost all power. There. I don't know what she wants. I don't know what she feels. (Philomele *seizes her, tries to express something*)
I don't know what she wants. ... I'll go.
(LN 16:36)

Philomele's existence takes place in those 'unlivable', 'uninhabitable' zones which are nevertheless densely populated by those who do not enjoy the status of subject.⁴⁰ Being excluded from representation, Philomele's story is a signifier that never finds a signified, her experiences remaining an 'unreadable sign' (LN 18:36).

In Wertenbaker's plays, victimization involves the inscription of voicelessness. Her dramatic work emphasizes the powerlessness of women's situation in a discourse which reduces them to silent objects and visual fetishes of male desire. Silence functions as a constitutive outside that is nevertheless internal to that system as its own nonthematizable necessity. In fact, 'there is no content without its myth' (LN 8:19); the domain of abject beings is an integral part of the ensemble of strategies which underlie and permeate discourses

⁴⁰ Judith Butler, *Bodies that Matter*, p.1

of power. However, both *The Love of the Nightingale* and *The Grace of Mary Traverse* emphasize the persistence of patriarchal structuring; in this comfortable and stable world it is important that 'nothing must change'; the duty of patriarchal authority is to 'watch that no wheels fall off', that everything remains 'in its place, forever' (*MT III/3:102*). In *The Love of the Nightingale*, the Female Chorus shows what a world in which questions are silenced and the mind that asks is imprisoned looks like. It is a society in which 'little girls [are] raped and murdered in the car parks of dark cities', 'countries make war' and 'races [are] exterminated' (*LN 20:45*). This list brings the audience's attention back to contemporary problems, highlighting issues of individual responsibility and the effects of silence imposed by a privileged authority.

The critique of the constituent elements of masculine power and authority foregrounds the question of what happens when the 'dutiful daughters' reject their assigned role and act 'with bad grace' (*MT I/1:63*) in the face of the demands imposed on them. Within a discourse dominated by the phallus, Mary's experiences are always filtered through male perception; she spends her life waiting, 'looking through window panes' (*MT I/1:71*) so that, for example, she has 'no need to see a play to talk about it' because Giles 'will bring [her] the playbill' (*MT I/1:61*). In her discussion of the Woman's film of the 1940s, Mary Anne Doane confirms that women and waiting are intimately linked; the scenario of the woman gazing out of a window

has become a well-worn figure in the classical cinematic text.⁴¹ Following Doane's critique of female spectatorship, this scene visualizes women as being aligned with spectacle, space and image. This corresponds with Laura Mulvey's observation; she argues that the presence of woman is an indispensable element in traditional narrative film. Woman's visual presence tends to work against the development of a story-line, its function is to 'freeze the flow of action in moments of erotic contemplation'.⁴² The explicit transfixing, immobilizing aspects of the spectacle function in this instance against the forward pull of a narrative which is conceptualized in the masculine mode.

However, being obviously unhappy with her situation and tempted by her mephistophelean guide, aptly named Mrs Temptwell, Mary decides to go out on the streets and to discover the world for herself. At first this venture takes place under the precondition that it will improve 'my conversation and Papa will admire me' (*MT I/2:65*). Later, Mary declares herself 'unfathered' (*MT I/4:82*) and decides to invade the masculine sphere of knowledge, to 'run the world through my hands as they do':

MRS TEMPTWELL. Do you want to travel in their world ? Around every corner, the glitter of a possibility. You'll no longer be an ornate platter served for their tasting. No, you'll feast with them. No part of flesh or mind unexplored. No horizon ever fixed.
Experience ! (*Pause*) I could manage it for you.
(*MT I/4:71*)

⁴¹ Mary Ann Doane, *The Desire to Desire: The Woman's Film of the 1940s* (London, 1988),

p.2

⁴² Laura Mulvey, 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema', *Visual and other Pleasures* (London, 1989), p.19

In her search for knowledge, Mary goes beyond the prescribed definitions of mediated experience, traversing gender and class barriers. She wants to see 'the world as it is, no imitations, no illusions' (*MT* I/4:72) and enters the male world of sexual, political and financial power with the intention of seeking power herself within the framework of the bourgeois state.

Mary's decision to leave her father's house corresponds with the classical concept of the quest in which the hero crosses a boundary and penetrates the space of the other. The temptation offered here is the voluntary internalization of the value system which is based upon the delusion of a coherent subject position and the possibility of absolute knowledge:

MR MANNERS. Carte blanche.

(LORD EXRAKE *discards five cards.*)

MARY. Cards, numbers, chance, mystery and gain. Oh what a rich and generous world.

MRS TEMPTWELL. For some.

MARY. Don't be glum, Mrs Temptwell, let me enjoy it all. ...
And look over there, a cock fight. Shall we go there or
play cards ?
(*MT* I/4:80)

However, even though the play begins as a traditional quest story which involves taking on the male subject position as the active principle of culture and the source or origin of narrative, it never moves to closure. Wertenbaker does not advocate an equal opportunity feminism whose objective might be women's entrance in

the masculine public world, but rather, Mary's venture leads to a critical examination of the workings of the ideological system, its categories of representation and the assumptions upon which they base their capacity to signify and to effect strategic action.

Mary's identification with the power structures is short-lived. In the course of the play, Wertebaker confronts the audience with a world devoid of any future. Accompanied by Mrs Temptwell and Sophie, Mary becomes 'involved in this horror' (*MT* III/9:121), experiencing a society of competition, power, glory, and finally defeat. The result of Mary's journey into knowledge is disillusion and alienation:

MARY. Look at us – crumbling. Too charred to scavenge for more hope. Soon we can stop breathing – last intake of the future... I know the world. I've shared its acts. And I would like to pour poison down the throat of this world, burn out its hideous memories. A white cloud to cancel it all. How ? I don't know. But I can start here. I can look after what I've generated. Stop it.

SOPHIE. You want to poison your daughter.
(*MT* IV/1:125)

In *Mary Traverse*, it is Sophie who finally finds 'her tongue' (*MT* IV/1:125) and prevents Mary from killing her own child by convincing her that 'you can't decide for anyone'. Whereas Mrs Temptwell seeks revenge and 'the right bones [to burn] this time' (*MT* IV/1:126), Sophie pleads for understanding, even though she is determined that 'we must not forget' (*MT* IV/3:129). The child is a symbol of hope for the future, but the play also offers the possibility of learning from

experience since even Giles Traverse has learned ' other things too...' (MT IV/3:130). However, *The Grace of Mary Traverse* ends with uncertainty, leaving the audience with questions to find answers for:

MARY. I'm not certain when we understand it all, it'll be simpler, not more confusing. One day we'll know how to love this world.

MRS TEMPTWELL. Will you know how to make it just ?
(MT IV/3:130)

Both *The Grace of Mary Traverse* and *The Love of the Nightingale* are characterized by a marked resistance to closure. However, *The Love of the Nightingale* reveals a deepening interest in exploring the possibility of an alternative discourse which is capable of articulating women's experiences and their bodies. Philomele finally finds a way to overcome her silence, challenging the male master discourse. She goes beyond the language of her oppressor to reveal her truth, miming her rape and mutilation:

*The Acrobats perform. Finish. As they melt back into the crowd, the empty space remains and Philomele throws the dolls into the circle ... One is male, one is female and the male one has a king's crown... The rape is re-enacted in a gross and comic way, partly because of Niobe's resistance and attempt to catch Philomele. Blood cloth on the floor.
The crowd is very silent.
(LN 18:40)*

In this scene, Philomele affirms her existence and experiences against Tereus' alleged 'nothing'. Through re-enactment, through performance, she does not remain an 'unreadable sign' (LN 18:36)

but assumes control over the narrative of her experiences. Her silence becomes an act of utterance, shared by the audience which later picks up the dolls, 'enacting other brutal scenes' (LN 18:40). Sharing her voicelessness, the crowd's reaction confirms their understanding of, and identification with, Philomele's predicament.

Philomele's performance adds a new dimension to the understanding of silence: silence as incoherence, as disruption, emerges as a potential threat, haunting the unity of an exclusionary masculine discourse. Therefore, the repression of other meanings/narratives is never complete since the process always involves their return which threatens the fiction of closure. This troubling return and with it the occasion for a radical rearticulation of the symbolic becomes evident even before Philomele re-remerges from her exile:

PROCNE. I am happy, as there were to be only one, that we
have a son.

(Pause)

Aren't you ?

TEREUS. Yes.

PROCNE. You're quiet.

(Pause)

Over the years you have become quiet.

(LN 17:38)

What is foreclosed from the symbolic order offers, therefore, possibilities of signification that challenge the permanence of the law, including the law that institutes sexual difference.

Wertenbaker recognizes that the attempt to reformulate identity within the available cultural terms forecloses in advance the emergence of new concepts. *The Grace of Mary Traverse* and *The Love of the Nightingale* highlight the importance for women of questioning and dislocating structures of masculinist language and thought, its dualisms and hierarchical orderings. While the appropriation of patriarchal language (in *The Love of the Nightingale*) and codes of behaviour (in *The Grace of Mary Traverse*) are exposed to bind women rather than to liberate them, the plays put forward the necessity for women to define themselves and their experiences apart from the signifying potential of dominant discourse.

In *The Love of the Nightingale*, the possibility of liberation and change arises when 'the stage fills with the Bacchae' (LN 18:39) and Procne joins it for the first time:

NIOBE. No place safe from the Bacchae. They run the city and the woods, flit along the beaches, no crevasse free from the light of their torches. Miles and miles of a drunken chain. In my village they'd be stoned.
(LN 18:39)

The Bacchae is a play-within-the-play which puts into question the traditionally established relationship between viewer and performer. The first performance of the events which lead to the destruction of the existing system, is revealed to the audience only through the description of two soldiers who watch 'through shutters of [the] window' (LN 19:42). However, the act of looking no longer guarantees

a safe distance between subject and object(s): 'The god has touched me with madness. For looking. I didn't see anything' (*LN* 19:45) declares one soldier before he escapes. In this scene, the gaze falls back upon the viewer, anticipating a change in relationships and in the determination of subject positions.

But can women escape the oppressive framework of language by finding new ways of expressing themselves which cannot be subsumed under the Saussurean sign? Is there an *outside* to the transcendently validated enclosure within which we are otherwise constrained by a phenomenology of existence and its relative linguistics? When Philomele attacks the future incarnated in Tereus' son Itys, she '*brings the sword down on his neck*' (*LN* 20:46). This scene dramatizes the classical metaphor of revolution; it brings forward an overthrow of the system which is achieved through a reversal and substitution of power positions. Thus, the play foregrounds women's determination to put an end to the dominant structures through taking power *within* this framework, exploiting its mechanisms for their own purposes. Philomele adopts the very model of domination by which her own oppression was effected: 'her hands are bloodied' (*LN* 20:46) and this recalls Procne's observation earlier in the play when she welcomes Tereus after his long journey, remarking that 'there's blood on your hands' (*LN* 14:32).

In *The Love of the Nightingale*, questions of truth and knowledge, power and language are irrevocably bound up with the

relation between self and other. The redefinition of subjectivity and the acknowledgement of the other-as-other, is presented as a necessary precondition for social transformation. However, to escape the dialectical appropriation of the other, to encounter the other-as-other is a process fundamentally at odds with the self-defence mechanisms necessitated by the illusory struggle for meaning. Hélène Cixous underlines that the most difficult thing is to arrive at the most extreme proximity while guarding against the trap of projection, or identification. Therefore, the other must remain in all its extreme strangeness within the greatest proximity.⁴³ This project corresponds with Irigaray's perspective; she does not advocate the privilege of the other over the subject, of the you over the I, since this would merely lead to a stand-in for the model of the one and the same, in which a singular subject inflects one meaning rather than another. The recognition of alterity of the other is, following Irigaray, the necessary foundation for a new ontology, a new ethics, and a new politics, in which the other is recognized as the other and not as the same. Replacing the one/the same by the two of sexual difference is a gesture that allows us to recognize 'all other forms of others without hierarchy, privilege or authority over them: whether it be differences in race, age, culture, religion'.⁴⁴

⁴³ Hélène Cixous, 'Extreme Fidelity', *Writing Differences: Readings from the Seminar of Hélène Cixous*, ed. Susan Sellers, tr. Anne Liddle and Susan Sellers (Milton Keynes, 1988), p. 29

⁴⁴ Luce Irigaray, 'The Question of the Other', tr. Noah Guynn, *Yale French Studies Vol.87* (1995), p.19

How, then, can women achieve self-determination, without remaining caught in the dualisms which depend upon a strict distinction between self and other? Cixous emphasizes that the object of female struggle is not to appropriate men's instruments of power, adapting their concepts, or begrudging them their position of mastery. She advocates that women should dislocate the binary structure which determines discourse, 'to explode it, turn it around; to make it hers containing it, taking it in her own mouth, biting that tongue with her very own teeth to invent for herself a language to get inside of'.⁴⁵ This perspective stresses that by repeating what is implicit in the founding concepts, by using against the edifice the instruments or stones available in the house, one risks ceaselessly confirming that which one allegedly deconstructs. Derrida confirms the necessity to avoid remaining within the closed field of hierarchical opposition, thereby confirming it. He acknowledges that the hierarchy has to be overturned at a given moment; however, the inversion which brings low what was high, has to be followed by a new concept of meaning that can no longer be included within the structure of philosophical (binary) dualism. Even though, this new concept still inhabits this opposition, its function is to resist and disorganize it, '*without ever* constituting a third term, without ever leaving room for a solution in the form of speculative dialectics'.⁴⁶

⁴⁵ Hélène Cixous, 'The Laugh of the Medusa', *New French Feminisms*, eds. Isabelle de Courtivron and Elaine Marks, tr. Paula and Keith Cohen (Brighton, 1980), p.257

⁴⁶ Jacques Derrida, *Positions*, p.43

This stance corresponds with the end of Wertebaker's play: the final scene of *The Love of the Nightingale* does not advocate a reversal of power but the overthrow of the repressive system opens up the way for a negotiation of meaning that is essentially dialogical. In the dialectical model, difference is incorporated into sameness. The construction of meaning is a movement towards closure, towards the emergence of a unitary, stable truth. Dialogism challenges this perspective by pluralizing and relativizing meaning. Meaning is, therefore, subject to constant negotiation and any claim to uncontested truth is refuted. In *The Love of the Nightingale*, 'the myth has a strange end' (LN 22:47); recognizing that 'we were all so angry the bloodshed would have gone on forever', the characters are finally transformed into birds:

IRIS. Philomele becomes a nightingale.

JUNE. Procne a swallow.

HELEN. And Tereus a hoopoe.
(LN 20:47)

The song of the nightingale is reminiscent of Cixous' vision of *écriture féminine* that sees woman's voice as a voice 'that sings from a time before law, before the Symbolic took woman's breath away and reappropriated it into a language under its authority of separation'.⁴⁷ Cixous prompts questions about what the feminine is, perceiving its existence in the margins and gaps of male-dominated

⁴⁷ Hélène Cixous, *The Newly Born Woman*, tr. Betsy King (Manchester, 1987), p.93

culture. Against the binary scheme of thought, she sets multiple, heterogeneous difference in order to break open the prison house of patriarchal language. Cixous argues that feminine texts are texts that work on the difference, struggling to undermine the dominant phallogentric logic and revel in the pleasure of open-ended textuality. Following Cixous, in writing, the very possibility of change occurs; it serves as a space for subversive thought and is seen as the precursory movement of a transformation of social and cultural structures. *Écriture féminine* is the attempt to write the other in ways which do not appropriate or annihilate difference in order to create the self in a position of mastery.

The following question arises: is the miraculous, instantaneous transformation of the characters an attempt to put forward the return of repressed femininity which is located in a pre-discursive reality? Does the nightingale's song symbolize a feminine language and what does this femininity signify? Moreover, if this view is not recognizable as representation, how can it initiate changes in the social reality? *The Love of the Nightingale* reveals an ambivalence towards an exclusively female language. The nightingale's song is a locus of subversion from which the underlying logic, the very perception of reality on which the present structure of cultural order rests can be undermined. Philomele's function can be seen, as Kristeva writes, 'to reject everything finite, definite, structured,

loaded with meaning, in the existing state of society'.⁴⁸ The birds are, therefore, a metaphor for representing a view from elsewhere, positioned in the margins of hegemonic discourse. Dismantling conceptual oppositions, the opportunity for reinscription into a different order of signification arises. These alternative signifying practices allow for a '*metamorphosis*' (LN 20:48), a plurality of positions and expressions. It is a system that does not offer alternative symbols or another metaphysical structure, but the opportunity of difference, a mutation and revolution in the propriety of symbolic systems.

Wertenbaker does not put forward a feminine language as another master-discourse that is set in binary opposition to the symbolic. Her plays emphasize the importance of developing a critical discourse characterized by its operative capacity to transform truth into a limitless exchange and transformation of meaning as a precondition for challenging the hierarchy of social and political relations. Rather than make truth claims, the play focuses its attention on the conditions and processes of exclusion according to which truth is constructed and recognized. At the end of *The Love of the Nightingale*, truth is no longer defined by authority's ready answers but by the individual's constant questions. In the final scene, questioning is prompted in the child Itys and the closing

⁴⁸ Julia Kristeva, 'Interview by Xavière Gauthier', *New French Feminisms*, eds. Isabelle de Courtivron and Elaine Marks, tr. Marilyn A. August (Brighton, 1980), p.166

image of the play is determined by the positing of alternative possibilities to a stable and monolithic patriarchal truth:

PHILOMELE. Do you know why it was wrong of Tereus to cut out my tongue ?

ITYS. It hurt.

PHILOMELE. Yes, but why was it wrong ?

ITYS (*Bored*). I don't know why it was wrong.

PHILOMELE. It was wrong because ...

ITYS. What does wrong mean ?

PHILOMELE. It is what isn't right.

ITYS. What is right ?

(*The Nightingale sings*)

Didn't you want me to ask questions ?

(*Fade*)

(*LN 21:48*)

In the last scene, the focus lies upon the instability of meaning in language. It becomes clear that words have no unitary definition, each is presented as a site of dialogic conflict, where various voices struggle to inscribe their meaning, their way of seeing things. The play closes with questions that open up many more. From this perspective, knowledge is not a given product or commodity that can be transmitted or imparted but it is presented as a structural dynamic, a rethinking of issues that can never be satisfied. Centring its attention upon dialogic interaction, the encounter of Philomele and Itys sets in motion a process that denies any stance of mastery. In this scene, the open-ended play between subjects signifies a dynamic relationship; this relationship is interdependent but not

hierarchical, making possible a new space for critical argumentation. Being opened up, language comes to signify in ways no one can predict in advance, allowing women to inscribe their voices in a politics of meaning that is fundamentally dialogical.

2 The Art of Playwriting

Put the play on, don't put it on,
it won't change the shape of the universe.
(*Our Country's Good*)

I open the door. They enter. And it happens:
they create the scene, do the work. Or they
refuse to do it. A freedom reigns on the
stage that no longer depends on any author,
but only on their destiny.
(Hélène Cixous)

Rejecting the inscription of women in society and on the stage as a projection of male desire, the political nature of traditional Western theatre has become a focus of many plays by women. The exploration of critical models and methodologies for the theatre in women's dramatic writing challenges values embedded in notions of form, practice and interpretative processes. By examining traditional forms of presentation and modes of perception, the question of an alternative poetics for the stage becomes a matter of importance. Various attempts in women's drama address the possibility of a theatre in which the closure of representation gives way to a morphology that does not depend upon the restriction and marginalization of the female subject. Evaluating theories of theatre, performance and aesthetics in the context of Wertebaker's plays,

this chapter analyses how the stage can become a site for ambiguity and a potential source of transgression. Theories of mimesis are evaluated and related to questions of representation and concepts of identity. Two important questions in this context are: What is mimed by mimesis and how can performance open up unexpected subversive potential?

Wertenbaker's preoccupation with the power and the limitations of theatre is central to her dramatic writing. Her plays are marked by the self-reflexive investigation of the structure of theatrical representation. In this analysis, *The Love of the Nightingale* is taken as a starting point for identifying the meaning-making processes involved in theatrical experience. These dynamics are further explored in *Our Country's Good*, a play that functions as an example of dramatic writing concerned with the processes of its own production and reception. In this context, the positioning of art in the social/political/historical context is a key element of the analysis. The focus on theatrical experience and representation raises a number of questions in terms of playwriting, authorship, the role of the actor and director, as well as of audience reception and response. How does theatre communicate? How is meaning produced in the exchange between text and performance, and in the interaction between audience and stage? *After Darwin* is also a play that makes the process of rehearsing and staging visible to the spectator.

However, in this play, the interaction between actors, playwright and director leads to a more general questioning of the possibility of meaning and identity in an increasingly integrated and fractious world. Interrogating the relationship between nature and science, *After Darwin* questions the status of knowledge and truth, while opening up the apparently self-contained subject to negotiation and re-definition.

The Love of the Nightingale sheds a critical light on theatrical experience and interpretation. In scene 5, the characters are featured as audience, watching the Hippolytus play in 'the theatre in Athens' (*LN* I/5:8). This strategy makes visible the interaction between viewing subject and the object on stage, generating an awareness of the dynamics involved in theatrical representation and communication. In this scene, what we may call the stage-upon-the-stage shifts the boundary between the performance space and auditorium. This shift, however, alters the actors' positioning within the play of gazes which determines theatrical representation since the characters now occupy the position of the audience in the theatre. In *The Love of the Nightingale*, the positioning of audience as players, and players as audience, aims at reversing the gaze, thus leading to a framing of the audience. The onstage audience makes the spectators in the auditorium gaze at themselves watching, confronting them with their own conditioned responses.

The performance centres around Phaedra, the wife of Theseus, who falls in love with her stepson Hippolytus. When he rejects her advances, Phaedra kills herself after telling her husband that Hippolytus has raped her. Theseus uses against his son one of the three wishes which he has been given by the God Poseidon and ' a great wave comes out of the sea and crashes Hippolytus' chariot against the rocks'(LN 5:12). The speeches and actions of Aphrodite, Phaedra, Hippolytus, Theseus and the nurse are commented upon and explained by the onstage spectators. This audience is by no means a homogenous group, but the characters engage in a critical discussion, revealing their conflicting views on the effects and purposes of the performance. Susan Bennett explains that the spectator comes to the theatre as a member of an already constituted interpretive community.¹ The hypotheses which constitute an audience's reading of a performance are influenced by and measured against a complex network of extraneous extra-theatrical material which forms their horizon of expectations. In *The Love of the Nightingale* the representations on stage are exposed and shown to be filtered by the discursive and aesthetic assumptions of the audiences, revealing the relational nature of truth which depends on the perspective of the spectator.

¹ Susan Bennett, *Theatre Audiences: A Theory of Production and Reception* (London, 1997), p.141

The play-within-the-play also foregrounds the *generic* expectations of what will happen on the stage. 'She only told us it was going to end badly, but we already know that. It's a tragedy' (LN 5:9), King Pandion explains while the Queen states 'Here's the nurse. She always gives advice' (LN 5:10). In *The Love of the Nightingale*, as Jennifer Wagner points out, Wertebaker engages in a parodic rehandling of an ancient myth and of the dramatic form of Greek tragedy. This becomes evident in the handling of the chorus, the play's ending and also in the depiction of characters and their relationships. However, the primary target of Wertebaker's use of parody is not so much the structure of Greek tragedy per se, but rather the structuring of contemporary theatrical experience.² Linda Hutcheon emphasizes the intrinsically political character of parody and its challenge to what is traditional and authoritative.³ Her analysis highlights that parody has a political stake in unsettling dominant discourses. Following Hutcheon's argument, we may say that parody is a repetition or imitation which includes difference; it is a contestatory revision of the past that simultaneously incorporates and challenges what it parodizes. Therefore, parody works within the very discourse it purports to challenge, refusing to be completely recuperated by it. Hutcheon stresses the creative potential of this strategy, in that parodic practice always offers a critical response to

² Jennifer A. Wagner, 'Formal Parody and the Metaphysics of the Audience in Timberlake Wertebaker's *The Love of the Nightingale*', *Papers on Language and Literature* 31:3 (Summer 1995), p.228

³ Linda Hutcheon, *The Politics of Postmodernism* (London, 1989), p.35

what is being contested; however, this response always admits its own provisionality.⁴

In *The Love of the Nightingale*, parody is employed as a means to foreground the structures of representation determining the relationship between spectator and stage. The chorus plays a crucial role in the communication between stage and audience: 'The playwright always speaks through the chorus' (LN 5:11) states the Queen while watching the Hippolytus play. However, the depiction of the female and male chorus as disconcertingly limited negates this claim and undermines its apparent omniscience. For example, the male chorus pretends to 'observe, journalists of an antique world' (LN 6:14); however, its role makes it clear that to remain neutral is not only impossible but itself tantamount to taking sides. The female counterpart proves to be completely alienated from language as a means of communication: 'I have trouble expressing myself'(LN 9:20). 'I would never say that' (LN 5:11) Philomele asserts; her reaction confirms the right to individual experiences, further undermining any notion of a privileged voice issuing from the performance space. In *The Love of the Nightingale*, discursive authority is not attributed to one side; thus the audience is prevented from perceiving the events on the stage as a message to be decoded. The chorus' role is to make the audience aware of its own responsibility in the contemporary context, assigning an active role to the spectator:

⁴ *ibid.*, p.154

MALE CHORUS. You will be beside the myth. If you must think of anything, think of countries, silence, but we cannot rephrase it for you. If we could, why would we trouble to show you the myth?
(LN 8:19)

In this context, performance is not limited to the events on the stage but rather involves the constant negotiation of spectatorial positions, opening up the way for a conception of meaning that is essentially dialogical.

'I find plays help me think. You catch a phrase, recognize a character. Perhaps this play will help us to come to a decision' (LN 5:9) declares King Pandion. For him, the effect of performance is the construction of knowledge through recognition. Here, the question of the audience becomes a question of identity formation. In dialectical thought, recognition always takes place in the space of the other. Lacan confirms that it is in his counterpart whom man exploits, that he recognizes himself.⁵ In traditional theatre, the performer is caught up in the gaze of the spectator. Theatrical performance sets in motion a process of self-consciousness with the actor as dialectical mainspring, as reflecting mirror for the viewing subject. The audience's seemingly secure position is determined by the protective spacing that structures traditional theatrical performance. Within this circle of representation, the other on stage is mythicized into just another version of the Same. For Pandion, the stage functions as a

⁵ Jacques Lacan, *Ecrits*, p.5

reflection of himself; he waits for the moment when he can finally see himself in the other (*voir*) – and thus, once again know himself (*se savoir*).⁶ His daughter, however, does not accept the dialectical impasse of this account of the interaction between stage and audience:

PHILOMELE. But, Father. I'm not Hippolytus. You haven't
cursed me.
And Tereus isn't Phaedra, look.
She laughs.
(*LN* 5:12)

Philomele's resistant comments serve to distinguish herself and the other spectators from the images on stage. She breaks the mirror, insisting upon the recognition of the other-as-other. Her emphasis on plurality and difference contradicts the circle of representation embedded in Pandion's specular logic and theatrical representation.

Pandion's search for knowledge and truth is comparable with the search for Cartesian certainty; as Lacan writes, the subject wants to 'distinguish between the true and the false in order to see clearly ... and to walk with assurance in this life'.⁷ However, during the performance it becomes obvious that the search for an absolute, unchanging truth is futile: 'there is no power that is all-knowing...' (*LN* 5:12). The interaction between the characters and their reaction to the Hippolytus play challenge the notion of eternal verities which

⁶ *ibid.*, p.294

⁷ *ibid.*, p.222

only have to be discovered by the rational subject. By moving towards a model of knowledge that accounts for diversity, the performance unsettles the seemingly stable dichotomy between true and false. This process further intensifies in the course of the dramatic action. From this perspective, meaning is subject to constant negotiation and change: 'life is endless wandering' (*LN* 5:12). This loss of an absolute truth correlates with a crisis of the subject which becomes one of the central issues in the play. The perceiving subject is no longer assumed to be a coherent, meaning-generating entity but it is always threatened by heterogeneity and change.

In this context, the role of women in constituting and securing the seemingly autonomous position of the male subject is emphasized. Philomele rejects a position of marginalization and subjection, expressing her desires: 'I want to feel everything there is to feel' (*LN* 5:11). Her lines anticipate the breakdown of the seemingly fixed boundaries between self and other, negating any claim to a unified self: 'How beautiful to love like that ! The strength of my limbs is melting away. Is that what you feel for Procne, Tereus?' (*LN* 5:10). Women's desire poses, however, a threat to dominant discourse; it prevents the male subject from gaining recognition and self-knowledge: ' wild steps to unchained rhythms ... turning us blind with the bitter poison of desire'(*LN* 5:11). The

performance makes explicit the consequences of this perspective, exposing the exclusionary processes involved in the construction of subject positions:

HIPPOLYTUS. Woman, counterfeit coin, why did the gods put you in the world? If we must have sons, let us buy them in the temples and bypass the concourse of these noxious women. I hate you women, hate, hate and hate you.

PHILOMELE. This is horrible. It's not Phaedra's fault she loves him.

TEREUS. She could keep silent about it.
(LN 5:11)

In this scene, the comments of Philomele and Tereus as onstage spectators clarify their position in dominant discourse, anticipating the conflict arising between them later in the play. In *The Love of the Nightingale*, Wertebaker effectively employs a play-within-the-play to challenge traditional notions of theatrical experience, a device which leads to the critical interrogation of the relationship between subject and its other.

The plots of *Our Country's Good* and *After Darwin* revolve around the rehearsal of plays, staging the processes of casting and rehearsal, right up to the moment when the curtain rises. This focus leads to a critical examination of the dynamics of contemporary theatrical experience while the performances put into play notions of originality, authenticity and presence. In *Our Country's Good*, Wertebaker stages a community of convicts that has been excluded as the other of society. Isolated in an eighteenth-century Australian

penal colony, they are 'spewed from our country, forgotten, bound to the dark edge of the earth ... nameless in this stinking hole of hell' (*OG I/1:1*). The distancing effect of historicization is explicitly emphasized:

DABBY. Why can't we do a play about now?

WISEHAMMER. It doesn't matter when a play is set. It's better if it's set in the past, it's clearer. It's easier to understand.
(*OG II/7:74*)

The role of theatre in society is discussed by the authorities in Act One. Staging a debate on 'the merits of the theatre' (*OG I:6:19*) Wertebaker juxtaposes contradictory views of the effects and purposes of performance. Apart from the recognition of the potential of theatre to act as cultural rehabilitation for the convicts, the characters express the argument that theatre is 'at the most a passable diversion ... an entertainment to wile away the hours of the idle' (*OG I:6:24*). Another view confirms that there is no value in the theatre project and its participants: 'Put the play on, don't put it on, it won't change the shape of the universe' (*OG I:7:24*). What is put in question here is the very power of theatre to effect change. On the one hand, it is possible to do anything on stage but it may have no additional meaning for society. On the other hand, the awareness of theatre's transformative powers and its function as a tool of protest

and subversion are emphasized: ' I know this play – this play – order will become disorder'(OG I:7:25).

In Wertebaker's play, the discussion of theatre thematizes strategies of power, interrogating the relation between the law and the subject. At the beginning of *Our Country's Good*, 'this most interesting experiment' (OG I/7:25), is seen as an educational exercise with far-reaching effects in the larger context of society: 'it could change the nature of our little society'(OG I/6:19). The staging and rehearsal of *The Recruiting Officer* is effected in order to redirect dissident actions into socially acceptable and productive uses, as evidenced in Philip's account of the function of dramatic performance:

PHILLIP. The theatre is an expression of civilisation. We belong to a great country which has spawned great playwrights. Shakespeare, Marlowe, Johnson, and even in our own time, Sheridan. The convicts will be speaking a refined, literate language and express sentiments of delicacy they are not used to... It will remind them that there is more to life than crime.
(OG I/6:21)

Philip's speech stresses the beneficial educative effect of art, stressing its positive influence on the community's morality and on the socialization of the individual citizen. Philip's speech illustrates a view of civilization determined by a homogenous community as well as by stable moral and aesthetic values. Art is granted a civilizing effect since it helps to introduce the audience to a set of aesthetic

values. From this perspective, theatrical representation is working in alliance with a dominant ideology. Philip makes the connection with Greek theatre which was fully integrated into the social, economic and political structures of society: 'The Greeks believed that it was a citizen's duty to watch a play. It was kind of work in that it required attention, judgement, patience, all the social virtues' (*OG I/6:22*).

The ideal state envisioned by Philip is one in which subjects are produced and acted upon in such a way as to guarantee their obedience to the state and its laws:

PHILIP. What is a statesman's responsibility? To ensure the rule of law. But the citizens must be taught to obey that law of their own will. I want to rule over responsible human beings, not tyrannise over a group of animals.
(*OG II/2:59*)

Philip's speech anticipates a strategy of power which produces the very forms of subjectivity which form the basis for political unity. The 'whip on my side, terror and hatred on theirs' is replaced by 'a contract between us'(*OG II/2:59*). The structures of power become internalized in each subject; power shifts its location from centralized institutions and more openly coercive forms, to the invisible depth of the subject itself. This form of power is, however, even more effective, and more permanent than authoritative repression since it constantly regenerates and reproduces itself. For Rousseau, it is the most important form of law; it is 'inscribed neither on marble nor

brass, but in the hearts of the citizens'. Substituting the force of habit for the force of authority, this law forms the true constitution of the state. It 'gathers new strength every day and when other laws age or wither away, reanimates or replaces them'.⁸

Installing social and moral values and laws deeply into the bodies of those it subjugates, this power is a form of colonization. Terry Eagleton points out that this constellation is nothing less than the production of an entirely new human subject.⁹ The ultimate binding-forces of this new order, in contrast to the coercive apparatus, will be habits, pieties, sentiments and affections. Power in such an order becomes aestheticized; it acts as a medium that unifies abstract duty and pleasurable inclination. The subject discovers the law in the depth of his own free identity, rather than in some oppressive power. This, however, entails a high level of self-control since to dissolve the law to custom, to unthinking habit, is to identify it with the human subject's own well-being, so that to transgress the law would signify a deep self-violation.¹⁰

In *Our Country's Good*, the staging of a play anticipates a new tactics of power. In this context, key elements are the function of language and the importance of the body. In Philip's speech, ideology and language are irrevocably bound up: The 'refined,

⁸ Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Social Contract*, tr. Maurice Cranston (London, 1968), p. 99

⁹ Terry Eagleton, *The Ideology of the Aesthetic* (Oxford, 1990), p. 20

¹⁰ *ibid.*, p.20

literate language' (OG I/6:21) of the text functions as a reflection and reinforcement of the beliefs of the culture at large. Following Judith Butler, the transformation of the convicts into law-abiding citizens may be understood as a signifying practice; it is the effect of a rule-bound discourse that is incorporated into the subject's own disposition through the pervasive and mundane signifying acts of linguistic life.¹¹ Thus, performance signifies a kind of internalized repression by the installation of social and moral values and laws in the deep recesses of the psyche of the subject, all of which operate as a mode of political hegemony. In Foucauldian terms, this shift in power relations replaces subjection by a 'subjectivation' that leaves the subject even more deeply shackled than was originally thought. For Foucault, subjectivation takes place primarily through the forming and discipline of the body: 'it is always the body that is at issue – the body and its forces, their utility and their docility, their distribution and their submission'.¹²

Various scenes in *Our Country's Good* reveal the body as an object and target of physical violence. Floggings and hangings still mark the punitive practices of the penal system: 'Sideway obeys. Ross turns him and shows his scarred back to the company'(OG II/5:64). However, the authorities in Wertebaker's play recognize the need for more effective ways of law-enforcement, since 'the

¹¹Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble*, p.43

¹²Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, tr. Alan Sheridan (London, 1977), p.25

convicts laugh at hangings, Sir. They watch them all the time'(OG I/3:3). Foucault demonstrates that the shift between the law and its subject is also manifested by changes in the penal system. Punishment, therefore, leaves the domain of everyday perception and enters that of abstract consciousness. Increasingly, punishment becomes the most hidden part of the penal process; it attains to the abstraction of the law itself, remaining 'a strange secret between the law and those it condemns'.¹³

In Scene 6, titled *The Science of Hanging*, Liz is prepared for her execution. In order to 'make it quick' (OG II/6:66), Ketch Freeman takes the accurate measurements of her body. However, these preparations do not merely indicate that the visible contact between the law, or those who carry it out, and the body of the criminal, is reduced to a minimum, but the focus on Liz's measurements also emphasizes that the knowledge of the body is important for power to function. Foucault explains that the human body enters 'a machinery of power that explores it, breaks it down and rearranges it'.¹⁴ Control and knowledge of the body work individually. This technology cannot be localized in a particular type of institution or state apparatus. From this perspective, power is not to be taken as a phenomenon of one individual's consolidated and homogenous domination over others but power is being exercised continuously through a net-like

¹³ *ibid.*, p. 15

¹⁴ *ibid.*, p.138

organisation. It has inserted itself into the actions, learning processes and everyday lives of individuals. Power's maximum intensity lies, therefore, not in the authority, but in the bodies which are individualized by their relation to power.

In *Our Country's Good* the spectacle of hanging is replaced by performance. Performance is seen to contribute to the building of a community that reflects the values and morality of the dominant system. The convicts' learning is mimetic; performance, therefore, enables one to become what one acts out. The question of mimesis is a key issue in Plato's and Aristotle's views on the value and function of theatre. In *The Republic*, Plato confirms that 'dramatic and similar representations, if indulgence in them is prolonged into adult life, establish habits of physical poise, intonation and thought which become second nature'.¹⁵ Following Plato's *Principle of Specialization*, this also forecloses in advance the mimesis of several, different roles: 'one man cannot play many parts as well as he can one'.¹⁶ Christopher Janaway points out that this claim reveals a fear of diversity or plurality within the individual. It highlights an anxiety about a subject that is not unitary and self-contained but determined

¹⁵ Plato, *The Republic*, tr. Desmond Lee (London, 1987), p.95/395d2-4. For educational purposes Plato advocates that Guardians should only act parts of characters suitable to them such as ' men of courage, self-control' but for their protection as 'men of worth' they are not allowed to 'take the parts of women ... slaves ... madmen'.

¹⁶ *ibid.*, p.94/394e8-9

by diversity and heterogeneity: 'with us man is not double or multiple'.¹⁷

However, even though Plato recognizes a beneficial value of dramatic characterization as part of a learning process, he criticizes mimetic art, such as drama: 'the art of representation is something that has no serious value'.¹⁸ Mimetic art is merely concerned with pleasure, appearance and play; therefore, it is far removed from the truth, which Plato situates in the higher realm of ideal forms. Since it merely produces a superficial likeness of any subject it treats, mimesis does not lead to true knowledge, the knowledge of the invisible forms. Language, in this context, is deceptive. 'So great is the natural magic of poetry'¹⁹ that it allows the poet to present his audience with a pretence of knowledge and value. In the *Poetics*, Aristotle corrects Plato's critique of art as imitation without value. Imitation, Aristotle explains, is intrinsic to the process of learning which determines the formation of the human subject: '*Mimesis* is innate in human beings from childhood – indeed we differ from the other animals in being most given to *mimesis* and in making our first steps in learning through it'.²⁰ This view underlines that mimesis

¹⁷ Christopher Janaway, *Images of Excellence: Plato's Critique of the Arts* (Oxford, 1995), p.101

¹⁸ Plato, *The Republic*, p.369/602b 8-10. Plato states that Forms are the only elements of reality that cannot be viewed as likeness of something else. He establishes a hierarchical positioning: 'so the tragic poet, if his art is representation, is by nature at third remove from the throne of truth', p.363/597e 6-7.

¹⁹ *ibid.*, p.367/601-9

²⁰ Aristotle, 'Poetics', *Classical Literary Criticism*, ed. and tr. E.Hubbard, D.A.Russell and M.Winterbottom (Oxford, 1989), p.54

alters human character since subjects become assimilated to what they enact. Drama is identified as an imitation of the actions of men, 'a mimesis of men better than ourselves'.²¹

In Aristotelean thought, the key to knowledge is closely bound up with the act of looking. In the perception of objects, the spectators apply their understanding and reasoning to each element, identifying this as an image of another, known object. Aristotle disagrees with Plato's view that art cannot lead to knowledge. He points out that even though dramatic representations are merely images, the audience's thinking about them is no less systematic or beneficial than their thoughts about reality. *Our Country's Good* confirms this effect on the audience: 'The convicts *watching* ... will be seeing something of a higher nature than usual'. This will remind them 'that there is more to life than crime' (*OG I/6:21*), thus altering their behaviour. Aristotelian mimesis fulfils a prescriptive function that aligns its operations with ideology. Wertenbaker's critique of these structures of representation is underscored by Augusto Boal's radical revision of Aristotle. Boal's writing on a people's theatre confirms classical theatre as a reinforcement of ideology. He identifies the poetics of Aristotle as a 'poetics of oppression'²²: the world is known, perfect, or about to be perfected, and its values and

²¹ *ibid.*, p.58

²² Augusto Boal, 'The Theatre as Discourse', *The Twentieth Century Performance Reader*, eds. Michael Huxley and Noel Witts, tr. C.A. and M. McBride (London, 1996), p.96

norms are imposed on the spectators, who passively delegate power to the characters to act and think in their place. From this point of view, the spectators purge themselves of their tragic flaw – that is of something capable of changing society. A catharsis of the revolutionary impetus is produced. Dramatic action substitutes for real action. Boal advocates the liberation of the spectator on whom the theatre has imposed finished versions of the world. The spectator has to be an actor on an equal plane with those generally accepted as actors, who must also be spectators. Therefore, the spectacle becomes a preparation of political action.

However, classical identification implies the total transformation of the actor into the character s/he portrays. 'When acting you have to imagine things. You have to imagine you're someone different' (*OG I/11:48*) Ralph explains. During the rehearsals he emphasizes that 'People must – euh believe you. Garrick after all was admired for his naturalness' (*OG I/11:45*). His directions emphasize the actor's task which is to deliver a believable performance. This, however, implies that the convicts themselves are merely imitators alienated from their own experiences, whose roles are worth nothing and, consequently, remain unrepresentable on stage. In traditional theatre, the actor is absent behind the presence of the persona which is represented. This becomes evident when Sideway self-consciously plays his part, engaging in a parodic representation of

transformation. His acting shifts between backstage and performance space:

SIDEWAY has scuttled off. He shouts from the wings.

I am preparing my entrance, Mr Clark, I won't be a minute. Could you read the line again, slowly? ...

SIDEWAY comes on, walking sideways, arms held up in a grandiose eighteenth century theatrical pose. He suddenly stops.

Ah yes, I forgot. Arms-a-cross. I shall have to start again.
(OG I/11:43)

The counterpoint to the dynamics of classical identification is the Brechtian idea of Epic Theatre. The opposition between mimetic activity and the necessary distance between actor and character forms the basis of the Brechtian *Verfremdungseffekt*. He demanded that the actor should not allow himself to become completely transformed on the stage into the character he is portraying.²³ The objective of the alienation effect is to expose and thereby alienate the social 'gest' underlying every incident. Social gest is explained by Brecht as the mimetic and gestural expression of the social relationships prevailing between people in a specific historical context. The aim of alienation is, however, to produce a new relation between audience and stage, a critical and active relation. Brecht's speculative political theatre stresses the importance of taking into

²³ Bertolt Brecht, 'Short Description of a New Technique of Acting which Produces an Alienation Effect', p.136

account the performance of the audience. His theory is concerned to construct a spectator who is not fully and unthinkingly interpolated into ideology but actively engaged in critical analysis.

In Wertebaker's play, questions of mimesis, repetition and identification address issues of subject constitution and the possibilities of subversion within dominant discourse. Jacques Derrida criticizes the concept of mimesis as the 'most naive form of representation'.²⁴ He identifies in theatre/art which is based upon the concept of imitation, a structure of representation that is embedded in the culture of the West, its religious orientation, philosophy and politics. The notion of mimesis always involves a hierarchical opposition between object and representation, original and imitation. Within the concept of mimesis, the relationship between mime and mimed, of the reproducer to the reproduced, is always a relation to a *past present*: 'the imitated comes before the imitator.... the double comes after the simple; it multiplies it as a follow-up'.²⁵ This opposition is determined by the logic that the imitated is more real, more true than its imitation. It is anterior and superior to it. Theatre, in this context, becomes 'an *expression of civilization*' (OG I/6:21).

²⁴ Jacques Derrida, 'The Theatre of Cruelty and the Closure of Representation', *Writing and Difference*, tr. Alan Bass (London, 1978), p.234

²⁵ Jacques Derrida, 'The first Session', *Acts of Literature*, tr. Derek Attridge (London, 1992), p.140

The stage, therefore, functions as an illustration and an addition to a text which has already been written; it actualizes the past in the present. A play 'is a world in itself, a tiny colony we should say' (OG II/2:60) Philip asserts. Thus, he confirms that the stage operates as a repetition of a present that exists outside and prior to the performance. The fact that Mary has 'to copy the play [since] we have only two copies' (OG I/5:15), reinforces the notion of the text as a dictation that demands endless repetition through performance. This repetition, as Judith Butler points out, becomes domesticated and recirculated as instruments of cultural hegemony. It is a reenactment of meanings already established as well as the mundane and ritualized form of their legitimization.²⁶ The reenactment is, therefore, two-dimensional; it highlights the necessity for the script to be repeatedly actualized and reproduced as reality.

However, Derrida goes on to highlight the paradoxes of the supplementary double. Since it is added to the simple and the single that it replaces and mimes, it is always both like and *unlike* it. Unlike because the repetition is – in that it is – always the same as and different from what it duplicates.²⁷ It is from this inherent contradiction that alterations in the dominant framework become possible. *Our Country's Good* indicates that there is no outside of representation, but subversion has to take place within discourse:

²⁶ Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble*, p.140

²⁷ Jacques Derrida, 'The first Session', p.139

ARSCOTT. There's no escape. I tell you.

Pause

You go in circles out there, that's all you do. You go out there and you walk and walk and you don't get to China. Even a compass doesn't work in this foreign upside-down desert.

(OG II/1:55)

The only agency left is, therefore, located in performance, and in the possibility of a variation on the enforced repetition. In Wertebaker's play, the repetition of dominant codes is revealed as a practice which opens up in-between spaces where possibilities of alternative subject positions can be explored.

In *Our Country's Good*, the notions of truth and originality and the possibilities of subversion are closely connected to questions concerning the role of the author. Philip's monologue presents the 'great playwrights' (OG I/6:21) as the controlling agents of meaning. 'You can't change the words of the playwright' (OG I/11:46) explains Wisehammer, one of the convicts. 'Don't add any words to the play' (OG I/11:50) he emphasizes. The actor, from this perspective, performs the role of mouthpiece for the absent author. In his writings on Artaud's Theatre of Cruelty, Derrida highlights that the theatre of representation is determined by an absent author-creator, who is 'armed with the text and keeps watch over, assembles, regulates the time or the meaning of representation'.²⁸ The author

²⁸ Jacques Derrida, 'The Theatre of Cruelty and the Closure of Representation', p.235

lets representation represent him through representatives. Directors and actors are merely 'enslaved interpreters', representing characters who, primarily through what they say, more or less directly express the thought of the creator. However, Derrida points out the ironic rule of the representative structure determining Western discourse. The notion of original creation is merely illusory; the author only transcribes and makes available for reading a text whose nature is itself necessarily representative. This argument reveals that art is not an imitation of reality, but reality is an imitation of a transcendental principle with which theatre puts the spectator into communication time and time again.

To escape the representational structures of Western discourse, Artaud advocates a theatre of immediacy. As Derrida explains, this idea of theatre is 'finite and leaves behind it, behind its actual presence, no trace, no object to carry off. It is neither a book, nor a work, but an energy'.²⁹ For Artaud, performance has to resist the possibility of repetition, re-constituting itself anew constantly. In *Our Country's Good*, however, the very repetition of the text opens up spaces in which the critical play of interrogation of both social and theatrical performance takes place. The original text is delivered in fragments. The scenes are taken out of their linear context, and they are rehearsed according to particular circumstances and restrictions.

²⁹ *ibid.*, p.235

Improvisation determines the rehearsals, since these are often interrupted by the intervention of the authorities or have to be changed due to the various prohibitions imposed on the players. The fact that some of the convicts have to play several parts since 'Major Ross won't let any more convicts off work' (*OG II/7:73*) is only one of the elements that challenge the mimetic property of acting.

Negotiating alternative ways of representation, Wertebaker's preoccupation with women's roles in both society and theatre is a key feature of *Our Country's Good*. The issue of mimesis leads to a discussion of the structures of representation and women's identity. Elin Diamond emphasizes that the notion of truth in mimesis is inseparable from gender-based and biased epistemologies. In the classical model of imitation offered by Plato and revised by Aristotle, the epistemological, morphological, universal standard for determining the truth, is always the category of the masculine, a metaphoric substitution for God the Father.³⁰ Wertebaker's play is marked by an awareness of women's objectification and specularization in social and theatrical representation:

DUCKLING. I don't want to be watched all the times. I wake up in the middle of the night and you're watching me. Watching, watching, watching. JUST STOP WATCHING ME.
(*OG I/7:27*)

³⁰ Elin Diamond, *Unmaking Mimesis* (London, 1997), p.IX

Our Country's Good interrogates the implications of Platonic mimesis in the context of phallogentric discourse. The play reveals the position of women in a system of representation that reduces them to mirroring the masculine 'Self-Same'. Luce Irigaray's concept of 'mimesis imposed' confirms that women function as the foundation of this specular duplication. Women's role is to 'give man back "his" image and repeating it as the "same"... Woman will therefore be this sameness – or at least its mirror image – and ... will facilitate the repetition of the same, in contempt for her difference'.³¹ The need for constant reassurance that was a key issue in *The Love of the Nightingale* and *The Grace of Mary Traverse* is dramatized in *Our Country's Good* in the relationship between Duckling and Harry:

DUCKLING. I heard your screams from the beach. You're having another bad dream.

HARRY. Let me come inside you.

DUCKLING. Will you forget your nightmares?

HARRY. Yes.
(OG II/3:61)

In *Our Country's Good*, the performance space is determined by the repressive representational structures in which the women 'are looked at by all the men' (OG I/4:9). However, at the same time, the play locates subversive possibilities within this very framework. It becomes clear that for women, performance is a process that can

³¹ Luce Irigaray, *Speculum of the Other Woman*, tr. Gillian C. Gill (Ithaca and New York, 1985), p.54

lead to self-determination, anticipating a change in the relationship to men. At the beginning of the play, women are still trapped in their stereotypical role of virgin and whore. Ralph is devoted to his wife whose name is not to be spoken 'on this iniquitous shore'. Every night he 'kissed your dear beloved image a thousand times'(OG I/4:7). The actresses, however, are seen as 'filthy, thieving, lying whores' (OG I/6:18). Their participation in the play allows them to engage in a critical interrogation of their roles in society:

DABBY. If God didn't want women to be whores he shouldn't
have created men who pay for their bodies.
(OG I/8:30)

Practising their lines, a sense of solidarity emerges: 'We women have to look after each other. Let's learn the lines' (OG I/7:30) Dabby states, confirming the need for a strong women's community. 'I haven't finished my speech!'(OG I/11:49) Liz Morden asserts, defending herself against Ralph's interruption. She demands a command over language to make her voice heard on the stage. In the course of the play, the love between Ralph and Mary makes clear the possibility of mutual recognition and pleasure. The acknowledgment of the other in her/his own right is manifested in the play and exchange of gazes:

RALPH. Let me see you.

MARY. Yes.
Let me see you.

RALPH. Yes.
(OG II/10:79)

In scenes titled *The Meaning of Plays* or *Backstage*, the convicts' discussion about the content and form of presentation of *The Recruiting Officer* leads to a critique of both the ideological foundations of society and dominant forms of art. During the dramatic action, the performers continue to question the paternal function of the writer's text they are asked to perform, offering alternatives that seek to transform it:

DABBY. I could write scenes, Lieutenant, women with real lives,
not these Shrewsbury prudes.

WISEHAMMER. I've written something. The prologue of this
play won't make any sense to the convicts: 'In
ancient times, when Helen's fatal charms' and
so on. I've written another one. Will you look at
it, Lieutenant?
(OG II/7:70)

In this context, the contributions of women are highlighted: 'Do you like the last lines? Mary helped me with them' (OG II/7:70) Wisehammer explains. His speech presents the text as consisting of a multiplicity of voices; moreover, it highlights women's hidden contributions to the theatre. In the course of the play(s), the convicts' acting subtly shifts from a mere rehearsal and repetition of lines (being able to read is an important precondition for taking part

in the play) and from the ability to 'play the part' (*OG II/7:72*) to a creative interpretation, criticism and alteration of the text. The rehearsed play is not presented as a closed spectacle but the actors interrupt the action, ask for explanations, attempt to re-write the plot, and invent new roles for characters who want to join the theatre group. This however, indicates a freedom granted to the spectacle, positioning the text as a variable entity subject to change as the context of enunciation changes. From this point of view, theatrical presentation is no reproduction/reflection of the written text but what happens on stage is transformed into the multiple text of performance.

Increasingly, Ralph's role as director of the play changes. At the beginning, he merely 'plays second fiddle to the author'.³² He acts as a kind of translator whose task is to re-enact and illustrate a discourse on the stage, and to make it a 'success' (*OG II/2:60*). However, his reliance on the original text gives way to adaptations initiated by the interaction with the convicts. Wisehammer defends his version of the play, suggesting that 'it would mean more to the convicts', when Ralph insists that 'it needs a little more work. It's not Farquhar' (*OG II/7:71*). However, later in the play, the performance causes Ralph, who was 'crawling for promotion' (*OG I/6:20*) to 'countermand the orders of a superior officer' (*OG II/5:64*). His

³² Jacques Derrida, 'The Theatre of Cruelty and the Closure of Representation', p.236

insistence on gaining respect for the performance indicates the change in his relation to the convicts, demonstrating a new understanding of their situation. This becomes obvious when he explains Liz's reasons for not defending herself against the accusations made by the authorities - 'she won't speak, Your Excellency, because of the convict code of honour' (OG II/10:79). In another scene, Ralph leaves his role as director and authoritative figure, joining the convicts in the performance space:

MAJOR ROSS. The wee Lieutenant wants to be in the play, too.
He wants to be promoted to convict. We'll have
you in the chain gang, soon, Mr Clark, haha.
*A Pause. Ross and Campbell stand, watching.
The convicts are frozen*

RALPH. Major, we will rehearse now.
(OG II/5:63)

Various scenes emphasize that the women do not identify with their assigned parts but recognize the stage as a space that is exposed/limited by a framework that does not correspond with their experiences and hopes. Mary, who states that she has to 'be' the character she is playing 'because that's acting', is contradicted by Dabby who declares: ' No way I'm being Rose, she's an idiot' (OG I/8:31). 'I think the *Recruiting Officer* is a silly play. I want to be in a play that has more interesting people in it' she continues in Act Two and finally concludes: ' I want to play myself' (OG II/7:73). Dabby expresses a liberation from the text of the master author. She

refuses to submit herself to the character because it would leave her in a position of absence. Ceasing to be an actor, she 'plays herself', thus rejecting her function as the foundation for the specular duplication of the masculine subject. As Philomele in *The Love of the Nightingale*, Dabby insists on breaking the mirror of self-reflection, a process which – as Irigaray confirms – entails the risk of mortal crisis for the male subject.³³

In *Our Country's Good*, a community of subjects emerges which is linked by fellow-feeling, autonomy and self-determination. Ann Wilson points out that performance is presented as a therapeutic tool for the convicts since the rehearsal process creates a community of players which allows them to re-build their social identities and serves as a paradigm for a utopian society.³⁴ Ketch Freeman confirms the new status: 'Some players came into our village once, they were loved like the angels ... Lieutenant, I want to be an actor' (OG I/8:32). Through the process of performance, a collective identity takes the place of isolated, individualistic struggle, self-alienation and self-loathing. During the first rehearsal, Major Ross and Captain Campbell appear and the reaction of the convicts to their presence is significant: '*the convicts slink away and sink down, trying to make themselves invisible*'. They are left '*in the shambles of their rehearsal*

³³ Luce Irigaray, *Speculum of the Other Woman*, p.54

³⁴ Ann Wilson, 'Our Country's Good : Theatre, Colony and Nation in Wertebaker's Adaption of *The Playmaker*', *Modern Drama* 34:1 (March 1991), p.24

(OG I/11:52). The intervention of the military authorities during the second rehearsal confirms the dehumanizing treatment to which the convicts are exposed. Moreover, it recalls a view of power as outright repression able to reduce human beings to the status of animals:

ROSS. Byrant. Here

DABBY *comes forward.*
On all fours.

DABBY *goes down on all fours.*
Now wag your tail and bark, and I'll throw you a
biscuit.
(OG II/5:65)

In the course of the dramatic action, resistance to oppressive forces becomes possible through the medium of the play. Liz Morden defies Ketch Freeman, telling him to 'stick to your ropes, my little galler, don't bother the actresses' (OG I/8:33). Suddenly, the convicts start '*acting boldly across the room, across everyone*' (OG II:5:65), using performance as a means of resistance. Moreover, the convicts develop a strong and affirming sense of identity through their participation in the production.

Even though these acts of resistance are powerful and politically radical, the production of *The Recruiting Officer* still amounts to the adoption of cultural values of the dominant community and hence is a means of colonization. While serving to offer a critique of the dominant ideology and its foundations of political and social belief, the play nonetheless presents their

reinforcement through re-enactment. The play's ending confirms that performance is always a double-edged, contradictory enterprise. *Our Country's Good* closes with the opening lines of Farquhar's play, '*and to the triumphant music of Beethoven's Fifth Symphony and the sound of applause and laughter from the First Fleet audience, the first Australian performance of The Recruiting Officer begins*' (OG II/11:91). However, the final scene is not a manifestation of dominant power and an expression of political stagnation. Rather it highlights the provisionality of discourse and the potential for resignification. Shortly before the curtain rises, the convicts express their expectations and plans for the time after the performance. They relinquish plans of escape, but want instead 'to do another play'(OG II/11:85), intending to start a theatre company, writing plays about justice and other issues that matter to them. Consequently, a notion of the future, a vision of 'tomorrow' (OG II/11:86) which is shared and expressed by each of the convicts, emerges. This highlights the potential of theatre as providing a powerful challenge to dominant ideological forms. The last scene encourages the hope that performance will act as an emancipatory force, enabling the convicts to redefine their situation, to politicize it, even though 'it will be considered provocative' (OG II/11:90).

In *After Darwin*, the vision of 'tomorrow' is a vision of a world that can no longer be contained within a totalizing and homogenizing

system. This issue is explored within a complex interplay of past and present, linking two apparently disparate worlds. Millie, an immigrant director from Bulgaria, Lawrence, a black American dramatist, and the two actors Ian and Tom rehearse a play dealing with the conflicts arising from Darwin's theory of evolution. The historical focus leads them to re-evaluate their present situation and to address problems of (cultural) identity, belief and personal responsibility. The play dramatizes Darwin's voyage on the *Beagle*, the development of his evolutionary theory leading up to the publication of *The Origin of Species*, the 'most important book of the modern world' (AD II/2:48).

The moment the play begins, the audience is confronted with the loss of authoritative standards of truth and belief:

FITZROY. This is the truth. ... Natural Selection? We cannot live without The Book. You want a grim future, without purpose, mockery of all that is sacred, no moral light. It had been better for that man, if he had not been born. I harboured you in my cabin. I, FitzRoy Captain of *The Beagle*, have brought destruction on to the world.
He draws the razor up to his throat to slit it.
(AD I/1:1)

FitzRoy's speech presents the audience with the challenges posed by the theory of evolution to religious assumptions, doctrines of creation, moral values and conceptions of the human subject. Millie's interpretation of FitzRoy's situation shows that the feeling of disorientation and alienation also determines contemporary society:

- MILLIE. ... he's out of joint so, fear, that terrible icy fear ... I've seen it, at first surprise, then disbelief, then you attack each other because there's not enough food to go around, times of betrayal, despair. And the ice advances towards you.
- IAN. Could you be more specific?
- MILLIE. Fear, Ian, it's an English word, no? Contemporary. Daily. Why do you repress that, too?
(AD I/9:25)

The constant interplay between past and present foregrounds the view that the present has been formed by the past. However, history itself is not presented as a fixed narrative, but it is 'shifty, too. I mean, isn't it supposed to be rewritten all the time?' (AD I/7:18). This, however, emphasizes the need for a critical reworking of history, and of acknowledging the processes of exclusion and marginalization that are part of the process of its production.³⁵

The second scene leads the audience back to the beginning of Darwin's journey, when the world as a stable, permanent reality was still intact. Accounts of reality depend upon a logic of discovery in which science plays an important role. The task of science is to 'uncover the immutable laws of nature' (AD I/10:31), 'scientific truths are there to reveal God's intentions' (AD II/1:39) FitzRoy states. Knowledge, however, is determined by observation: 'Observe and note down. Observe again. Never trust memory' (AD I/6:14). These explanations reveal the belief in the possibility of an unmediated and

³⁵ The importance of recognizing history as a narrative and of taking into account the exclusionary processes involved are discussed in depth in Chapter 3.

direct knowledge of the world and of reality. This mode of thought, however, positions the knowing subject in a relation of externality to nature which is seen as a source of insight. Hegel confirms that nature is something immediate and external to the human subject who, through the 'cunning of his reason' is able to preserve and maintain himself in face of the forces of nature in order to make himself more and more at home in the world:

[nature] is something immediate and external; and [man] himself is an external and therefore sensuous individual, although in relation to nature he correctly regards himself as end.³⁶

In Hegelian thought, God reveals himself in two different ways: in nature and in Spirit. The task of the knowing human subject is, therefore, to uncover in the processes and constant transformations of nature its universality - the concealed workings of the Spirit. Therefore, the human subject aspires to knowledge of nature's forces and laws 'whose content must not be a simple aggregate, but arranged in orders and classes, must present itself as an organism'.³⁷

In *After Darwin*, nature presents itself as a reality that has to be discovered, accurately classified and mapped by the human subject in order to produce true knowledge:

FITZROY. I have measured, remeasured, and measured again every inch of this coast. Back and forth, back and

³⁶ G.W.F. Hegel, 'Nature and Spirit', *Hegel: The Essential Writings*, ed. and tr. Frederick G. Weiss (New York, 1974), p.200

³⁷ *ibid.*, p.200

forth, there will be no error in the charts of these waters.
(AD 8:19)

The world as an object of knowledge and exploration is finally itself only matter for the self-formation of the only social being in the production of knowledge, the human subject. The application of reason and knowledge leads to the conquest of natural and social evils and to the emancipation of humanity. The play makes explicit the liberal-humanist project to know and achieve the self. 'Man alone has the freedom to change and perfect himself'(AD I/10:31), FitzRoy confirms, accounting for the right of the individual to realize himself to the full. Liberal humanism, as Chris Weedon explains, is a metanarrative that puts forward universal human rights, assuming that Western societies are the most developed societies.³⁸ As such they supposedly stand for the most desirable form of existence. According to this theory, progress and development towards a more humane society are the results of rational action, founded on education and the rule of law. This narrative, however, is also employed to justify colonialism.

In *After Darwin*, FitzRoy starts his 'civilizing mission'(AD I/6:15) with the intention to raise the Fuegians to the state of civilization:

³⁸ Chris Weedon, *Feminism, Theory and the Politics of Difference* (Oxford, 1999), p.108

DARWIN. And you plan to educate them?

FITZROY. Not one of God's creatures is beyond salvation. Try to be a little more charitable, Darwin.
(AD I/10:30)

Scene 10 foregrounds and parodies the imposition by one nation of its values, structures and language upon the colonized other. When FitzRoy unwraps the presents for the Fuegians given by 'the good ladies of the Walthamstow missionary society', the absurdity of these gifts mocks the privileging of Western norms:

FITZROY. Why should a Fuegian not sit one day, his hair cut, washed, smoothed with maccassar oil, in a huge armchair reading a paper? And then his wife shall want antimaccassars. Not immediately perhaps

FitzRoy carefully unwraps a large, ornate Victorian chamber pot. Darwin bursts out laughing.
(AD I/10:31)

The play does not merely present FitzRoy's enterprise as a misguided idealistic project. It reveals that economic exploitation is at the core of colonialism: 'the settlers ... believe only in grabbing more land for themselves' (AD II/5:59). The cultural appropriation of the other is based upon the internalization of Western culture and values. This, however, involves the annihilation of difference: Jemmy Button 'could no longer speak his own language' and his 'own tribe is now extinct' (AD I/11:32). The colonization of the other operates within the dialectical process of difference and sameness. However, Homi Bhabha shows in his discussion of colonial discourse that this

discourse is determined by a process of mimicry. Based upon the desire for (religious) reform and on the need for control over the colony, the imposition of values and norms by one nation upon the colonized other does not completely obliterate difference but leaves the other in a state of ambivalence. Colonial mimicry is, therefore, the desire for a reformed, recognizable Other, as a subject of difference 'that is almost the same but not quite'.³⁹ Bhabha explains mimicry as a sign of a double articulation; in order to be effective it must continually produce its slippage, its excess, its difference.

In *After Darwin*, both the historical and contemporary scenes present the subject in a state of transition:

LAWRENCE. With difficulty, pain, FitzRoy recognizes Jemmy Button. Jemmy, embarrassed by his nakedness, refused to answer FitzRoy's questions until he had been fully clothed. English and good table manners came haltingly back to him over dinner. ...He undressed, lowered himself into his canoe, vanished.
(AD I/11:32)

As Lawrence explains, Jemmy Button was 'thus becoming perhaps one of the first people to suffer the stresses of biculturalism, a condition which was to reach epidemic proportions in the late twentieth century' (AD I/11:32). The play makes the connection to Millie's situation:

³⁹ Homi K. Bhabha, 'Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse', *The Location of Culture* (London, 1994), p.86

MILLIE.

In the 1960s Zhivkov decreed that members of the Communist Party must be pure Bulgarians. So my family, which had had a Turkish name since the middle ages, changed it to a Bulgarian one. .. In my last year of high school, I stumbled on the truth, and I don't know why, I really don't know why, I decided to proclaim my Turkish identity.... I drifted to the Capital... When the communists fell, I took back my Bulgarian name ... I came here ... I took an English name.

(AD II/2:51)

Julia Kristeva describes the condition of the foreigner/subject as a moving train, a plane in flight, a form of transition that precludes stopping. Her writings reveal an identity that is determined by multiplying masks and 'false selves', never completely true nor completely false.⁴⁰ Millie's biography confirms the impossibility of taking root, resisting a notion of ordinary sites or authentic identities. Far from being at home in the world, her camouflage-tactics function as a means of protection, depicting the adaptation to ever-changing conditions.

In the play, migration, the crossing of borders, becomes a metaphor for the situation of the subject in modern society. Society is in a state of constant flux, leading to a sense of disorientation and insecurity. Kristeva compares the crisis of the human subject who ceases to see himself as universal and glorious but instead discovers his abysses and incoherences with the feeling of homelessness of the foreigner. As a way out of this crisis, she emphasizes the necessity of

⁴⁰ Julia Kristeva, *Strangers to Ourselves*, tr. Leon S.Roudiez (New York, 1993), p.7

accepting new modalities of otherness which rely neither upon devaluation nor on levelling. In addition Kristeva stresses the importance of recognizing the foreigner in ourselves, across an internal border, in order to achieve a society in which otherness and difference are neither rejected nor erased. However, dealing with questions of the relation between subject and other, Wertebaker's play dramatizes the exclusionary processes involved in the constitution of dominant discourse and universal truth:

DARWIN. ... the day has passed delightfully. Delight itself, however is a weak term to express the feelings ...

FITZROY. Feelings.

DARWIN. ... feelings of a naturalist who, for the first time, has wandered by himself in a Brazilian forest. The elegance of the grasses –

FITZROY. Elegance. Is that a size?
(AD I/6:13)

'Vague, Darwin, vague...' FitzRoy criticizes. Offering his accounts of facts, the cartographic precision and detailed descriptions of the voyage, he proposes that his companion should 'tear up your account and start again'(AD I/6:15). Setting the terms of language, it becomes clear that discourse does not allow for a heterogenous account of the world.

In *After Darwin*, 'The Book is beauty and security' (AD II/5:60). As repository and receptacle of knowledge, the book's status as master narrative guarantees identity and stasis, providing the subject

with a notion of a founding centre. Derrida identifies the book as a fundamentally theological notion; it reassures us by the assumptions of meaning, purpose and unity and, thus, sustains the concept of a self-present being within Western metaphysics. The idea of the book, which always refers to a natural totality, is 'profoundly alien to the sense of writing'. It is the protection of logocentrism against the disruption of writing, 'against its aphoristic energy ... and against difference in general'.⁴¹ Contrasting the two narratives, the play shows the attempt to sustain the concepts of being and truth in contrast to the endless play of meaning within language. Asserting his authority, Fitzroy confirms his position of power against the threat of Darwin's text which makes no claim to unity: 'A captain who cannot assert discipline betrays his men, goes mad himself, mad ...' (*AD I/6:15*).

For FitzRoy, the act of writing is mimetic, repeating and legitimizing the truth contained in the Book. This provides him with the illusion of unity, mastery and self-representation: 'I know how interested people will be in reading it' (*AD I/6:15*) he states. However, the contemporary scenes highlight the instability of the logos, the impossibility of unifying the signifier in order to produce singular meaning:

⁴¹ Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, tr. G.C.Spivak (Baltimore, 1974), p.18

TOM. It's a lot of lines.

IAN. You'll get them.

TOM. I remember them, I just don't know what they mean – and then, words... They shift about.

IAN. That's the pleasure.
(AD 5:11-12)

After Darwin presents language as the domain of play, as potentially disruptive. However, for FitzRoy, the pleasure and play of language is a threat. His equilibrium is shattered by 'headaches ... that drove my uncle to suicide'(AD I/8:23); moreover, scenes titled *Fear, Despair* and *Doubt* destabilize the seemingly secure position of the rational subject: ' I know the dark night of the soul, Darwin' (AD I/12:36)... 'they call me Black Coffee, don't they, - when the dark mood descends' (AD I/6:16).

In the course of the play, the different views of the two opponents escalate in an open confrontation. When FitzRoy asks Darwin to 'tear up' his writings since they do not adhere to the dominant rules, Darwin merely '*folds up his papers and puts them into his pocket*' (AD I/6:15). Later, he contests FitzRoy's claim to a single Truth. However, the crucial point is, that Darwin's argument operates within the existing framework of the dominant discourse. In contrast to Wallace, whose paper supports evolutionary theory, and whose ideas ' came to him in a three-day fever' (AD II/3:53), Darwin's 'book is carefully argued' (AD II/5:59). 'I have only observed' (AD

I/6:16) he states and, through the mimetic assumption of the dominant metaphors of observation, reason and validation, beats the captain with his own weapons. In a contemporary scene, Tom explains the performative character of Darwin's text:

TOM. How was this idea going to survive in a world of FitzRoy?
 You use camouflage. Maybe even the idea used camouflage ...
 (AD I/7:17)

Camouflage, in this context, is the adaptation of mimesis as tactics which dislocates the structures of representation from within the very framework it imitates.

Even though Darwin's writings are, finally, comprehended in a book, which 'is already with the publisher' (AD II/5:60), his theory resists closure. Engaging FitzRoy in a dialogue, Darwin makes the captain realize the inevitable logical consequences of his research:

DARWIN. ... suppose there began to emerge birds so different from their forebears – look at the beaks, FitzRoy – that they must, in truth, be called a – new – species.

FITZROY. New.

DARWIN. New.

FITZROY. Stop. I see where you are going
 The devil is at work here in the cabin.
 (AD I/11:36)

Evolution challenges the fundamental unity of all things, proving it to be illusory. Darwin's account of the mutability of species negates the

existing belief in 'the divine designer' (*AD I/12:36*). Counterpointing the ancient hypothesis of the fixity of species, all of which had been individually created in their present form, it is determined by an entirely centreless structure. The perpetual emergence of 'new species' signifies the lost security of origin and presence. Instead, the process of evolution entails the notion of an endless series of inscriptions, always open for resignification, the present always under the threat of extinction.

In *After Darwin*, Wertebaker confirms the compulsion of the dominant system to totalize and unify aligning it with the will to power and control:

FITZROY. This is struggle, disorder, despair, horror, chaos ...
Don't think I do not understand your theory. Even I
see how it could – but I will not allow it to exist.
(*He takes out a pistol*)
(*AD II/5:60*)

However, even FitzRoy's attempt to confer God's presence upon the evolutionary processes fails. The advantage of one species which leads to its survival is not 'given to it by God', but Darwin shows that it is 'more like accident' (*AD II/3:52*). This, however, leads to the most threatening result of the evolutionary thesis – the descent of man. 'He too evolved', Darwin concludes his argument and concludes 'I believe it is the truth' (*AD II/3:52*). The conclusion, that 'we are no better than animals' (*AD II/5:59*) calls into question the foundations of thought and belief. Intellectual development, moral faculties, even

religion are merely useful ideological weapons, preserved because of their political usefulness. This, however, unsettles assumptions of the special status of man who is not to 'mirror God' (AD I/6:15), but whose existence is merely a stage in the evolution of the world which has not been created in seven days, but it is the result of 'changes [that] take place over millions of years' (AD II/3:52). Man as part of the evolutionary process can never be self-contained; he cannot retain his illusory position external to the world-as-object, but is himself determined by constant change and an indeterminate future.

'Perhaps there is no right, no good' (AD I/1:1) claims FitzRoy, expressing the disintegration of moral and social values, following the collapse of his belief system. In *After Darwin*, Wertenbaker dramatizes the loss of ontological security and the need for new formations of subjectivity. Shifting the focus upon '*the present*' (AD I/3:8) the play presents the audience with a society determined by the competitive struggle of all against all, the breakdown of family and social relationships, and the invasion of the virtual world of modern technology:

IAN. *A bleep goes off. Ian looks for something.*
My daughter's Tamagotchi. She comes every other weekend and I look after it the rest of the time. If something happens, she'll never trust me again.

Tom and Ian look both.

I think it wants to be fed. *(He gently hands the Tamagotchi to Tom)* A virtual baby. You get very attached.

Tom *quickly hands it back.*
(AD II/1:43)

In *After Darwin* the borders between the seemingly stable material reality and the virtual world become blurred, leading to a feeling of disorientation and alienation.

In this context of permanent crisis, Wertebaker's play addresses questions of individual responsibility and the multiple possibilities of meaning. Tom occupies a position of resistance to hegemonic identities of all kinds:

TOM. I'm tired of everyone trying to enlist me in their ideas, communism, free marketism, Europe, God, the greatness of science, the purity of art ... When I see an Idea floating around, about to get stuck on my jacket, I move.
(AD I/9:26)

This speech shows a range of competing discourses tied to particular social interests which make truth claims. However, Tom's situation reveals a denial of responsibility and the refusal of critical inquiry. He doesn't 'care one way or the other': 'I live in the present. I travel light' (AD I/7:18) and is merely interested in 'doing blank. You know: nothing. Like: Beyond anger' (AD II/3:56). Here, the play portrays a society in which individual identities and values are displaced seemingly irreparably. When Tom's 'selfish gene' (AD II/3:54) takes over, he decides to leave the theatre group in order to take part in a

film: ' I'm hungry .. I want to go where the food is'(AD II/1:45).

Millie's breakdown parallels FitzRoy's experiences:

MILLIE. It is the end of everything. All this: wreckage, ashes,
nothingness. ...Quiet, please. I am going extinct.
(AD II/3:56)

In various scenes Millie expresses the hopes she has invested in the theatre project. This and various other scenes foreground theatre as the place of community and bonding. Moreover, Wertebaker's writing emphasizes the creativity and immediacy of theatre by contrasting it with the cinema. 'In a film, you're there for ever. Fixed' (AD I/5:12), Tom explains. In the theatre, however, repetition always contains difference, depending upon the context of performance. In *After Darwin*, the absent writer enters the performance space. The interaction between the writer and the actors underscores the emancipation from the authority of the text through performance:

LAWRENCE. I'm confused nor – you don't seem to understand-
I'd feel my work was contaminated.

MILLIE. It's not yours anymore, it's ours, Ian's, mine. You
can go away.
(AD II/6:69)

In the discussions between Ian and Millie, theatre is confirmed as the place of experimentation and individual creativity. Ian has 'read everything there is about FitzRoy' (AD I/3:8) and insists on 'finding'

the historical character in the books. However, his attitude is challenged by Millie:

MILLIE. Ian, you are creating him....

He will evolve into what we make him here.
(AD I/3:8)

This and various other scenes emphasize the power of performance to open up capacities for play and creativity which transcend the given structures.

This leads, however, to the following question: is there a way out of the contemporary crisis? In Wertebaker's play, hope is to be found in a community that does not unify and level difference, but rather functions as a supporting network for the individual. The final scene communicates a feeling of solidarity:

FITZROY. If you can find me and give me room –
Then we can become part of this, too.

DARWIN. My work is nearly finished.

FitzRoy moves to Tom.

FITZROY (to Tom). Both of us.

Tom acknowledges this, nods. FitzRoy turns towards Millie, as Lawrence hands her some notes.

All of us.
Fade
(AD II/7:73)

The speeches of the characters present the audience with a sense of belonging and security found in personal relationships. However, this

scene is also determined by Millie's speeches. '*As if reading titles*' (AD 11:72) she readdresses the elements of evolution, evoking a sense of constant flux, change and the necessity for the individual to adapt to this situation. The end of the play does not offer a stable subject position but *After Darwin* emphasizes that the 'small and secure space' (AD II/3:55), the moments of equilibrium which the characters have found through their theatre project, will always be threatened.

3 Playing with History

What are you then?
What name would you put to yourself?
You're not a wife nor a widow. You're not a virgin.
Tell me a name for what you are.
(*Vinegar Tom*)

What has surfaced is something different
from the unitary, closed narratives of historiography
as we have traditionally known it
we now get the histories (in the plural) of the losers
as well as the winners, of the regional as well as the centrist,
of the unsung many as well as the much sung few,
and I might add, of women as well as men.
(Linda Hutcheon)

Plays by women repeatedly emphasize the role of history in the construction of seemingly fixed gender positions. The revision of history in order to include women's achievements and experiences is one of the key issues of women's dramatic work. However, any attempt to take history as a starting point for the understanding of the subject should ask about the writing of history itself, involving a critical analysis of what counts as historical. In this chapter, Sarah Daniels' play *Byrthrite* is used as a starting point to introduce theories of history and history writing. The analysis of Caryl Churchill's plays *Cloud Nine*, *Vinegar Tom* and *Top Girls* relates these concepts to the formation of subjectivity and to the question of the body and its materiality. In order to 'historicize' history and to make

clear that the production of historical discourse is necessarily political, this examination addresses questions of time, power, narrative and authorial position, always in relation to the constitution of women's subject position both in society and in theatrical representation.

The correction of the marginalization of women's past within the traditional discipline of history has been identified by feminist critics as a matter of political urgency. This corresponds with attempts to reconstruct women's place in historical discourse, focussing upon the emergence of new evidence previously ignored. A recurrent feature of women's theatre is the attempt to challenge historical narratives which pay scant attention to women's achievements in the past. An example of this aspect is dramatized in Sarah Daniels' *Byrthrite*, a play that is set in the seventeenth century:

HELEN. And what is this task?

PARSON. I am just writing history. ... In many years hence, men will want to read it and find out about the accounts and happenings of our time.

HELEN. Could I not help you with it?

PARSON. A woman cannot write, for even if she has a mind to understand the lines on paper, her emotions get in the way of truth.

Pointing to his diary.

This is plain statement of fact so it will not be questioned as to its accuracy in future.

HELEN. I'm sure t'would improve under my guidance.

PARSON. Don't be foolish, women don't make history.
(*BR II/2:381*)

This scene questions the modernist paradigm of the author as a seemingly stable point of knowledge in an objective world; it simultaneously presents and undermines a concept of history as truth, as factual representation of past realities. As a heuristic activity, the writing of history is revealed to order and represent the past in relation to the needs of the present and the future. Thus, it is shown to contribute to the maintenance of the existing structure of power and knowledge.

In this scene, history is shown to be based upon processes of selection and exclusion. Michel de Certeau confirms that any autonomous order is founded upon what it eliminates; it produces a residue condemned to be forgotten.¹ In *Byrthrite*, the idea of history as a recounting of facts/truths is challenged by turning the spotlight upon the exclusionary processes and biases involved in the production of historical narrative. The dialogue between Helen and her husband foregrounds the notion that history is determined by the dominant patriarchal order and by a textual structure of closure through totalization. In this context, it becomes obvious that in historical discourse women's experiences have consequently been hidden, silenced, trivialized and erased. However, these repressive processes are necessarily invisible from within the totalizing field of a foundational history. de Certeau calls attention to the disavowal by historians of certain features of their practice. While acknowledging

¹ Michel de Certeau, *Heterologies: Discourse on the Other*, tr. Brian Massumi (London and Minneapolis, 1986), p.4

that the 'plain statement of fact'(BR II/2:382) that has been recorded and is assumed today to be historically valid is shaped from conflicting imaginations, historiographical practice is considered to be a form of ideology that is based upon the elucidation of its own working laws, thus creating an illusion of objectivity:

The operation in question is rather sly: the discourse gives itself credibility in the name of the reality which it is supposed to represent, but this authorized appearance of the 'real' serves precisely to camouflage the practice which in fact determines it. Representation thus disguises the practice that organizes it.²

Similarly, Roland Barthes confirms the view of history as a narrative form that claims to produce not fiction but a (past) reality. From this perspective, history is 'placed under the imperious warrant of the "real", justified by principles of "rational" exposition'.³ Identifying historical discourse as a form of ideological elaboration, Barthes questions the distinctiveness of historical discourse in relation to other discourses such as fiction or drama. His argument brings historical narrative and fictional narrative together on an equal plane, a view that contests the former's claim to scientificity and objectivity.⁴

This perspective highlights the performative dimension of narrative. Barthes emphasizes that narrative does not represent, it does not imitate or show but its function is to constitute a spectacle which is not of a mimetic order.⁵ Following his argument, the historian

² *ibid.*, p.203

³ Roland Barthes, 'The Discourse of History', *The Rustle of Language*, tr. Richard Howard (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1989), p. 127

⁴ *ibid.*, p.127

⁵ Roland Barthes, 'Structural Analysis of Narratives', *Image-Music-Text*, tr. Stephen Heath (London, 1977), p.124

is not so much a collector of facts as a collector and relater of signifiers which are organized for the purpose of establishing positive meaning and filling the vacuum of pure, meaningless series; therefore, the past comes alive in history books through a combination of signifiers and referents. Narrative is understood as a unifying act through which the past is given a meaning it otherwise lacks, a meaning that is actually the play of language:' "What takes place" in narrative is from the referential (reality) point of view literally *nothing*; "what happens" is language alone, the adventure of language...'.⁶

'Can you not know what a dangerous thing you write' (*BR II* 2:382) Helen asks, thus emphasizing that history is crucial in positioning women within the dominant power structure. As Elin Diamond suggests, to understand history as narrative is a crucial move for feminists, not only because it demystifies the idea of disinterested authorship, but because the traditionally subordinate role of women can be seen as the result of narrative itself.⁷ *Byrthrite* challenges the apparent objectivity, neutrality and impersonality of historical discourse:

HELEN. ... read me your version.

PARSON. (*reads as though delivering a sermon*)

The war has rid us of many evils not least of the evil embodied in some of the female sex who were weighed in the balance and found wanting. Suitably dealt with through rigorous court procedures and brought to justice either swum or hung.

HELEN. (*curtly*) You've repeated the word evil twice.
(*BR II* 2:382)

⁶ *ibid.*, p.124

⁷ Elin Diamond, 'Refusing the Romanticism of Identity', *Theatre Journal* V37-3 (1985), p.276

History is characterized by a simultaneous totalization of time and a neutralization of power. The question is, then, how to destabilize these operations, enabling a critical discourse to emerge. Both Churchill's *Cloud Nine* and *Vinegar Tom* focus on the question of history and the subject. In these plays, the view that historical discourse is coextensive with patriarchal discourse is very obvious. The plays dramatize the processes by which history is produced while using the historical perspective to set in motion a process of self-reflection.

In seeking an analytic disclosure of power and its relations and evaluating the foundations of gender roles and their interaction with other socio-political factors such as class, Caryl Churchill's dramatic work covers a wide range of theatrical expression. Her writing has undergone many inflections, reorientations, and differences of emphasis since her earliest publications over 25 years ago. While her earlier plays contain political messages likely to be didactically encoded, her later work is more heteroglossic in character and reveals an increasing engagement with alternative possibilities of meaning and communication. In *Cloud Nine*, Churchill employs devices such as time-shift, cross-gender casting and doubling to unsettle and destabilize conventional assumptions about history, gender and identity. In the first part of the play, the dramatic action reveals the restraints and pressures experienced by the characters in a patriarchal colonialist setting. Act Two presents the audience with a 'world upside down'(CN II/3:312) in which the seemingly fixed gender

positions are opened up to plurality and change. However, even though the characters are leading more libertarian lifestyles, the repressive values and norms experienced in Act One still continue to influence their social positions and relationships.

Set in a British colony in Africa during the Victorian age, the first act of *Cloud Nine* presents the audience with a society characterized by bi-polar gender oppositions and well-defined concepts of femininity and masculinity. Whereas men are the 'doers', women's lives are reduced to the domestic sphere and to 'monotony' (*CN I/1:253*), for they remain merely 'spectators and clap' (*CN I/2:265*). The exploration of a new, unknown territory exemplifies the elements of the major 'quest' myths of Western society. Within this mythic discourse, sexual identity is destiny: the female is projected as a static obstacle, a non-dynamic space to be entered and traversed. Women are possessions, first of their fathers, then of their husbands; 'kept' and 'looked after' by men, female identity is dependent upon the identity of the male, the woman being 'mother. And a daughter. And a wife' (*CN I/2:268*) which indicates that her identity apart from her relationship to him is relatively unimportant.

For Clive, his wife Betty in her 'white dress' (*CN I/1:255*) embodies the accomplishments that encode her as female. Playing the piano and reading poetry, Betty represents beauty and motherhood, providing 'a haven of peace to come home to' (*CN I/1:254*); she is 'a star .. in men's sky' (*CN I/2:268*) which emphasizes the passive role of women whose

task is to give men inspiration and comfort. Betty is loved for her jealousy which proves her devotion to her husband and characteristics like 'fainting' and 'hysteria' (*CN I/1:254*) complete the exaggerated stereotype of female compliance and the perfect image of the subservient wife and mother, depending on her husband to protect her and to support her inherent weakness of body and mind. This choice of descriptions shows that various contradictory concepts of femininity exist in conjunction with each other. While the Victorian trope of the angel in the house presents women in their role of sacred homemaker to which the male returns after his labors and explorations in the outer world, the play simultaneously highlights women's constant predisposition to hysteria and, as an extension of this image, their radical instability and uncontrollable bodily excess.

In Act One, Betty is played by a man, and through this cross-dressing technique, Churchill emphasizes that she has become a reflection of her husband's achievements and values. She is a mere projection of the male imagination, his perfect, idealized mirror image, even repeating his expressions word for word when she states that 'we are not in this country to enjoy ourselves' (*CN I/1:253*). The scene presents a parody of the cultural signs of gender which are usually received as indices of feminine/masculine identity. By alienating iconicity, by foregrounding and dislocating the audience's expectations of resemblance, the ideology of gender is exposed. The spectator is able to recognize a sign-system as a sign-system, realizing its function

as a means to reinforce the social status quo. In *Cloud Nine*, gender becomes the central function in the play; Edward – Clive's and Betty's son – is played by a woman since he finds it 'rather hard as you can see' (*CN I/1:252*) to adopt the seemingly equally restrictive role prescribed for men in society. However, the audience quickly realizes that the image of the female is no more likely to allow Edward a sense of a coherent self than the masculine identity that he seems on the surface to have relinquished. His sister Victoria (who is at the beginning of the process of feminization) is played by a life-sized dummy. Through this device, Churchill problematizes the naturalness of gender roles, exposing feminization as an irreducibly social process. The play foregrounds the characters' unhappiness with this state of affairs. Betty wants 'more than that' (*CN I/2:258*) but, as her mother reminds her, she has 'to learn to be patient. I am patient. My mama was very patient' (*CN I/1:258*), thus emphasizing the long history of women's passive subordination and lack of self-determination.

A central issue in the play is the importance of the family in securing and reinforcing ideology and value categories. In the opening scene, Clive's formal speech illustrates the role of the family as an elementary social community:

CLIVE. This is my family. Though far from home,
we serve the Queen wherever we may roam.
I am a father to the natives here.
And father to my family so dear.
My wife is all I dreamt a wife should be,
And everything she is she owes to me.
(*CN I/1:251*)

The rhyming couplets perform a kind of containing function; therefore, the structure of Clive's speech signifies the restraints governing dominant discourse, which does not allow for any deviation from the norm. Clive personifies the white, authoritarian God who is all-powerful, representing absolution and punishment. 'Help me. Forgive me' (*CN I/3:278*) Betty asks her husband, 'I have faith in you' (*CN I/3:277*) she says and this maintains the connection between the oppressive patriarchal structure of society and the symbolic power of God. Clive's speech reveals the concept of the father; 'the empire is one big family' (*CN I/2:266*) and society is based upon a firm hierarchical structure since 'through our father we love our Queen and our God' (*CN I/3:276*).

For Churchill, the sexual-reproductive organization of society clearly determines the whole superstructure of political as well as economic and philosophical discourse. The family itself, dominated by the powerful father and supported by the dutiful mother is part of what Louis Althusser identifies as the Ideological State Apparatuses. He claims that the state does not merely function by power and repression but it also functions by ideology.⁸ The Ideological State Apparatuses are institutions which generate ideologies which the individual subject internalizes, and acts in accordance with. This internalization and re-enactment has a double function; it places the individual in subjection, and at the same time reproduces and

⁸ Louis Althusser, 'Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses', *Essays on Ideology*, tr. Ben Brewster (London, 1984), p.19

actualizes the rules of the system. In his writings, Althusser differentiates between 'ideologies' and 'ideology'. He argues that ideologies are historical and specific; a set of values which are dependent upon the respective social and political context. Ideology, however, is a permanent structure which 'has no history'⁹; it is not a set of politically acknowledged ideas, but rather the condition of action: the boundaries within which thought and representation are limited.

In *Cloud Nine*, the family itself subjects the individual members to a set of values and norms which guarantee the functioning of the State. In this context, Michel Foucault emphasizes that between every element of a social body, between men and women, between the family members, there exist relations of power which are 'not simply and purely a projection of the sovereign's great power over the individual; they are rather the concrete changing soil in which the sovereign's power is grounded, the conditions which make it possible to function'.¹⁰ This argument reveals that power does not operate on two different levels (one microscopic and the other macroscopic); the family organization does not mirror the order of the state but constantly creates and reinforces that order. From this point of view, the family is not the point of application or the final outcome of power but rather its anchor point.

⁹ *ibid.*, p.33

¹⁰ Michel Foucault, *Power/Knowledge*, ed. Colin Gordon, tr. with Leo Marshall, John Mepham, and Kate Soper (New York, 1980), p. 187

The play discloses the power relations within the family as a fundamental aspect of women's oppression. The characters' roles are prescribed by rigid behavior patterns for their respective sex; children at an early age have to undergo a process of socialization which is aimed at reproducing the dominant power system and, consequently, suppresses any 'deviation' from the given norm. Edward is taught 'to grow up to be a man' (CN I/1:252) and Victoria 'will learn to play' (CN I/3:275) with the doll, a toy which prepares her for her future, passive role in a society in which everybody has 'a part to play' (CN I/3:273). The play emphasizes that women's social task is their self-effacement in a family-related role. This positioning is elaborated in Hegel's concept of the family. In Hegelian thought, the patriarchal family is an intermediate institution that links individuals to civil society. While man has his actual substantive life in the state and in the struggle with the external world, woman has her substantive destiny in the family, and 'to be imbued with family piety is her ethical frame of mind'.¹¹

Cloud Nine confirms this division, portraying women as being hidden in the closed patriarchal family:

ELLEN. We don't have much society.

BETTY. Clive is my society.
(CN I/1:258)

¹¹ G.W.F.Hegel, 'The Family', *Philosophy of Right*, tr. T.M. Knox (Oxford, 1967), p.114/§166

However, in Hegelian thought, the roles assigned to men and women in the family determine their respective positioning in history:

One sex [the male] is mind in its self-diremption into explicit personal self-subsistence and the knowledge and volition of free universality. The other sex is mind maintaining itself in unity as knowledge and volition of the substantive, but knowledge and volition in the form of concrete individuality and feeling.¹²

In her critique of Hegel's account of the family, Luce Irigaray emphasizes that woman 'must love man and child as generic representatives of the human species dominated by the male gender. She must love them as those who are able to realize the infinity of humankind (unconsciously assimilated to the masculine), at the expense of her own gender and her own relationship to infinity'.¹³ From this perspective, the generic definition of woman as wife and mother deprives women of universality and singularity both of which are seen as the privilege of man.

Since the reconciliation of these terms is the necessary precondition for the emergence of the self-unfolding spirit, women are positioned as the 'unhistorical other' a collectivity that is positioned outside of history proper, confined to the realm of natural immediacy. Dealing with theories of consumption, Michel de Certeau confirms that everyday life is traditionally understood not as the site of action but of non-historical spaces, the domain of inertia and

¹² *ibid.*, p.114

¹³ Luce Irigaray, *I love to You: Sketch of a Possible Felicity in History*, tr. Alison Martin (London, 1996), p.21

passivity: ' a degraded world without hope or signification... virtually unintelligible... in a word, feminine'.¹⁴ In the gap between the world structured by hegemonic powers and practices of everyday life (individuals), de Certeau insists upon the theory of the everyday as tactics. However, this approach is not to be regarded as strategic revolution, rather, this position serves to confirm the unsutured nature of the social, the impossibility of the full colonization of daily life by the system.

In its shedding a critical spotlight on the concept of the family, *Cloud Nine* presents history as an important part of the social whole that can make subjects conscious of values and hierarchical positions. Within a discourse that glorifies the masculine virtues of courage, honor and patriotism and which is dedicated to preserving the names of explorers, women have no voice. In *Cloud Nine*, history itself becomes problematic; it is presented as a censored discourse, a totalizing hermeneutic founded upon a commanding premise. At issue is what patriarchal authority chooses as worthy of discourse. In a society in which institutionalized heterosexuality helps to create gender and difference and, consequently, to set limits to that difference, homosexuality is regarded as disturbance; it is ' the most revolting perversion', 'a disease more dangerous than diphtheria' (*CN I/4:283*). Harry Bagely, a homosexual, is 'like a man born crippled' (*CN I/4:283*), a deviation from the norm which has to be obliterated

¹⁴ Michel de Certeau, *Heterologies: Discourse on the Other*, p.101

from history in order to maintain dominant value categories. The patriarchal authority considers it 'unthinkable' that 'rivers will be named' after Bagely, who misunderstands Clive's praise of the comradeship of men:

CLIVE. I know the friendship between us, Harry, is not something that could be spoilt by the weaker sex. Friendship between men is a fine thing. It is the noblest form of relationship.

HARRY *takes hold of* CLIVE

CLIVE. What are you doing?

HARRY. Well you said –

CLIVE. I said what?

HARRY. Between men.

CLIVE *is speechless*
(CN I/4:282)

To uphold the existing order and to eliminate a 'sin [that] can destroy an empire' (CN I/4:283), Harry is forced into a marriage with Ellen, whose love to Betty is never openly acknowledged. His wedding speech summarizes the values glorified by the dominant system:

HARRY. My dear family – what can I say – the empire – the family – the married state to which I have always aspired – your shining example of domestic bliss – my great fortune in winning Ellen's love – happiest day of my life.
Applause
(CN I/5:287)

The apparent re-integration of Harry into the social framework dramatizes the subsumption of differences and conflicts into a

continuous flow of history, or what Lyotard terms the totalizing master narrative of society: systems which are determined by progress and through which contradictions are unified and smoothed over in order to make them internally coherent.¹⁵ From this perspective, history is characterized as the discourse of authority and legitimation, being determined by a relentless teleology and order of meaning. This perception of history finds its strongest form as a dialectical movement which proves to be a coercive process. In Hegelian thought, historical development is not accidental but constitutes the necessary phases in the development of the Spirit. The unity of the Spirit (*Weltgeist*) unfolds in history (*Entfaltung*). Therefore, the history of the world is a *rational* process, the *rational* and *necessary evolution* of the world spirit. Unity is achieved at the expense of systematic repressions and exclusions which are necessarily invisible from within the totalizing field of foundational, sacred history. For the sake of creating a coherent and internally consistent world and bound to the circular reproduction of sense, history is thus narrativized into the logic of the same.

In the context of history-as-narrative, Barthes identifies a hermeneutic code, inscribing the drive of narrative towards a truth to be revealed at the end.¹⁶ Desire and expectation are positioned in the middle and signified as disturbance and disorder. History seeks

¹⁵ Jean-Francois Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, tr. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi (Manchester, 1984), p.XXIII

¹⁶ Roland Barthes, *S/Z*, tr. Richard Miller (London, 1975), p.52

both completeness and closure, attaining both through selection and exclusion and through the application of a formal beginning-middle-end structure of narrative which then implies discovering such teleologies in the events of the past. Therefore, in order 'to be in history books' (CN I/4:266), Harry Bagely has to be brought into line with the appropriate gender position. The dramatic action of *Cloud Nine* makes clear that history is there to be known, to be read like a book. In the discursive formation which produces history, this logic is what makes history itself the object of knowledge.

This perception reveals a relation between past and present that is determined by a stable knowledge that positions the present in relation to a fixed and seemingly unchangeable domain of the past. Following de Certeau, the Cartesian project of knowledge and domination of the object receives its particular variation in the discipline of history, in the objectification of the past as outside, as the real.¹⁷ From this perspective, the unacknowledged performative of history writing is the inscription of the other as the past, an other that is thereby known and controlled. In this context, Foucault calls for a critical history that reintroduces ambivalence to the relation between past and present, unsettling the stable position of knowledge in the present in relation to the stable domain of the past.¹⁸ This focus, however, leads to a positing of questions of new temporalities and new concepts of the outside.

¹⁷ Michel de Certeau, *Heterologies: Discourse on the Other*, p.216

¹⁸ Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, p.31

The time of history is linear time: time as project, teleology, departure, progression and arrival. In this way the uninterrupted flow of time acts as a unifying principle that gives homogeneity to the random nature of events, conferring upon them the appearance of a causal development. In this context, Julia Kristeva stresses that this concept of 'obsessional time' is inherent in the logical and ontological values of civilization.¹⁹ However, *Cloud Nine* utilizes forms of temporality that contest the totalizing narrative of history-as-progress. The play's focus narrows from historical to contemporary characters and stages two temporalities as well as disturbing diachronical time. Character time is not coterminous with the time frame of the text: the second act takes place in London about 75 years later but for the characters only 25 years have passed. Elin Diamond emphasizes that the Victorian era can be read as a set of coded practices which continue to exert pressure upon contemporary social relationships: as a result of the time-shift, the fears and indecisions of the characters in Act II are lifted out of the causality of personal history; they manifest the socio-sexual configurations the audience witnessed in Act I.²⁰

This use of temporalities also serves to foreground discontinuities rather than sustain a concept of uninterrupted development. Through the time shift, an understanding of historical

¹⁹ Julia Kristeva, 'Women's Time', *The Kristeva Reader*, ed. Toril Moi, tr. Alice Jardine and Harry Blake (London, 1986), p.192

²⁰ Elin Diamond, 'Refusing the Romanticism of Identity', p.278

time as based upon teleology, transcendence and a putative neutrality is undermined by replacing it with a construction of temporality through which unexpected relations of power and issues of gender are foregrounded. However, this form of presentation correlates with the denial of the existence of a stable subject; in *Cloud Nine*, subjectivity is refused a coherent representation but individual characters become loci in which incoherent and often contradictory pluralities of relational determinations interact.

In its shedding of a critical spotlight on the discourse of history, *Cloud Nine* dramatizes an interplay between the order of representation and the non-representable element that is symbolically central to its constitution. In the wedding scene, the fragmentation of language highlights the artifice of the social ceremony. Harry's speech has a broken quality; the words and sentences lack the flow and cadence, the unifying trajectories of normal speech with the result that his utterances are nothing more than an accumulation of empty phrases. This use of language exposes the existing power relations and its values to radical critique and ridicule at the same time. Harry's apparent praise of marriage and society dramatizes the idea that there is no clean break between past and present but that what was excluded re-infiltrates the place of its origin; it resurfaces, troubles and inscribes the law of the other. Michel de Certeau confirms that whatever the past holds to be irrelevant comes back, despite everything, on the edges of discourse

or in its rifts and fissures: resistances, survivals, or delays discreetly perturb the order of a line of progress or a system of interpretation.²¹ Through gaps and interruptions, the audience is invited to look beyond representation, beyond what is authoritatively put in view, to recognize opportunities for yet unarticulated experiences. In the wedding scene, Harry's speech manifests that history 're-bites' since historical discourse is always marked by what it represses/refuses in constituting itself as universal. The fragmentation of language anticipates a return of the repressed, a 'return of what – at a given moment, has become unthinkable in order for a new identity to become thinkable'.²²

In *Cloud Nine*, Churchill dramatizes the need to counter hegemonic discourses with formulations of oppositional histories that tell something other than the story of the same. This becomes evident when Joshua tells 'another bad story' in which the great goddess is chased by 'a tree with hundreds of eyes and a long green tongue' (CN I/4:279). This story does not present the dominant image of women's guilt which positions Eve as the Evil Woman who caused Man's downfall, but is, rather, a story of oppression and rape. But more than that, the narrative of victimization is accompanied by a story of empowerment, offering an alternative concept of creation with the great goddess who 'made the stars and the sun and the earth' (CN I/4:279) opposed to the white authoritarian God. Here, the emergence

²¹ Michel de Certeau, *Heterologies: Discourse on the Other*, p.218

²² *ibid.*, p.4

of hidden knowledge about women contributes to the process of problematizing the dominant role that the male subject has traditionally played in historical narratives.

The revision of historical narratives is, however, not unproblematic. It leads to the following question: is the attempt to include women's experiences within the dominant framework of history merely a positivist operation which nonetheless confirms the dominant discursive structures? Elin Diamond argues that to reinscribe a historical narrative in which woman is the signifier of power and authority would be to romanticize her, to remove her from history, which would be just the reverse of phallocratism.²³ In *Cloud Nine*, this operation does not change the course of history; the truth of the past continues to be determined by men since the 'bad story' is only told on the prohibited margins of history, 'when nobody else is awake' (*CN* I/4:279). Lacking representation, this version is replaced by a narrative which helps to create women's powerless situation:

EDWARD. It's not true, though.

JOSHUA. Of course, it's not true. It's a bad story. Adam and Eve is true. God made man white like him and gave him the bad woman who liked the snake and gave us all this trouble.
(*CN* I/4:280)

Like Eve, who has been 'unfaithful' to the patriarchal authority, Betty was 'too weak to resist' (*CN* I/3:277) temptation, asking for

²³ Elin Diamond, 'Refusing the Romanticism of Identity', p. 275

forgiveness and love. Showing her devotion to her husband through jealousy, she is reestablished in the role of Clive's 'own dear wife' (CN I/5:287). Seeing that she accepts her role as the bad woman and claims 'it is not Harry's fault, it is all mine' (CN I/3:277) it becomes obvious that Eve's story is fundamental and still of relevance to the relationship between women and men who 'must resist this dark female lust' (CN I/3:277).

The attempt to *rewrite* history in order to include the experiences of women also determines the dramatic action of *Vinegar Tom*. This 'play about witches with no witches in it', as Caryl Churchill put it in an interview, deals with issues of abortion, teenage pregnancy, the dominant allopathic medical system, religion, and the function of scapegoating as a means of maintaining the social structure. Set in seventeenth-century rural England, the dramatic action depicts a group of women who are accused of witchcraft. *Vinegar Tom* confronts the audience with the various reasons for their persecution, dramatizing the women's different reactions to the accusations and their punishment. Through the time-shift in the play, Churchill emphasizes the persistence of patriarchal oppression in order to articulate the marginality of women throughout history. However, the play simultaneously insists upon the specificity of the place and particularity of subject positions: *Vinegar Tom* takes part 'in and around a very small village over a period of a few weeks in the seventeenth century' (VT:133). Even though the persistence of

patriarchal power and structures of oppression is acknowledged, gender is clearly not seen as a transcultural / transhistorical phenomenon.

Apart from the issue of historicization, Churchill provides the spectator with various reminders not to become too involved with the events depicted onstage. The narrative is constantly interrupted by songs which are 'not part of the action... and should if possible be sung by actors in modern dress' (VT:133). Shifting the spectator's attention away from the events on stage to the ways in which women and their bodies are perceived in modern society, these songs function as a link between past experiences of women and the present history-in-the-making. The spectator is alternately drawn into the events, and distanced again with a view to being engaged in an active critical debate; thus s/he is asked to construct meaning out of the various discourses the play provides. Through this presentation, the audience is able to follow the reformulations of women's position within the ongoing historically constituted chain of discourse. Following Bakhtin's definition of dialogic texts, this dramatization reveals 'barely audible echoes'²⁴ which are nonetheless constitutive of women's lives in contemporary society. This staging of various discourses results in a plurality of voices in which the audience's response becomes a constitutive element. Engaging the spectator in a critical dialogue, the

²⁴ M.M. Bakhtin, *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays*, eds. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist, tr. Vern W. McGee (Austin, 1986), p.88

audience is not merely positioned as critical observer of history but at the same time experiences its participation in the historical process.

The use of questions, imperative and direct address all function as instruments that are deployed to voice women's experiences of which normally 'nobody sings about' (VT 3:141). Moreover, they also criticize women's compliance with the hierarchical structure. Obedience is always cooperative; 'Oh happy family' is the credo for too many women: since they always 'try to do what's right', nothing will change. The song 'Evil women' is directed at the men in the audience. 'Evil women/Is that what you want?', confronts men with their own weakness in relation to a female sexuality that refuses to be controlled: 'Do you ever get afraid/You don't do it right?/Does your lady demand it/three times a night?/If we don't say you're big/Do you start to shrink?' (VT 21:178). This contrasts sharply with the opening scene when Alice commits 'uncleanness unspeakable' (VT 1:135), and male potency and phallic power are still intact. In *Vinegar Tom*, questions of female sexuality and subordination are closely related to questions of the operations of power and knowledge. Sexuality is shown to be determined by shame, fear and disgust; it is regarded as a sin. Man's fear of God's punishment is projected onto women who are his temptation and whose sexuality is associated with weakness and evil. Thus, sexuality becomes 'unspeakable', or - as Foucault writes - it is 'expunge(d)..from the things that were said'.²⁵

²⁵ Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality Vol I*, tr. Richard Hurley (London, 1978), p.26

In his writings, Foucault explores the polymorphous techniques of power, emphasizing that repression has been replaced by various institutional discourses. Churchill's play confirms that sex is not considered as a timeless biological drive, but that sexuality is an effect of historical pressures brought to bear upon the subjects. These pressures are dramatized in pronouncements of institutional representatives (e.g. the medical establishment) and through the representation of social activities. Sex is, following Foucault, a public issue; it is comprised of a whole web of discourses, special knowledges, analyses, injunctions and prescriptions imposed upon it. The elaboration and circulation of discourse serves to implant the figures and modes of knowledge into each individual, family and institution. As Foucault explains power has to be analysed as 'something that circulates, or rather as something which only functions in the form of a chain'.²⁶ Therefore, power can never be localized in a single, central source, it is never possessed by somebody, never appropriated like a commodity.

In *Vinegar Tom* it becomes clear that sex is not only a secular concern but a matter that demands the social body as a whole, placing it under surveillance. Far from being 'radically unconstructed', sexuality is saturated with power; it is revealed to be a historically specific organization of power produced in the service of social regulations and control. In the first scene, Alice's sexual experience

²⁶ Michel Foucault, *Power/Knowledge*, p.98

and pleasure are confined within the framework of an ideology that denies women self-representation and self-gratification:

MAN. Didn't I lie on you so heavy I took your breath?
 Didn't the enormous size of me terrify you?

ALICE. It seemed a fair size like other men's.

MAN. Didn't it hurt you? Are you saying it didn't hurt
 you?

ALICE. You don't need be the devil. I been hurt by men.
 Let me go now, you're hurting my shoulder.
 (VT 1:135)

The man's discourse articulates a charade of maleness and femaleness. Angela Carter draws attention to the importance of the mythically correct, sacerdotal position of the woman within the representational framework: 'she is most immediately and dramatically a woman when she lies beneath a man. Her submission is the apex of his masculinity'.²⁷ What is presented in this scene as female desires are images which are censored and layered by sado-masochist fantasies induced by the dominant framework. Luce Irigaray confirms that representations of female sexuality are determined by rapes, violence, and penetrations which are described as breaking and entering. In this context female orgasms function as the proof of male power, an over-evaluation of the physical attribute of masculinity. The only pleasure granted to the woman is, therefore,

²⁷Angela Carter, *The Sadeian Woman* (London, 1979), p.7

a masochistic prostitution of her body to a desire that is not her own, leaving her in a state of complete dependency upon man.²⁸

In *Vinegar Tom*, the body is presented as the primary focus of patriarchal control over women. Understanding sex and materiality not as *a priori* to a culturally defined body but inscribed in its discursive networks is a crucial move for analysis. In *Bodies that Matter* Judith Butler problematizes the materiality of bodies, risking an initial loss of epistemological certainty, a venture which she evaluates as a significant shift in political thinking. Butler rethinks materiality as an effect of power, not as a basis for power's interpretation and categorization.²⁹ Material differences are themselves formed/marked by discursive practices. Their construction is a process of reiteration by which subjects and acts come to appear at all. The body is, therefore, no site or surface but a signifying practice within a cultural field of hierarchy and compulsory heterosexuality; it is a process of materialization that stabilizes over time to produce the effects of boundary, fixity and surface which are conceived as matter. Consequently, gender can no longer be understood as a cultural attribute imposed on a stable physiological form.

Theorizing the matter of sex, Butler problematizes the distinction between nature and culture. The body is not merely a mute

²⁸ Luce Irigaray, 'Women's Exile', *The Feminist Critique of Language: A Reader*, ed. Deborah Cameron, tr. Couze Venn (London, 1980), p.92

²⁹ Judith Butler, *Bodies that Matter*, p.9

substratum open to cultural inscription but Butler's argument calls into question the presupposition of materiality in order to understand what political interests are secured in and by that metaphysical placing. Reformulating Simone de Beauvoir's distinction between sex and gender, Butler argues that sex is not merely one of the norms which qualifies a body for life within the domain of cultural intelligibility but is, rather, part of a regulatory practice that produces the body it governs. However, according to Butler no body is ever complete; there is no finished product as such but the constant production process opens up instabilities and possibilities for rematerialization.

Vinegar Tom dramatizes how ostensibly natural facts are discursively produced by various discourses in the service of various political and social interests. Bodily features are irrevocably linked with certain versions of sex which support the heterosexual imperative; sexuality is initiated and controlled by men, and women are put into a position of vulnerability; for them subordination is sexualized as is dominance for men. Irigaray points out that all Western discourse presents a certain isomorphism with the masculine sex: the privilege of unity, form of the self, of the visible, of the specularizable, of the erection (which is the becoming of a form). This morphology, however, does not allow for a representation of the female sex:

there is not 'a' female sex. The 'no sex' that has been assigned to the woman can mean that she does not have 'a sex', and that her sex is not visible, or identifiable, or representable in a definite form... Besides the sexual functioning of the woman

can in no way lend itself to the privilege of the form: rather what the female sex enjoys is not having its own form.³⁰

Alice's bodily features appear in a dialogue which foregrounds the necessity to differentiate, to distinguish between 'I' and 'you'. In *Vinegar Tom*, the female body is constructed within an encounter in which the man's speech is determined by the fear of failure, and by his constantly seeking recognition and confirmation in the other (*Didn't I?*). Thus, the male subject emerges through its differentiation from its constitutive other that is represented as a domain of abjected alterity, associated with femininity. Hélène Cixous confirms the implications of the censoring of the body for feminine subjectivity:

the body which has been more than confiscated from her, which has been turned into the uncanny stranger on display the cause and location of inhibitions. Censor the body and you censor breath and speech at the same time.³¹

From this it may be concluded that the category of woman is a signifier that has always referred back to the opposite signifier which annihilates its specific energy and diminishes or stifles its very different desires. In *Vinegar Tom*, it becomes clear that this positioning results in the disintegration of the female subject position and its means of articulation: it 'took [her] breath' (VT 1:135).

The objectification of women within a dominant masculine discourse correlates with a loss of self-knowledge. Irigaray states

³⁰ Luce Irigaray, 'Women's Exile', p.82

³¹ Hélène Cixous, 'The Laugh of the Medusa', *New French Feminisms*, eds. Elaine Marks and Isabelle Coutivron, tr. Paula and Keith Cohen (Brighton : 1980), p.249

that 'she will not say what she herself wants; moreover, she does not know, or no longer knows, what she wants'.³² 'What name would you put to yourself' asks the man but Alice cannot answer:

MAN. Take a whore with me?

ALICE. I'm not that.

MAN. What are you then? What name would you put to yourself? You're not a wife or a widow. You're not a virgin. Tell me a name for what you are.

ALICE. You are not going? Stay a bit?

MAN. I've stayed too long.
(*VT* 1:137)

The power of naming lies with men, and, as Butler emphasizes, the naming process is also a setting of a boundary, the repeated inarticulation of a norm.³³ The dialogue between Alice and the Man reflects the Lacanian fantasy of woman, a process whereby women are split into two types, virgin and whore, and are idealized and denigrated accordingly. Apart from motherhood, the other images and representations available to women are either asexual or derogatory. These stereotypes are the result of cultural codification: representational, discursive as well as social practices combine to form images which support the dominant power system. Asked to assume the sex defined as 'woman', the position made available in/by the dominant discourse leaves no room for Alice to articulate a notion of an autonomous form of sexuality and desire freed from the Platonic

³² Luce Irigaray, *This Sex which is not One*, p.25

³³ Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter*, p.81

tradition since women are only permitted to represent male fantasies but are denied fantasies of their own.

Being restricted to models of male sexual fantasy which do not at all correspond to her sexuality, Alice's unhappiness with this situation is very obvious; she wants to go to London where 'men and women lie together and say that's bliss and that's heaven and that's no sin' (*VT* 1:136) and she makes a claim for mutual enjoyment and equality in a sexual relationship since she wants to 'do what gives *us* pleasure' (*VT* 5:136). Her sexuality is not passive and responsive to male needs; Alice wants 'a man I can have when I want not if I'm lucky to meet some villain some night' (*VT* 5:147). Thus, she undermines man's sense of virility and authority by asserting her desire for active sexual pleasure and control over her own needs. Threatened by her attempt to re-define patriarchal prescriptions for women, man imposes an image on her which proves to be destructive:

MAN. In Scotland I saw a witch burnt.

ALICE. Did you? A real witch? Was she a real one?

MAN. She was really burnt for one.
(*VT* 1:136)

This dialogue, however, emphasizes the male need to curb and punish female sexual power and reveals the anxiety that 'the infection will spread through the whole country if we don't stop it' (*VT* 14:167).

Churchill's play confirms that female sexuality poses a problem for the dominant values. In *Vinegar Tom*, the male fear of uncontrollable female sexuality which threatens the socio-cultural order by its failure to correspond to the proclaimed values, determines the course of dramatic events. Churchill offers the spectator an insight into the psychic mechanisms of patriarchal structuring. In Scene 13, Jack accuses Alice (the object of his sexual desire) of bewitching him by removing his penis:

JACK. Give it back.

ALICE. What?

JACK. Give it back.

ALICE. What now, Jack?

JACK. Give it me back. You know. You took it from me these three month. I've not been a man since. You bewitched me. You took it off me.
(VT 13:163)

Women's power to castrate is a fantasy that influences the whole of masculine attitudes towards women. As Angela Carter aptly puts it, it is 'a psychic fiction as deeply at the heart of Western culture as the myth of Oedipus, to which it is related in the complex dialectic of imagination and reality that pervades the whole of our culture'.³⁴

Phallogentrism depends on the image of woman as the castrated other to give meaning and order to its world. Scene 13 shows the power invested in the phallus (represented by the visible, physical

³⁴ Angela Carter, *The Sadeian Woman*, p.23

penis as the most obvious sign of difference) in patriarchy. The penis/phallus are conflated in this scene, although in Lacanian thought the two notions of penis and phallus are separated. Lacan employs the term phallus to designate the privileged signifier, insisting that it is not the same as the biological penis, so that the phallus does not necessarily reside only with men.³⁵ However, as Jane Gallop points out, this argument clearly ignores the political implications of such a terminology. As long as the phallus as *the* attribute of power refers to and can be easily confused with the penis, this confusion supports a structure based on the unequal power relations between women and men.³⁶ In *Vinegar Tom*, the connection between the sexual organ and the signifier of privilege becomes very obvious; losing the power of the phallus, Jack 'has not been a man since' (*VT* 13:163); he has no sense of positive identity opposed to women's *rien à voir*. No longer castrated, woman fails to function as reassuring sign; withdrawn this erstwhile subordinate 'other' breaks up the foundational illusions of the male subject position.

In the play Jack responds to the threat of castration by choking Alice until she '*puts her hand between his thighs*. Alice: There. It's back.' and now Jack recognizes her to be a witch: 'It's back. Thank you Alice. I wasn't sure you were a witch till then' (*VT* 13:164). Alice is in a no-win situation here and this scene underscores the contradictory logic by which innocent women were condemned as

³⁵ Jacques Lacan, *Ecrits*, p.285

³⁶ Jane Gallop, *Feminism and Psychoanalysis: The Daughters Seduction* (London,1982), p.97

witches. However, as Diamond points out, it also reveals the male fear which fuels such logic.³⁷ Threatening Alice, whom he thinks to be the possessor of the phallic object, 'to give it back', Jack regains the position of dominance. Naming - both the name/role one carries and the right to confer names - is a central issue in the play. In the opening scene, Alice is unable to put a name to herself. However, newly empowered, Jack has the power to *name* and to create the truth; by *seeing* Alice as a witch, Diamond emphasizes, he authorizes the truth that condemns her to demonic power and persecution, thus removing the threat she poses to patriarchal authority.³⁸ As with seeing, naming is part of the imaginary process of fixing the other, of controlling it. The element of aggression is of importance here. Teresa Brennan explains that as 'name-shaper', the master simultaneously directs aggression towards the passified other.³⁹ This leaves the passified other in a state of dependency on the image it receives. The image, however, is negative - a repository for everything that the subject wants to project outward.

In *Vinegar Tom*, the witch-image is applied to several female characters who do not fit into the accepted social pattern and who threaten patriarchal authority in various ways. Apart from Alice, whose assertive and powerful sexuality challenges phallic supremacy, Betty resists marriage and subordination. She wants to 'jump off. And fly.'

³⁷ Elin Diamond, '(In)Visible Bodies in Churchill's Theatre', *Theatre Journal* V XL/2 (1988), p.194

³⁸ *ibid.*, p.194

³⁹ Teresa Brennan, *History after Lacan* (London, 1993), p.60

(VT 2:140). Susan takes control over her reproductive function by aborting her foetus. Also in the play, questions of female sexuality and subordination are closely related to questions of the relation between power and knowledge. Foucault identifies forms of knowledge or experiences that have been disqualified as inadequate to their tasks, or insufficiently elaborated; these are naive knowledges, located in the lower reaches of the hierarchy, beneath the required level of cognition or scientificity.⁴⁰ The play dramatizes the view that women's traditions of knowledge have always had low prestige and especially women healers' knowledge of their reproductive systems have been deliberately suppressed. Ellen, the cunning woman, recognizes female powers: 'you use them how you like'(VT 8:155) she says. Her role exemplifies a Foucauldian notion of science as a discourse which subjugates and disqualifies other forms of knowledge that are inscribed in the hierarchical order of power. Claiming that 'there's all kind of wisdom' (VT 8:155), Ellen challenges the notion of a unitary truth and knowledge, thus opening up the way for women to self-determination and a much more powerful position in society.

Witchcraft is interpreted as evidence of misogyny, controlling deviant women, stripping them of autonomy and power. The discursive practices condemning unruly women to persecution invariably locate the danger of witches in the body. *Vinegar Tom* identifies the fear of witches as the fear of female sexuality which is declared evil:

⁴⁰ Michel Foucault, *Power/Knowledge*, p.82

SPRENGER. To conclude.
KRAMER. All witchcraft
SPRENGER. comes from carnal lust
KRAMER. which is in woman
SPRENGER. insatiable.
(VT 21:178)

The *Malleus Maleficarum* - the bible of the inquisition - outlined the evil crimes of witches. Arguing that witchcraft is the direct result of the specificity of female sexuality, it legitimates inquiries into the lives of all women. Women are inspected because, according to a seemingly logical progression, it is the woman who is the immediate cause of social problems. Punishment takes the form of (bodily) immobilization: The witches are bound, held down, stretched on the rack, hung, drowned, burned and pricked. As in the case of Betty, who 'wants to jump. And fly.' (VT 2:140) but who is 'tied to a chair. The DOCTOR is about to bleed her arm' (VT 2:149), the women in *Vinegar Tom* are subject to bodily inflictions and constraint. As in Foucault's *Discipline and Punish*, control of the body is seen as essential for the operation of power in society and Churchill dramatizes the ways in which women's bodies are either turned into docile and productive entities or, if declared as witches, destroyed.

The body is the primary means of access to the woman herself; associated alternately with nature and with the unconscious, with matter and mystery, it functions as the site where meaning is generated. However, in this scheme, women can never be meaning makers in their own right. Examining the concept of witchcraft within the context of contemporary experiences of women, Churchill's play

links the historical phenomenon with the role played by modern science in disciplining women's bodies:

Stop cutting me apart.
Stop, put me back.
Stop, put me back.
Put back my body.
I can't wait.
To see myself.
Give me back my body.
I can see myself.
Give me back my body.
I can see myself.
(VT 6:150)

Why can't I see what you are taking out?' asks the song, thus exposing scientific discourse to be crucial in the construction of values and meanings which can be embodied by women but are not known. The song produces an image of immobility; it presents woman as spectacle without any possibility of masking her subjection.

The play's dramatic action politicizes the functioning of the gaze, exposing its repressive mechanisms and its contribution to the positioning of women as mysterious other. In *Vinegar Tom* the subject is always under control. The relentless gaze defines woman within the dominant subjectivities of society. Sartre demonstrates the ways in which the subject suffers objectification through the eyes of the Other: 'by the mere appearance of the Other, I am put in the position of passing judgement on myself as on an object, for it is as an object that I appear to the Other.'⁴¹ Following his point of view, the subject is never self-constituted, it derives from an other over which it has no control. From a Lacanian viewpoint, the gaze determines the

⁴¹ Jean Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, p.222

subject 'at the most profound level'. The subject is looked at, a picture which is determined by the gaze that is 'outside', from a point with which it can never merge.⁴² Does not Churchill's presentation put forward a desire for self-presence that - as Derrida explains - 'carries in itself the destiny of its non-satisfaction' ?⁴³

Foucault identifies apparatuses of surveillance as a central technique and tactics of domination. The gaze is omnipresent, embedded in the structures of a society preoccupied with surveillance; 'there is no need for arms, physical violence, material constraints. Just a gaze'.⁴⁴ The dramatic action demonstrates that science is a specular politics; scientific representations of the feminine body are revealed to be a constitutive element in the wider network of social discourses. The song 'Oh Doctor' addresses the medical profession's continued objectification of women's bodies, questioning the fact that science is given a high prestige in our society and challenging its technological invasion of these bodies as well as its efforts to co-opt them from the agency and experience of women themselves.

In *The Birth of the Clinic*, Foucault describes the medical gaze as essentially demystifying; it is invested with powers that go beyond the barriers of immediate perception, posed by an exterior surface:

⁴² Jacques Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis*, p.106

⁴³ Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, p. 143

⁴⁴ Michel Foucault, *Power/Knowledge*, p.155

The structure that commands clinical anatomy, and all medicine that derives from it, is that of invisible visibility. Truth, which, by right of nature, is made for the eye, is taken from her, but at once, surreptitiously revealed by that which tries to evade it.⁴⁵

Michel de Certeau confirms that 'the body is a cipher that awaits deciphering'. What allows the seen body to be converted into the known body is the transformation of the body into extension, 'into open interiority like a book, or like a silent corpse placed under our eyes'.⁴⁶ In *Vinegar Tom*, the feminine body is defined and looked at with 'man's metal eye' (VT 6:150); it is understood as a depth that is not immediately visible, an enigmatic text that demands a reading. The play emphasizes men's desire to see inside; 'taking the skin' and 'cutting the woman apart' reveals the attempt to demystify the mysterious Other. This finds its parallel in the historical context when 'we'll shave (the witch) and see what shameful thing's hidden' (VT 18:173). This, however, signifies the body as prior to signification; woman's nature is something inbuilt and fixed in the bodily self. Yet if the materiality of bodies is itself a discursive construction, *seeing* can not be a return to the body as point of departure from the cultural constraints, but is itself part of the process of its construction.

Churchill's play stresses the fundamental link between the metaphysics of perception and the networks of power. The dramatic

⁴⁵ *ibid.*, p.165

⁴⁶ Michel de Certeau, *The Writing of History*, tr. Tom Conley (New York, 1988), p.3

action reveals the complicity of science with a system of power threatened by a desire that must remain invisible and unnameable. In *Vinegar Tom* the essence revealed by the medical gaze is revealed to be just another representation to support women's oppressive subject position. Churchill emphasizes the effect, the alienation that the analytic gaze has on women's notion of identity: 'I was a witch and I never knew it' (VT 20:174), Susan says; having completely internalized patriarchal authority, she regards the *image* imposed on her as her *identity*. This presentation marks a shift in the conception of the relationship between power and the subject. Susan's reaction re-opens the question of how a subject is produced, addressing the double-function of power which simultaneously subordinates and constructs subjectivity.

As Foucault has argued, power reaches into the very grain of individuals; it is a non-sovereign power 'that no one owns'.⁴⁷ The subject is, therefore, no longer determined by a power external to itself but a character like Susan in the play has become 'the eye of power'; in order to come to terms with the dominant power structures and to create a meaningful identity, she has interiorized the gaze to the point that she is her own overseer. Althusser describes this process as *interpellation*, the process by which ideology transforms individuals into subjects. Interpellation signifies the acceptance of a social representation which is absorbed by an

⁴⁷ Michel Foucault, *Power/Knowledge*, p.156

individual as her (or his) own representation and, therefore, becomes real, even though it is in fact imaginary.⁴⁸ For Althusser, the effect of ideology is a process of recognition, the internalization of a certain order, and an important element in the formation of subjectivity itself. In this process, the subject becomes a *subjected being*. Althusser's interpellation operates in and through language, as the effect of the authoritative voice that hails the individual. In *Vinegar Tom* Susan recognizes herself as a unique subject; however, as Althusser emphasizes, this realization always precludes the knowledge of the mechanisms of recognition. Churchill's play shows that Susan inhabits the category of the 'I' through embracing the very forms of power which threaten her with destruction. However, non-acceptance of these restrictions turns out to be no more liberating for women: 'I hate my body' (*VT* 5:146), Alice declares since she is not in control of her sexual desires which prove to be inexplicable in the dominant discourse. Churchill's play shows the effects of a system which indoctrinates the subject into a limiting identity and paralyzes women into a state of self-loathing and self-destruction. However, can the subject ever successfully fight back against the relentless gaze?

Even though it is responsive to the ways in which ideologies of the feminine body change in the context of political and economical circumstances, *Vinegar Tom* also reveals the persistence of patriarchal structuring: 'I know I'm sad/I may be sick/I may be bad' (*VT* 6:149) differentiates women's distress and suggests that explanations for

⁴⁸ Louis Althusser, 'Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses', p.47

their 'sadness' are furnished by discourses outwith their control. Like witchcraft, sickness and badness act as signifiers, contributing to the marginalization of women in society. In *Vinegar Tom*, Churchill both satirizes and historicizes the very representations which produce the feminine body as evil or mad, suggesting the ways in which mental health is defined within a distorting discourse:

DOCTOR. Hysteria is a woman's weakness. Hystern, Greek the womb.... the obnoxious gases that form inwardly every month, rise to the brain and cause behaviour quite contrary to the patient's real feelings.
(VT 6:149)

Hysteria - a condition which is primarily associated with the late nineteenth century - is presented as a disorder attributed to the female anatomy: a representation that reveals that femininity itself is seen as pathological or - as Butler writes - as a natural indisposition.⁴⁹

The play stresses the necessity for women to liberate themselves from the bodily constructions available to them. The song 'Oh Doctor' moves from women's acceptance of patriarchal authority as signifier of meaning with its concomitant reliance on the male-dominated 'knowledge' of themselves ('Oh Doctor, tell/me, make me well'), to the urgent demand: ' Let me out of bed now/Give me back my body/ I want to see myself' (VT 6:150). In this scene, the woman as victim and enraged witness of her cultural subjection demands liberation. However, can the body function as a source of

⁴⁹ Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble*, p.VIII

self-knowledge? By dramatizing the necessity for women to reclaim their bodies from scientific constructions, the play seems to endorse a possible return to a body which escapes signification. But is there a body without embodiment, or - to ask Butler's question - a body *before, after* or *outside* discourse which has to be reclaimed by women? Churchill offers no easy answers to these questions. However, the very act of politicizing them reminds us that science itself is a practice that can change or be changed and, thus, Churchill suggests that while scientific discourse and meanings are powerful, they are not all-powerful. Therefore, *Vinegar Tom* advocates a critical consciousness as a precondition of cultural change and action.

'Who are the witches now?' asks another contemporary song that points out the political urgency of the body question. The use of *we* at the end of the play includes the audience in the answer, evoking a collective presence. The answer offered by the play shows that the image of the witch has been transformed and changed but still has lost none of its destructive power over women's lives:

Look in the mirror tonight.
Would they have hanged you then?
Ask how they're stopping you now.
Where have the witches gone?
Who are the witches now?
Ask how they're stopping you now.
Here we are.
(VT 20:176)

Despite its critical awareness of the historical/cultural production of gender, the play's final song nonetheless is a plea for identification. It

generates a vision of an identity understood through the category of woman, which constitutes the subject for whom political representation is sought. Brecht demanded that the audience should not be treated as an undifferentiated mass: the actor does not address himself to everybody alike, but he allows the existing divisions between the audience to continue, thus widening them'.⁵⁰ The final song seems to reduce diversities (of class, race, sex, ethnicity, politics, religion and socio-economic status) among women to a common identity in opposition to patriarchy. The play's final scene creates a sense of female identity over time, providing a coherent, unitary subject-position and a historical lineage by which that identity is determined. It discovers in history the notion of woman's 'truth', a truth which responds to present concerns. *Vinegar Tom* thus recognizes the fundamental experience of being the other as a foundational premise for coalitional action and offers the consolation of a unified 'we', the authorization to speak for all women, including those of the past.

The final scene of *Vinegar Tom* re-opens the problematic involved in writing a history of women. Diane Elam emphasizes that '*her-story is not one story*'⁵¹. She argues that an injustice is committed when *one* history purports to speak for all women everywhere, when it does not acknowledge and communicate the

⁵⁰ Bertold Brecht, 'Short Description of a New Technique on Acting which produces an Alienation Effect', p.143

⁵¹ Diane Elam, 'Feminism and deconstruction', *The Postmodern History Reader*, ed. Keith Jenkins (London, 1997), p.65

incompleteness of its own narrative. A feminist reconstruction of history that reconceptualizes women as a unitary category which can be recognized in history always works within the circle of ideological reflection. This guarantees, as Christina Crosby argues, that women will be found everywhere, and will be everywhere similar:

for where once history revealed the truth of man's identity as the finite being... now history reveals the truth of women's lives... of being the 'other'. The closed circle of recognition is still inscribed, for all women are women in the same way, and this discovery of identity is predicated on a whole series of exclusions.⁵²

The writing of women's history, from this perspective, still ignores implicit processes of differentiation, marginalization and exclusion. It is a continuous, unifying progress directed towards the reappropriation of women's own specific difference. However, the search to discover the 'truth' of women's past, a truth that shatters the myths about them in the standard histories, still operates out of a positivist epistemology that runs the risk of reproducing the patterns of narrative that excluded or erased women from the master-narrative in the first place.

To historicize without surreptitiously returning to history-as-usual is, therefore, to recognize that 'being' a woman provides no ontological or epistemological foundation and that the collectivity of women is historically, discursively constructed and always relative to other categories which themselves undergo a process of change. The

⁵² Christina Crosby, *The Ends of History: Victorians and the women question* (London, 1991), p.153

question is, then, how to develop more than a singular history that will tell something other than the story of the same. The shift between the effort to provide a basis for collective political action and an awareness of the diversity of women's positions within history is a central feature of Churchill's play *Top Girls*. The play is set in Thatcher's Britain in the early 80s. The plot focuses upon Marlene who has recently been appointed Managing Director of Top Girls, an employment agency. Her experiences and interactions with the other characters, for example with her sister Joyce, make clear the sacrifices women undertake in order to achieve success in a male-oriented power structure.

The attempt to deconstruct the singularity and unity of woman's position and negotiate a coalitional politics in diversity is dramatized in the opening scene which stages a meeting of historical and legendary characters from the past in a contemporary setting:

MARLENE. This is Joan who was Pope in the ninth century, and Isabella Bird, the Victorian traveller, and Lady Nijo from Japan, Emperor's concubine and Buddhist nun, thirteenth century... and Gret who was painted by Brueghel. Griselda's in Boccaccio and Petrarch and Chaucer because of her extraordinary marriage. (*TGI*/74)

Even though the women all come from different economic and political backgrounds and have lived in different centuries, their encounter shows that the oppression suffered by them is systemic. Defying socio-cultural norms and invading public spaces defined as masculine, the characters have achieved an apparent independence but paid a high price since their 'extraordinary achievements' (*TGI*:67) are all based on

emotional suffering, self-abasement or denial of sexual identity, motherhood or sisterhood. Irigaray points out that whatever may be the inequalities between women, they all suffer, even unconsciously, the same oppression, the same exploitation of their bodies, the same denial of their desires. This common ground, she concludes, makes it so important for women to unite among themselves. This first step in achieving liberation is, therefore, to enable every woman to become conscious that what she has experienced, is a condition shared by all women. This recognition makes it possible for that experience to become politicized.⁵³

The opening scene of *Top Girls* offers a platform for the exchange of women's diverse experiences. However, in this play, the notion of women as a homogenous group, a universal, trans-historical, cross-cultural fiction, is effectively contested by the obvious lack of communication dramatized through overlapping dialogue. The characters interrupt each other constantly, they are not listening to each other, talk at cross purposes or speak in foreign languages:

JOAN. ... determined to go on. I was seized again / with a desperate longing for the absolute.

ISABELLA. Yes, yes, to go on. I sat in Tobermory among Hennie's flowers and sewed a complete outfit in Jaeger flannel. / I was fifty-six years old.

NIJO. Out of favour but I didn't die. I left on foot, nobody saw me go. For the next twenty years I walked through Japan.
(*TG* I:66)

⁵³ Luce Irigaray, 'Women's Exile', p. 86

Diane Elam stresses that women's history should not consist of the recounting of great deeds performed by women but should be aimed at exposing the often silent and hidden operations of gender that are nevertheless defining forces in the organization of most societies. Through doing this, women's history critically confronts the politics of existing histories and inevitably begins the process of rewriting history.⁵⁴ Christina Crosby confirms that unitary history is broken by the reality of political struggle, and that the task of the historian is, therefore, to articulate the faultlines in the field, to reconstruct history as the violent, often surreptitious engagement of conflicting forces. From this perspective, reading women as an effect, rather than positioning women as a substantive entity that waits to be discovered is radically historical, 'a radical remedy to history-as-truth'.⁵⁵

Top Girls neither celebrates the ethos of individual achievements put forward by capitalism, nor is it concerned with emphasizing how difficult it is for women to succeed in a man's world and how much courage is needed to break away from conformity. Equality with men is viewed with suspicion since it requires an identification with certain values embedded in the hierarchical structure of society; individual success has no historical impact; it is 'only temporary, but how marvellous while it lasted' (*TG* I:83). A notion of coalition finally emerges in Gret's speech when she describes the struggle against

⁵⁴ Diane Elam, 'Feminism and Deconstruction', p.69

⁵⁵ Christina Crosby, *The Ends of History: Victorians and the women question*, p.155

patriarchal oppression, finally generating a positive response from the other characters:

GRET.

And they all come out just as they was / from baking or washing in their ... (*interruption by Nijo: All the ladies come.*) aprons, and we push down the street and the ground the opens up and we go through a big mouth into a street just like ours but in hell. ... Oh we give them devils such a beating. (*Nijo: Take that, take that.*)
(TG: 83)

For Gret, change is only possible in the direct confrontation with the causes of her personal sufferings. She rejects women who 'stop and get some money' given by the 'big devil'(TG:83) and, thus, become an active part of the repressive apparatus.

This narrative advances the idea of a political strategy based upon the affirmation of a specific identity and subject position. The first scene of *Top Girls* dramatizes the tension between the desire to find a grounding for coalitional, effective political action and the attempt to undermine the essentialist assumptions and simplifications of an understanding of woman as a category. The scene confirms the need to risk some kind of essentialism if women are to be thought of as a political category. The interplay between the women's dialogue and Gret's speech suggests the necessity of assuming a subject position that, however provisional and flexible, allows women to make truth claims concerning their own representations and, thus, to achieve a political program. This approach is confirmed by Judith Butler who prefers to think about

the invocation of identity as a strategic provisionality, always subjecting this term to a political challenge concerning its usefulness:

But it is one thing to use the term women and know its ontological insufficiency and quite another to articulate a normative vision for feminist theory which celebrates or emancipates an essence, a nature, or a shared cultural reality which cannot be found.⁵⁶

Identity, therefore, as a point of departure, can never hold as the solidifying foundation for a feminist political movement. Butler confirms that identity categories are never merely descriptive but always normative and as such limited and exclusionary. She emphasizes that the differences, the contradictory positions among women over the content of this very term ought to be safeguarded and prized and this constant rifting ought to be affirmed as the ungrounded ground of feminist theory.

From this perspective, the subject has to be released into a future of multiple significations; it has to be emancipated from the ontologies to which it has been restricted. In this way it becomes a site where heterogeneity and unanticipated meanings might be brought to bear. Consequently, the history of women is produced as an open terrain which always acknowledges the necessity of breaks and divisions, and the loss of universality. *Top Girls* dramatizes the subjection of identity-terms to a contestation in which the procedures of its production are constantly questioned. The first scene proposes a

⁵⁶ Judith Butler, 'Subjection, Resistance, Resignification – Between Freud and Foucault', *Identity in Question*, ed. John Rajchman (London, 1995), p.131

sense of solidarity in diversity, suggesting that effective political action can only be the result of a coalitional politics whose aim is *not* the fusion (and weakening) of divergent positions but is directed at sharper articulation of these concerns through an irreducibly problematical dialogue. Such a coalition is characterized by the acceptance of fragmentation and heterogeneity. Differences amongst women are, therefore, not counter-revolutionary but a resource for creative change. Thus, in spite of the political and personal differences, *Top Girls* encourages the hope that woman-conscious critical thought will develop a radical theory and a practice of socio-cultural transformation.

4 Spectacle on the Stage

The theatrical situation, reduced to a minimum
is that A impersonates B
while C looks on.
(Eric Bentley)

Who d'you think you're bloody staring at?
(*Head-Rot Holiday*)

In her attempts to prevent 'theatre in Britain [from] becoming too safe', as Sarah Daniels said in an interview, she confronts her audiences with thought-provoking presentations of the discourses which contribute to constructing women's bodies and sexuality. Consequently, self-discovery constitutes the primary movement of the dramatic action in her plays. There is no doubt that men come off badly in Daniels' dramatic work; whether she writes about pornography, the hierarchical structure of social institutions, child sexual abuse or mental health issues, there is not even a pretence at representing both sides of an argument. Confronting her spectators with an unmistakable woman-conscious position, Daniels' plays offer a radical condemnation of patriarchal society, stressing the economic, ideological and political power of men. There is no attempt to include men in women's struggles but they are presented as *the* enemy actively creating social arrangements, including

language while using coercive pressures to force and keep women in their assigned place.

The key issue in Daniels' plays is to make the audience realize the harm inflicted upon women by men. It is not surprising that her dramatic work has been dismissed with the label of essentialism and met with fierce criticism. Her representation of men as being organized implies a conscious activity, a personification of power. Daniels' plays seem to argue for a repressive and coercive form of power based upon the assumptions that power is possessed and is located in a centralized source. The question is, however, whether power can be accounted for in terms of the subject which is its effect. In this conceptual environment, Michel Foucault stresses that power cannot be explained as a phenomenon of the individual's consolidated and homogenous domination over others, or that it is the result of the domination of one group or class over others.¹ In accordance with Foucault's argument it can be concluded that the juridical explanation of power neglects the examination of an entire network of power relations that invests the body, sexuality, the family, knowledge and technology. From this perspective, there is not, on the one hand, a discourse of power, and opposed to it, another discourse that runs counter to its operations. Discourses are rather tactical manoeuvres of a linguistic kind operating in the field of force relations; therefore, there can exist different and even contradictory discourses within the

¹ Michel Foucault, *Power/Knowledge*, p.26

same strategic manoeuvre.

In his writings, Foucault stresses the polyvalence of discourses, that is, their capacity to provide points of support for and points of resistance to the dominant field of force. His writings emphasize the productive nature of power, identifying it as a closely linked grid of disciplinary coercions and not as a global domination which acts as a base and from which emanate a plurality of repercussions: 'Power is everywhere; not because it embraces everything, but because it comes from everywhere'.² This perception of power demands an analysis of a multiple and mobile field of force relations which is far-reaching but never stable. Foucault formulates a relational model whose tactical objective is to guarantee the cohesion of the social body. Therefore, he advocates an ascending analysis of power, starting from its micrological mechanisms, which each have their own history and their own tactics.³ His analysis seeks to discover how these mechanisms of power have been, and continue to be, invested, utilized, transformed, displaced and extended by even more general mechanisms. From this perspective, power is being constantly exercised rather than applied in a discontinuous manner; it is a process of constant transformation and re-orientation.

Despite the seemingly simplistic view of patriarchy as tyrannical oppression, Daniels' dramatic writings nevertheless acknowledge that power is multi-dimensional, a complex matter exercised through

² *ibid.*, p.93

³ *ibid.*, p.100

ideology/discourse and not exclusively by means of outright coercion. The dramatic action offers a critique of discourses such as history, science, social institutions and language in order to expose the belief-systems which determine the foundational basis of society. Daniels' plays are characterized by a polemical energy and they challenge any notion of consensus. Her writings encourage controversy, forcing audiences to take sides. In her work, ideological structures are disclosed at the level of everyday social relations. For Bakhtin, the most important events in life are not grand or dramatic but apparently small and prosaic ones. In Daniels' plays, these seemingly insignificant events accumulate to provide a sense of the fragmentation of identity, a catastrophe of individuality.

Ripen Our Darkness portrays a life of struggle and marginality. The dramatic action centres around Mary who is married to David, a churchwarden. She is the mother of three teenage sons who are still living at home, and of Anna, a lesbian daughter who lives with her lover Julie. Mary's existence takes place in the confined space of her domestic world (9 out of 14 scenes take place in the kitchen); it is dominated by a set of rigid regulations which exist to support masculine comfort:

DAVID. And remember what we agreed, eh? What we worked out about being methodical, and getting things sorted out in a logical order so that it will give you more time to do things, to get important things fitted into the day. Especially Sunday.
(*ROD* 1:5)

The drama's ethos is one in which privileged men operate a system of tyranny directed against women. The heterosexual couple parodies the binary and unequal power relations. Mary exemplifies what Monique Wittig describes as the social relation to man called servitude, a relation which implies personal and physical obligation as well as economic dependence.⁴ Mary's churchwarden husband David rules his little world with obvious pleasure and an awareness of his self-importance; trivializing his wife's existence he is 'sure taking (the trousers) to the dry cleaner's will be the great event of the week' (*ROD* 1:9) for Mary whose days are completely controlled and organized by him.

In Daniels' plays, there is no intention to merge actor with character, but, rather, the spectator is confronted with political subject positions. Parody and exaggeration serve as techniques to create a distance between actor and character; acting, therefore, always seems artificial and imposed. Daniels takes up the issue of the economic exploitation of women by depicting a social (gendered) space in which women labour without reward. David's attempt to organize and at the same time to devalue Mary's workload - 'I find things never seem so unsurmountable if they're made into a list' (*ROD* 1:6) - again recalls Wittig's argument, claiming that it is women's fate to perform three quarters of the work of society.⁵ However, this role restricts them to a form of life that is 'at best monotonous and at worst unbearably

⁴ Monique Wittig, 'The straight Mind', *The Straight Mind and other Essays* (Hemel Hempstead, 1992), p.20

⁵ *ibid.*, p.3

painful'(ROD 13:67). In the public domain, women are only allowed a limited space in which to move. In *Ripen Our Darkness*, Mary and Daphne take part in the game of monopoly; their participation is, however, merely aimed at forcing them to conform to male values over which they have little influence.

In *Ripen Our Darkness*, the parodic master/slave dialectic leaves the audience in no doubt that the heterosexual relationship is by no means one of a mutual dependence, but, rather, that it is only one participant who benefits from it. It is this that Mary challenges when she stops functioning in her defined role. In David's words she suffers 'a lapse in attitude' since he notices 'a twenty minute gap between the first course and the pudding' (ROD 4:34). In order to bring her into line with male expectations, she is sent to 'a special conference for those women who are married to men involved in the Church' where she is to 'meditate and re-dedicate [her] life to the Lord and His works' (ROD 4:34). This shift manifests what Wittig identifies as the double aspect of women's oppression: a private appropriation by an individual (a husband or father) and a collective appropriation of the whole group by the class of men, reinforced by religion as an ideological apparatus.⁶

Even though Mary joins together with other women, it is by no means a community that she finds herself in; women do not meet each other in their own right but are still only seen in relation to men

⁶ *ibid.*, p. XV

since patriarchal authority does not 'approve of the use of first names here'(ROD 6:37). The 'vow of silence' isolates individual women, preventing any communication and exchange of experiences; they 'go to [their rooms] for continual confession and purification in *solitude*'(ROD 6:38). Again, silence is presented as a positive attribute of femininity, a display of deference to men. However, silence has an important social function. It is women's silence, as Luce Irigaray stresses, their silent but yet productive bodies, which regulate the smooth exchanges between men, and the social mechanism in general.⁷

Ripen Our Darkness foregrounds the fact that in patriarchy, women are not merely alienated from themselves but also divided from other women. Irigaray regards this division as a foundational premise of all dominant discourses. The logical conclusion of Irigaray's argument is that men have organized de facto a rivalry between women. The result is that this prevents the individual woman from seeking solidarity with others; the individual is unaware that what she has felt in her own experience is a condition shared by all women, a recognition that makes it possible for that experience to become politicized.⁸ In *The Laugh of the Medusa*, Cixous underscores this argument; she stresses that men have committed the greatest crime against women: 'insidiously, violently, they have led [women] to hate

⁷ Luce Irigaray, 'Women's Exile', p.91

⁸ *ibid.*, p.86

women, to be their own enemies, to mobilize their immense strength against themselves'.⁹

Ripen Our Darkness reveals the consequences of men's awareness of the effects of a strong female community and of the necessity 'to tread a bit carefully with the fairer sex these days' (*ROD* 4:27) in order to maintain a comfortable position. Mary's inability to fulfil her role as (house)wife, mother and cleaning lady necessitates the intervention of experts who have to decide whether she might qualify for a national health bed. In *Ripen Our Darkness* treatment and diagnosis are presented as methods of social control, a view that is further developed in Daniels' later plays. Questions of madness and sanity, women who are 'out of the picture' (*BH* 2:25), are central to Daniels' dramatic work which explores the traditional link between femininity and madness. At the same time her plays attempt to offer various alternative accounts of the concept of mental health.

Daniels' work dramatizes the perception that women's madness is not an individual, psychological problem, but a structural one. In *Ripen Our Darkness* madness is caused by the alienation, pressures, powerlessness and frustration imposed on women by the alliances of male-dominated society, the Catholic Church and the misogynist medical establishment. Catherine Belsey demonstrates how women's lives are determined by contradictory discourses; they participate both in the liberal humanist discourse of self-determination and rationality

⁹ Hélène Cixous, 'The Laugh of the Medusa', p.248

and simultaneously in a discourse of submission, relative inadequacy and irrational intuition all of which are assigned to them. The retreat into sickness (mental illness) is identified as a response to the pressures arising from women's attempts to locate a single and coherent subject position within these contradictory discourses.¹⁰ Being ridiculed, exploited and controlled by men, Mary sees her life 'like a half-finished jigsaw while everybody else seems to have completed their pictures' (*ROD* 4:30); she can no longer endure the fact that the whole day is 'centered around mealtimes' (*ROD* 7:45) and feels that she is 'decomposing from the inside' (*ROD* 6:36). This presentation foregrounds the ways in which images and stereotypes acquire repressive power over the lives of women, mirroring their experience of fragmentation and loss.

In Daniels' plays, the socialization of women can be seen to prepare them for this mask of madness, the 'desperate communication of the powerless'.¹¹ In *Ripen Our Darkness* madness is represented as an integral element of women's positioning within misogynistic society. In this context, Irigaray confirms that madness is not a characteristic applied only to those women 'shut up in hospitals, or in a "sickness" recognized by society' but she argues that nearly all women are in some state of madness:

shut up in their bodies, in their silence and their 'home'. This kind of imprisonment means that they live their madness without it

¹⁰ Catherine Belsey, *Critical Practice* (London, 1980), p. 65

¹¹ Elaine Showalter, *The Female Malady: Women, Madness and English Culture 1830-1980* (London, 1987), p.5

being noticed. This is perhaps why feminine madness is less explicit and, above all, less socially disruptive.¹²

In this context, madness is closely linked to the process of alienation which determines women's socialization, a self-alienation that is closely bound up with the relationship with other women. The social system, at all levels of its operation, is such that the relationship of women to their mothers and to other women –thus towards themselves– is completely devalued. Irigaray argues that psychoanalysis has totally mythologized and censored the positive values of these relationships. The imposture of a language and a desire that does not belong to woman establishes a break with her auto-eroticism. Following Irigaray, it is possible to argue that this kind of *schizo*, the 'being exiled from herself'¹³ is experienced by every woman in contemporary society.

Ripen Our Darkness advances the view that women's madness is irrevocably linked to misogyny. The characters' interactions show that misogynistic discourse explains women's distress, suffering and anger as an individual pathology, rather than as a result of institutional oppression. Mary's situation doubles, and is, therefore de-personalized, in Daphne's experiences. She declares that she is not 'mad. For Christ's sake. I'm angry' (*ROD* 13:70). However, in the final scene Daphne and the threat she poses to patriarchal power is brought under control since she is publicly declared to be in considerable

¹² Luce Irigaray, 'Women's Exile', p.94

¹³ *ibid.*, p.95

'mental anguish'(ROD 14:71). Labelling the woman as mad serves the function of maintaining her position as outsider/other in society, thus sustaining the existing power structures. Foucault explores the concept of madness as the outside of social structures, arguing that it is excluded as the other of language and historical meaning both of which have been identified with reason: 'The history of madness would be the history of the Other – of that which, for a given culture, is at once inferior and foreign, therefore to be excluded (so as to exorcise the interior danger) but by being shut away (in order to reduce its otherness)'.¹⁴ Jacques Derrida explains that in Foucault's writings, insanity is constantly linked to silence, to 'words without language' or 'without the voice of a subject'.¹⁵ This observation confirms that the process of exclusion is the necessary foundation, and guarantee of the social order. Marking groups as different - or in Mary's words as 'psychopathic, hysteric, neurotic, psychotic, paranoid, schizophrenic, manic depressive, hypochondriac, a raving lunatic or a screwball' (ROD 11:60) - denotes the boundaries of sanity and normality and is, thus, a crucial strategy in the process of maintaining the hierarchical status quo.

The Victorian era marked an important change in the discursive regimes that defined and controlled women's lives. Jane Usher confirms that it was in this period that the close association between

¹⁴ Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (London, 1970), p.XXIV

¹⁵ Jacques Derrida, 'Cogito and the History of Madness', *Writing and Difference*, tr. Alan Bass (London, 1978), p.34

femininity and pathology became firmly established within scientific, literary and popular discourse:

As witchcraft died out, and the clerics of the inquisition lost their power, the psychiatrists moved in. The nineteenth Century saw roots of our present logical positivist position on madness, where science replaced theology, and the female malady replaced the witch.¹⁶

While madness became firmly conceptualized as mental illness under the control of the rising medical establishment, it also became synonymous with womanhood, acting as a signifier that effectively served to position women as other. In contemporary society, madness has been institutionalized as a discourse which legitimates women as good/bad, attractive and seductive, dangerous and fearful. The discourse associated with the fear of women and the confining power of madness in the nineteenth century has in contemporary society merely taken on a veneer of scientificity and respectability, as well as extending its authority over a greater number of women.¹⁷

Ripen Our Darkness investigates the marginalization of women in the symbolic and social order and the complicity of scientific discourse in this process of positioning. The play makes the link between madness and female sexuality explicit while presenting the audience with a hilarious caricature of psychoanalysis and medical science:

¹⁶ Jane Ussher, *Women's Madness: Misogyny or Mental Illness?* (Hemel Hempstead, 1991), p.61

¹⁷ *ibid.*, p.168

MARSHALL. A lot of research has been carried out on the subject of female homosexuality, by very learned men. And if you want I'll précis down some of the relevant facts for you.
(*ROD* 11:58)

In *Madness and Civilization* Foucault confirms the connection between women's madness and a thorough medicalization of their bodies. He links the historical perspective with the powerful position occupied by the medical experts in society today. Women's objectification was carried out in the name of the responsibility that they were expected to discharge to the health of their children, the stability of the family institution, and the safeguarding of society. Foucault argues that a philosophical positivism imposed itself upon medicine and psychiatry: 'The psychiatrist's power [becomes] more and more miraculous ... the authority he has borrowed from order, morality, and the family now seems to derive from himself; it is because he is a doctor that he is believed to possess these powers ... and increasingly the patient would accept this self-surrender to a doctor both divine and satanic.'¹⁸ Foucault's argument underlines the objectification of the patient in this relationship. Subjecting herself to the authority of the scientist, the patient becomes the perfect correlative of those powers that she projected onto the analyst as a figure of authority. She is a pure object without any resistance except the possibility of her own inertia.

¹⁸ Michel Foucault, *Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason*, tr. Richard Howard (London, 1967), p. 275

In this conceptual environment, discourses such as psychoanalysis designate sexuality as the key to self-understanding. Uncovering the truth of sexuality is seen as a cure for mental disorders. Through the deployment of sexuality, Foucault explains, sex became the target for intervention in family life by medical, psychiatric and governmental experts whose authoritative status enabled them to function as effective agencies of social domination.¹⁹ This finds its parallel in *Ripen Our Darkness*, where it is suggested that women have become subject to the control of medical and aesthetic experts whose practices limit and regulate what it means to be a woman. Psychoanalysis is presented as a 'check-up, a safety-valve' (*ROD* 11:54). In the play, it is a discourse which slots women into the existing structures of ideology and society, by subjecting them to a law that represses female desire.

The dialogue between Mary and the psychoanalyst Marshall who has been called in to 'help' her, reveals how gender ideology operates within scientific discourse; it carries to extremes the dyadic differentiation within the heterosexual matrix. In this context, Luce Irigaray points out that psychoanalysis and its attitude towards women is historically determined. However, as this is not acknowledged, its phallogocentric bias is elevated into a universal value. While psychoanalysis purports to analyse the phantasies of others, its own discourse perpetuates the dominant cultural

¹⁹ Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality Vol.1*, p.110

phantasies.²⁰ *Ripen Our Darkness* systematically deconstructs the apparently powerful and unquestionable position of scientific experts. Right from the beginning, the psychiatrist Marshall is denied any credibility or prestige due to the critical and derogatory description offered by his wife in an early scene of the play:

TARA. I don't believe you have met my husband, Marshall, yet. He's a psychiatrist. ... unfortunately, Marshall is typically sane. Of course, he has his little routine and rituals. And as for sex, well, my dear, you can imagine how paranoid psychiatrists get. When we were first married we used to go to the Greek islands for our holidays and I adored making love on the beach, but Marsh, poor love, was absolutely, obsessionally, preoccupied with the fear of getting a grain of sand under his foreskin.
(*ROD* 5:36)

According to the terms of this description the psychiatrist himself is 'ill' but he projects his illness onto his patients, as this satirical portrait reveals. Focusing on the misogynist tendencies of Freudianism - the theory which has received the most stringent criticism from feminists - the play acknowledges the penetration of these thoughts into popular discourse. In Scene 11, Freudian ideas are shown to represent a symptom of a particular social and cultural economy that has been maintained in the West.

However, as in the case of the psychiatrist Marshall, Freudian theories are presented as reductionist and phallographic by locating them in the realms of the ridiculous:

MARSHALL. Where you *aware* that you wanted to cannibalize your son's penis?

MARY. I beg your pardon?

²⁰ Luce Irigaray, 'Women's Exile'. p.81

MARSHALL. When he quite innocently asked: How long's dinner, you snapped back 'Four inches', it's a sausage. Where you *aware* that you wanted to undermine his sexuality and render him impotent by alluding to the fact that his penis was four inches long and edible?

MARY. I don't know how to say this but perhaps you should see a doctor.
(*ROD* 11:59, my emphasis)

In this scene, the reversal of roles completely discredits male knowledge. The dialogue between Mary and Marshall provides the audience with a psychoanalytic shorthand for referring to the castration complex but reduces the effectiveness of the theory by means of satire. What is satirized is the Freudian castration complex as the anatomical source of neurosis, and the effect is to reverse the claim that it is the woman who is neurotic.

Irigaray stresses the Freudian tendency to fall back upon anatomy as destiny, as an irrefutable criterion of truth: 'nothing to be seen is equivalent to having nothing. No being and no truth'.²¹ Her analysis identifies Freud's theories as key elements of psychoanalytical phallogentrism. Irigaray links these ideas with the structure of desire expressed in scopophilia: whatever the (male) subject cannot dominate/overlook (e.g. the womb, cavern, the inside of the mother's body), threatens him with castration. Woman, as already castrated, provides an opportunity for desire but is also a source of danger: she lacks the penis, implying a danger to a seemingly stable and self-contained subjectivity: 'a nothing that might cause the ultimate

²¹ Luce Irigaray, *Speculum of the Other Woman*, p.47

destruction, the splintering, the break in [men's] systems of "presence", of "representation"....'.²²In Lacanian thought, castration is the imaginary construction of a radical operation which constitutes the symbolic field. The penis/phallus as determining signifier in the operation of separation gives full meaning to the lack or desire which constitutes his/her insertion into language.²³ This institutes a split that assigns women to the category of the natural/carnal, excluding them from the domain of reason, relegating them to an inferior status.

Of course, Daniels' play rejects Freud's initial hypothesis; the dramatic action foregrounds and ridicules patriarchy's insistence on, and allegiance to, castration which is, as Cixous argues, illustrative of the depiction of 'a glorious phallic monosexuality'.²⁴ The dialogue highlights the implicit and hidden sexual indifference that underlies the truth of science and logic of discourse. Daniels stresses the dependence upon the category of the visual as a key culprit in the exertion of authority over women's bodies, foregrounding how the ideology of the seeable determines the nature of what is *known*. Exposing the Freudian psychology of women which assumes an unconscious penis-envy on their part to open critique and laughter, *Ripen Our Darkness* argues that within a discursive framework determined by anatomical/physiological imperatives, women are reduced to perpetually envious, second-rate citizens.

²² *ibid.*, p.50

²³ Jacques Lacan, *Écrits*, p.288

²⁴ Hélène Cixous, *The Newly Born Woman*, tr. Betsy Wings (Minneapolis, 1986), p.82

Daniels presents her audience with an incisive and ruthlessly satiric demonstration of the ways in which psychoanalysis defines women as irrational, invisible and imperfect, as castrated men. Even though female difference is emphasized, these dominant discourses constantly assimilate femininity to masculinity, making women a mere subcategory of men. The feminine, as Luce Irigaray writes, is always described as the other side of the sex that alone holds a monopoly on value: the male sex. Female sexual organs are assigned meaning only through the comparison/subjectation to the phallus; from this perspective they are merely the negative, the reverse, the counterpart of the only visible and morphologically designatable sex organ: the penis. In this context, Irigaray emphasizes that all of Freud's statements on sexuality overlook the fact that the female sex might possibly have its own specificity:

Just as [Freud] will never refer to the pleasure associated with the sensitivity of the posterior wall of the vagina, the breasts, of the neck of the womb. All organs, no doubt, that lack masculine parameters? ²⁵

This argument confirms that in Freudian thought, women's erogenous zones are no more than a clitoris-sex, which cannot withstand in comparison with the valued phallic organ.

In *Ripen Our Darkness*, female homosexuality is, therefore, explained in terms of a heterosexual norm, it is presented as 'a parody of ... normal intercourse':

²⁵ Luce Irigaray, *Speculum of the Other Woman*, p. 29

MARSHALL. Yes, these people can only rarely achieve any degree of satisfaction, unless one of the two partners has unusually well-defined physical attributes. For example, occasionally a woman may have an unusually large clitoris, maybe two or three inches in length.

Marshall holds up his finger and thumb to shows the size
(*ROD 11:58*)

Homosexuality is defined as 'a dead loss and very frustrating too' referring to women's inability to 'attain some degree of penetration' (*ROD 11:58*). By contesting the inevitability or naturalness of supposedly scientific definitions of women's bodies, the play implies that these discourses not only construct but also depend on the very institution of gender which experts claim to discover or observe. Compulsory heterosexuality is exposed as one of the foundations of patriarchy while the deviations from this norm appear only as failures or exceptions.

By issuing a challenge to the male privilege of knowledge, the play reveals that the links between sexuality, discourse, knowledge and the social order are intrinsic. Looking for guidance, Mary 'opens her Bible' (*ROD 6:38*); however, her prayers to God emphasize the acceptance of the male authority he symbolizes. She now realizes that her life has to change without the help of God: 'But this is definitely the last chance you are getting. Otherwise there are going to be some drastic changes in this servant's life' (*ROD 6:38*). Mary finally acknowledges that Marshall is 'penis-mad' (*ROD 13:61*). 'He is talking shit' Mary asserts, recognizing that she has always dreaded being thought of as 'abnormal' while she has 'based all [her] ideas of

normality on David' (*ROD* 7:44). This contests the notion of a privileged subjectivity as a basis for articulating human perception, experiences and meaning. This notion is exposed as being caught up in a hierarchical system which always depends on the exclusion and devaluation of an 'other'.

It is at this point that Mary starts re-evaluating things from a different perspective, looking for a story that defeats phallographic representation:

MARSHALL. Do you think that is the evidence of a sane woman?

MARY. How would you know?

MARSHALL. We are supposed to be trained in these matters.

MARY. All you are trained in is a load of men's mumbo jumbo garbage. Oh yes, by your values I'm nuts, but by my values I was - but I am no longer. I wasted my life in a bitter compromise. I've bitten my lip and said nothing when inside I've been screaming. ... I was no longer alive, and now I am insane. It's great to feel things, *it's just great to be mental.*
(*ROD* 11:61)

However, this scene simultaneously presents madness as a protest against social oppression, while at the same time disclosing its potential to disrupt the dominant schema. Madness as a form of expression for women within the patriarchal order is a key interest in various feminist approaches and a significant element of Daniels' dramatic work. Mikhail Bakhtin confirms the subversive potential of madness. It is a parody of reason, of the narrow seriousness of official truth: a way of seeing, not 'dimmed by "normal"', that is by

commonplace ideas and judgments'.²⁶ Similarly, Artaud confirms madness as an alternative form of communication, a mode of release and discovery.²⁷ At the end of her encounter with Marshall, being mentally disturbed takes on a different meaning for Mary. It acts as a liberating force, functioning as a method to de-condition and free her mind. Thus, it opens up a creative potential which helps her to find her own position.

Recognizing that it is 'just great to be mental', Mary decides that things are going to get done on her terms when she gets home. However, Irigaray confirms that women's escape from exploitation is more than the destruction of a few prejudices:

they upset the whole set of the dominant values – economic, social, sexual. They challenge every theory, every thought, every existing language in that these are monopolized by men only. They question the *very foundation of our social and cultural order*.²⁸

Similarly, Cixous emphasizes that women's liberation is not limited to a 'blow-by-blow interaction' but will have a larger significance because it effects more than merely a modification of power relations; it will bring about a mutation in human relationships and thought.²⁹ Notwithstanding the positive effects of this theoretical position, Daniels leaves the audience in no doubt about the hopelessness of Mary's situation. She cannot, in her isolated and individualistic struggle effect changes in the symbolic order which proves to be too powerful to be

²⁶ M.M. Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, tr. Hélène Iswolsky (Bloomington, 1984), p.39

²⁷ Antonin Artaud, *The Theatre and its Double*, tr. Victor Corti, (London, 1993), p.18

²⁸ Luce Irigaray, 'Women's Exile', p.87

²⁹ Hélène Cixous, 'The Laugh of the Medusa', p.253

told 'to bum off' (*ROD* 11:61). It is, certainly, obvious that more has to be done than simply change things at home and 'reorganize my kitchen' (*ROD* 7:46) in order to improve women's present situation. Having 'reached despair' (*ROD* 13:68) Mary finally kills herself, leaving her husband a note that his 'dinner and my head are in the oven' (*ROD* 11:64). This essentially pessimistic conclusion is rearticulated in patriarchal narrative as an 'accident': she merely 'tripped and fell asleep before she had time to get up' (*ROD* 13:69). This scene confirms that women's experiences lack representation; within a totalizing discourse, women are 'all part of God's rich plan' (*ROD* 13:69) and, thus, effectively obliterated from history.

Given the choice, Mary is prepared to do more than merely pay a 'flying visit' (*ROD* 7:42) preferring to stay in an exclusively female community, leaving her husband at his game of monopoly and the audience with an image that seems to endorse a movement towards an autonomous female culture in which 'we simply know no fear' (*ROD* 14:68) and which perhaps 'could change the things you can't change' (*ROD* 7:46). The dramatic action hints at the possibility of a counter-society; it presents the audience with an alter ego to official society in which all real or fantasized possibilities for *jouissance* take refuge. This unsignified space is based upon the expulsion of an excluded element, a scapegoat invested with the opprobrium of which the new community can purge itself. Daniels' utopian female world is harmonious, without prohibitions, free and fulfilling. Experiencing a feminist heaven, Mary is told that the Bible, which so far had

determined her values and perception of the world and of herself, is nothing more than a 'libelous load of crap', ' a myth created by men in their fear'(ROD 13:67) from which patriarchal definitions of women have derived. The end of *Ripen Our Darkness* confirms the notion that men are hopeless, even though Daniels pretends to give them a last chance. In the final scene, Mary tries to make contact with her husband:

MARY (*voice off, softly*). David

David is mildly concerted as though he has heard something far away.

MARY (*voice off*). But David

David seems slightly irritated but dismisses it.

MARY. Mother Almighty, what is the point?
(ROD 14:70)

'Man as master cannot hear her'³⁰ writes Irigaray. In order to acknowledge woman he would have to face his castration anxiety instead of separating it off and projecting the lack onto woman.

Woman as a reassuring sign for masculine identity is a key issue in Daniels' dramatic work. In this context, the function of woman as image, as spectacle, is one the focal points of the plays. The preoccupation with the ideology of the visible is at its most explicit in *Masterpieces*, a play that stages one of the most controversial issues in the study of the relations between sexuality and dominance. The play examines the social dimensions of women's

³⁰ Luce Irigaray, 'Women's Exile', p.90

objectification and fetishization and the function of their positioning in the political and economic system. In *Masterpieces*, the emphasis is on the relevance of vision in constituting relations to women, exposing pornography to be both a source and support of male power. The play attempts to unravel the system of the gaze (and consequently of specific theatrical techniques) that constructs woman as image, as object of the (spectator's) voyeuristic gaze. The dramatic action is centred around Rowena, a social worker whose growing awareness of the impact of pornography on women's lives finally leads her to push a man in front of an oncoming subway train. During the play a gap opens up between the male characters who trivialize the effects of pornography since 'looking at pictures never hurt anyone' (*MP* 1:164) or tolerate it as a safety-valve, and the women who become increasingly aware of the role of pornography in a coherent male socio-sexual system.

The function of image and gaze are important to Daniels' investigation of women's subordinate role in society. For Daniels, the gaze is gendered, it is grounded in the politics and ideologies of patriarchal society. Freud argues that knowledge of sexual difference is established through the act of looking. This early pleasure/shock is later reproduced in voyeuristic activities and its converse, narcissism and exhibitionism (presenting oneself to the gaze of others). In her analysis of cinema and narrative forms, Laura Mulvey differentiates between the various pleasures of looking, arguing that narrative

constructs the male gaze, regardless of the individual spectator's gender:

In a world ordered by sexual imbalance, pleasure in looking has been split between active/male and passive/female. The determining male gaze projects its fantasy onto the female figure, which is styled accordingly. In their traditional exhibitionist role, women are simultaneously looked-at and displayed, with their appearance coded for strong visual and erotic impact so that they can be said to connote *to-be-looked-at-ness*.³¹

Mulvey identifies two gazes characteristic of patriarchal society within which women are positioned as the object of the fixation and obsession associated with male spectatorial desires – pre-eminently voyeurism and fetishism.

The role of the gaze is emphasized in Lacan's theory of the mirror stage. In Lacanian thought, scopophilic desire is directed towards an object or image that compensates for what is lacking or what has disappeared since 'what one looks at is what cannot be seen'.³² The pleasure of the look in the Lacanian mirror stage results from the perception of oneself as a coherent and idealized entity. The object that provides satisfaction is a divergence, a lack of the real, displaced onto a substitute. Within this logic of representation, woman's entry into the symbolic order signifies her consignment to passivity; she is, Irigaray argues, the object of contemplation.³³ In this conceptual framework, representation relieves castration anxiety at the unconscious level and, at the cultural level, reinscribes the dominance

³¹ Laura Mulvey, 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema', *Visual and other Pleasures* (London, 1989), p.19

³² Jacques Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis*, p.182

³³ Luce Irigaray, *This Sex which is not One*, p.26

of patriarchy. That the positioning of women as commodities of the male gaze and desire is one of complete degradation and dehumanization is never more clear than in pornography: 'It is violence, violence against women' (MP 1:173) declares Yvonne, one of the main characters, linking pornography to male hegemony and women's continued subordination since 'it's all to do with the way men are taught to view women' (MP 8:202).

In *Masterpieces*, pornography is exposed as the epitome of misogynistic control. It serves to perpetuate male supremacy and crimes of violence against women because it conditions, educates, and inspires men to despise women, to hurt women. Within a system of exchange, woman is transformed into a commodity. *Masterpieces* reveals pornography to be not merely a reflection of the social situation but an active form of coercion. Its effect depends on the notion that masculinity cannot be changed by alterations in the social institution. Pornography takes many forms; as Monique Wittig confirms, it is a crime against women's humanity:

Pornographic images, films, magazines, photos, publicity posters on the walls of the cities, constitute a discourse, and this discourse covers our world with signs, and this discourse has a meaning: it signifies that women are dominated.³⁴

In Daniels' play, pornography is exposed as something much more than 'filthy magazines', it is 'everything from adverts to...'(MP 1: 172) and in this scene, Yvonne's unfinished sentence allows the spectator to

³⁴ Monique Wittig, *The Straight Mind*, p.25

draw her own conclusions. The play emphasizes that pornography is not located in an undercover world of obsessive voyeurs, 'gangsters and kinky dwarfs' but it is 'a perfectly normal profession run by ordinary nice people'(MP 1:163), part of a system of commodity exchange regarded as socially acceptable.

The dramatic action reveals that state power supports the pornographic industry for obvious reasons: 'In the last few years the tax man has gleaned over two million pounds from me' (MP 1:164) confirms the Baron, one of the leading figures in the pornographic industry. He believes that 'had it not been for the present repressive climate', he would have received 'the Queen's Award for Industry long ago'(MP 1:163). Thus, the play argues that the construction of women within pornography in subordinate positions is a state-sanctioned construction dependent upon an economics of commodity exchange. In *Masterpieces* this complicity of the state apparatus is further explored through a critique of the educational and legal systems. Legally, 'she'd only been raped but was unharmed' (MP 3:180) and in school, the rapist is made 'a cult hero' (MP 3:180). This serves to emphasize that the construction of masculinity allows for, even encourages, the subjugation and the perversion of desire into oppression/suffering, all in the name of male pleasure.

In this play Daniels explores the ways in which the images of women produced for male consumption are encoded in media, advertising and other forms of social discourse: woman-as-object

becomes the subject of the dramatic text. During the dramatic action, Daniels foregrounds and examines ideologically determined beliefs and unconscious perceptions. The play exposes the ways in which the construction of women's bodies contributes to their positioning as passive images within a closed subject/object dichotomy. The title *Masterpieces* makes explicit the structures of male fantasy. Images of women in masculine visual ideology are created to empower man as spectator. As long as the master's scopophilia is satisfied, his domination rests secure. Reducing women's sexuality to items of display, as Angela Carter writes, 'woman has no other function but to exist, waiting. Between her legs lies nothing but zero, the sign for nothing, that only becomes something when the male principle fills it with meaning'.³⁵ For Carter, pornography involves the abstraction of human intercourse and the reduction of the self to its formal elements. These elements drive the whole metaphysics of sexual difference. The play's title implies a reduction of the female subject to its corporeal features; it confirms the traditional imaging of women as the disembodied object of a dominant male spectatorial vision. This dematerialization of the body as image not of herself but of its (male) cultural articulation leads to the fragmentation of women's bodies and identities since what remains are merely *pieces*. This destructive process finds its climax in the snuff film, the actual dismemberment of women's bodies as the most extreme form of pornography, offering the spectator a drastic image of the violence of masculine power

³⁵ Angela Carter, *The Sadeian Woman* (London, 1979), p.4

relations. Finally, the play's title involves a critique of art as a cultural practice that makes of woman a category, a sign that denotes availability and degradation.

In *Masterpieces*, the transposition of woman into a signifier in a masculine economy of meaning is shown to endanger and control the lives of all women. The objectification of female sexuality is responsible for a climate that condones rape and the male coercion of women who can only complain 'about broken lights in corridors and lifts on estates' (*MP* 1:173). Carter confirms the link between pornography and rape; in a world where women are commodities, a woman who refuses to sell herself will have the thing she refuses to sell taken away from her by force.³⁶ Rape is exposed as a means of keeping women in their place and off the streets, thus controlling them:

ROWENA. What am I doing out this late at night? ...
 Don't walk fast. It will look funny. Don't slow
 up - inviting. Don't look too nervous. Why the
 hell doesn't he cross over?
 (*MP* 5:187)

Moreover, Rowena's experience exemplifies that rape – and the fear of rape – act as deterrents to women who attempt to adopt autonomous modes of behavior and living.

The sexual victimization of women is depicted as a means of uniting the female characters, and their growing awareness of the effect of pornography and its connection with male hegemony leads

³⁶ *ibid.*, p.55

them to seek open confrontation with their male 'partners'. In Scene 12 Rowena and Yvonne reject their husbands' declarations that they 'have nothing to do with it' (MP 12:221). The speeches are '*delivered at top speed and volume*':

ROWENA. Get stuffed.

TREVOR. Just shut it, will you?

YVONNE. Why should she?

RON. You stay out of this.

ROWENA. Why should she?
.....

ROWENA. What are you going to do?

YVONNE. Leave him.
(MP 12:221)

This high tension is immediately followed by, and thus contrasted with '*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*' (MP 13:222). As in *Ripen Our Darkness*, Daniels attempts to establish a feminine specificity that emerges in exclusively female communities or ways of knowing, offering a desirable way out of the ethos of patriarchal regulation. Women-only-groups are located either in the mythic past or utopian future but are always untouched by ideology. However, is this depiction of female communities an adequate development, or is this development an indication of desperation in the face of a patriarchal ethos that refuses to alter its ideological perspective? In Daniels' plays it often seems as though social conditions are virtually unchangeable. The dramatic action in

Masterpieces highlights patriarchy's insistence upon its structures of domination and control. The individual can not overcome these obstacles; therefore, the only possibility left to women is to form a network of close relationships with other women. This community enables women to gather strength and to envision an ideological perspective which acknowledges their political interests. Therefore, the function of female communities in *Masterpieces* is to give a reason for 'optimism' (MP 13:224) and this development is obviously seen as an indispensable step towards liberation.

Masterpieces addresses a female spectator who has to negotiate between her own position of voyeur and the awareness of herself as constantly being-looked-at. Dealing with pornographic images, Daniels acknowledges the fixity of cultural signs and the danger of reinscribing the female body as the object of the male gaze. In *Mythologies* Roland Barthes argues that certain signifiers (which might mean various things) are linked to particular signifieds. Once something has become a sign in culture, the union of signifier/signified is seen as natural and dissoluble.³⁷ Therefore, the female body cannot easily be freed from its customary connotations. The play acknowledges that female nakedness bears a burden of signification, participating in narrative and social codes. But for this reason, objects of pornography and the images that represent the violent power relations in society are never openly presented on stage; '*Rowena*

³⁷ Roland Barthes, *Mythologies*, tr. Annette Lavers (London, 1972), p.141

looks at the magazines in such a way that the audience is not exposed to their contents' (MP 8:203). In this way, in *Masterpieces* Daniels prevents any re-assimilation of the female in the fetishistic process by undermining both the power and the supremacy of the specular.

Theatre and visual arts are based upon a system of representation that assumes a male spectator, offering woman as the other, the object of the desiring gaze destined to compensate for the subject's incompleteness and lack. The construction of the gaze as male has consequences not only for the women on stage but for the female spectator as well. If the gaze is male, how can woman-as-viewer look? Problematizing familiar structures of visual pleasure, and demanding a more critical and active mode of viewing are central features of a more general theatrical practice designed to expose the habitual violence which is the male gaze.

In Scene 8, Daniels alters the frame of visibility since the performers are not physically present on stage (*voices over tape*). In three autobiographical monologues, Daniels investigates the subjective experience of women who are constantly on visual display. Kaja Silverman confirms that, for the spectator, the discovery of a field beyond his/her gaze is experienced as a dispossession, as a diminution or loss of visual potency.³⁸ Daniels' play poses the question: is there a private space where woman remains un-looked-at

³⁸ Kaja Silverman, 'Lost objects and mistaken subjects: A Prologue', *The Acoustic Mirror: The Female Voice in Psychoanalysis and Cinema* (Bloomington, 1988), p.11

and in which she is subject alone? However, Silverman takes the view that in signification, the speaking subject and the subject of speech (=woman) remain dissimultaneously at odds. In the context of this remark Daniels' approach may be evaluated as a failure to recognize that the play operates within complexities of power/representations in which even the invisible is not outside but embedded in the representational process and in the operations of subject formation. Does not the reliance on language as means of expression reinscribe women's apparent subjectivity into the dominant framework which denies them representation? Consequently, is the enunciation of 'I' in the monologues any more than a delusion of self-presence?

It seems as if Daniels' presentation recognizes these contradictions and the difficulties for women who seek to speak in their own terms. In the three monologues, the 'I' the voice defiantly speaks is not an assertion of subjectivity, but, rather, the utterances do reveal a consciousness of constructedness. Even though the woman emerges as narrative figure, she is never named; moreover, the use of 'I' as a material enunciation and affirmation of subjectivity is simultaneously cancelled through the passive construction of the sentences. The monologues share with the audience the specific status of that which is objectified, the loss of self-determination. Throughout the monologues, the 'I' is characterized by an awareness of her body as her only capital asset, as an object of exchange in a heterosexual economy. The process of feminization and early preparation for the part women have to play is emphasized, as is the

double standard inherent in this role: 'When I was a little girl, I was always being shown off to relatives, made to sit on my uncle's knee ... I'd learnt by then I was dirty and it was my fault' (*MP* 8:203). These statements foreground the intersection of competing claims regarding women and their roles, revealing the absurdity of simultaneous eroticization and devaluation. From this perspective, woman can never negotiate her position within a phallogocentric discourse; the only possibility for her is, therefore, the complete denial of these structures. *Masterpieces* doesn't offer a compromise: in the last scene, Daniels' female characters therefore decide that they 'don't want anything to do with men who look at photos of women...'(MP 16:230); finally rejecting any communication within patriarchal society and refusing the play of gazes which constitutes (non)representation.

To enter the theatre is to become entangled in a complex set of intersecting gazes. In Daniels' plays, the function of theatre as, to borrow Teresa de Lauretis words, a 'technology of gender'³⁹, an element in the complex set of discourses that contribute to the construction of women's subject-position, becomes a critical issue within the dramatic action. *Head-Rot Holiday* makes explicit Daniels' deepening attention to the play as image, as a structure of visual forces and object of perceptual activity. The play depicts a group of women who undergo treatment in a mental hospital. The dramatic

³⁹ Teresa de Lauretis, *Technology of Gender* (Bloomington, 1987), p.2

action reveals the various reasons why Dee, Ruth and Claudia have been declared mentally instable, exploring their attempts to come to terms with their loneliness and despair which are caused by an oppressive patriarchal economy. At the beginning of *Head-Rot Holiday*, the body which, from a masculine perspective, represents an object of the gaze, actually looks back. 'Who'd you think you are bloody staring at?' (*HRH* I/1:193) asks one of the patients angrily. Barbara Freedman elucidates this notion in her suggestion that this return of the look develops an uncanny sense that the given-to-be-seen has the power both to position us and to displace us.⁴⁰ In *Head-Rot Holiday*, the spectator's position within the theatrical event is destabilized; the audience's *looking* becomes a *being seen* by those who are normally exposed to the scopic gaze due to the fetishistic imperatives of the theatrical apparatus.

Head-Rot Holiday does not rely upon a spectatorial consciousness, an epistemological model based upon an observer who stands outside of what s/he sees in a position of mastery, but, rather, it disturbs the audience. The spectators are not allowed to sit in a protective darkness but they are inscribed in a more active role, being asked to rethink their own positioning within a discourse that coerces women into repressive roles. Catherine Elwes highlights the distinction between viewing practices in film and in theatre. Theatre never provides the perfect illusion necessary for voyeuristic activities since

⁴⁰ Barbara Freedman, *Staging the Gaze: Postmodernism, Psychoanalysis and Shakespearean Comedy* (Ithaca and London, 1991), p.1

performer and spectator share the same temporal/physical space, making it more difficult to create the distance necessary for fantasizing since the safety in looking is always threatened.⁴¹ In this conceptual framework Stanton Garner emphasizes that the reversal of the look activates the Sartrean danger inherent in every theatrical presentation.⁴² From these perspectives, the appearance of the performer as other represents the permanent possibility of 'being-seen', establishing the spectator's own position as visual object in another individual's perceptual field.

However, in *Head-Rot Holiday*, the play of gazes does not end here. Daniels introduces an invisible spectator; he is a threatening male figure who only appears as 'the DOCTOR.... passing' or as a disembodied offstage presence: '*A phone rings. As she turns to answer it we see that she has a bruise on her face*' (HRH I:2:199). This mechanism brings audience and performer together on an equal plane, so that the audience's, as well as the characters', being-seen determines the representational framework of the performance. During the theatrical event, spectator and performer are subjected to the process of being always observed from a point of view from without – without the possibility of ever merging with this position. While the events on stage arouse the voyeur's/spectators consumerist gaze, this device simultaneously confronts the spectator with her own

⁴¹ Catherine Elwes, 'Floating Femininity : A Look at Performance by Women', *Women's Images of Men*, eds. Sarah Kent and Jacqueline Morreau (London, 1985), p.172

⁴² Stanton B. Garner, *Bodied Spaces: Phenomenology and Performance in Contemporary Drama* (Ithaca and London, 1994), p.48

vulnerability to the gaze.

Making spectatorship a central issue in her work, Daniels adopts strategies which seek to dismantle the usual stage-auditorium relations. The dramatic action further transcends the dichotomy *audience/stage, subject/object, seeing/being seen*. The impact of this strategy is confirmed by Cixous, who, in her writings on the theatre, foregrounds the coercive model of identification that determines the theatrical representational apparatus, thus indicating the problematic of female spectatorship.⁴³ To deconstruct the dynamics of representation involves the deconstruction of the boundaries set by the theatrical framework; it demands going beyond the confines of the stage. In this context, *Head-Rot Holiday* is determined by a stage-body that comes up close, and by a spectator who can be enveloped by the theatrical event. In her suggestion that Ruth - one of the patients - goes and sits '*with the rest of them....Ruth goes and sits down. Front row of the audience?*' (*HRH I/1:191*) Daniels re-defines the spatial arrangement of the theatre in accordance with Cixous' conceptualization of the boundaries between stage and audience. Even though stage and auditorium are still divided, the stage is no longer a locus of difference. This approach widens the performance space; by welcoming the spectators to 'Head-rot Hotel' (*HRH II/24:262*) Daniels uses the confined space of the theatre to create the claustrophobic

⁴³ Hélène Cixous, 'Aller à la Mer', tr.Barbara Kerslake, *Modern Drama* 17 (1984), p.547

environment of a mental health institution in which 'the most dangerous people in the country' (*HRH II/24:262*) are confined.

In *Head-Rot Holiday*, Daniels continues to investigate the role of madness in society, and its function in the construction of subject positions. The characterization of Dee suggests that women are declared mad or escape into madness because they are at odds with their roles in society. Phyllis Chesler observes that madness is the penalty for being female, as well as for desiring or daring not to be.⁴⁴

This situation is emphasized in Dee's speech:

DEE. Cold. I wasn't cut out to be wet and feminine. I always liked toys that worked. But then I used to break loads of things. On purpose. I know it sounds like crap. Well, what's new, the majority of my life has been crap.
(*HRH I/3:209*)

The dramatic action emphasizes the paradox of women's social conditioning: women who conform to the feminine role, as well as those who reject it, are equally devalued:

RUTH. I can't understand why they call me a slag. Why? Isn't that what they call natural, men exploring your body, doing sexual things to you? Isn't that what we're all supposed to aim for? Why then do you get called all these names when it happens?
(*HRH II/13:233*)

In Daniels' play, women are shown to be caught in an impossible situation. Moreover, feminine attributes with which women are asked to identify prove to be essentially self-destructive. Angela Carter points

⁴⁴ Phyllis Chesler, *Women and Madness* (New York, 1973), p.56

out that gentleness, honesty, sensitivity, all the qualities women learn to admire in themselves, are invitations to violence: 'all her life she has been groomed for the slaughterhouse'.⁴⁵ Women's obvious distress is shown to be the result of this situation.

When women's anger takes over, this leads to their positioning as irrational and out of control. Or, as Ruth explains: 'someone's bad to you. You don't get the chance to be bad back but then you're bad to someone else because it has to come out' (*HRH II/16:240*). However, when Claudia tells the audience 'what it was like being mad', her feeling of liberation is very obvious since she 'felt completely exhilarated. I felt I was flying I was so high' (*HRH I/6:217*). Unrestricted bodily movement and power determine this scene. Here, the symptoms of madness are confirmed as expressions of women's outrage, a protest against the situation they find themselves in. But from the perspective of those in power, Claudia has 'had a history of mental illness' (*HRH I/6:217*), leading to her institutionalization. This prompts the question: is the only solution for women to accept life as being a compromise since 'if you were to pick up on every little thing you would just drive yourself mad if you weren't already' (*HRH I/5:214*)?

The subject positions offered in Daniels' plays are not heroic; madness is not celebrated as a release of power and suppressed creativity since the women are repressed and misplaced. The dramatic action confronts the audience with the Catch 22 of female mental

⁴⁵ Angela Carter, *The Sadeian Woman*, p.55

health and psychiatric care. The play suggests that psychiatry is an element of the larger ideological and coercive mechanisms of society, participating in the oppression of some of the very people it purports, and intends, to help. In this context, Jane Ussher highlights that traditional therapy is seen as enforcing gender stereotypes, maintaining women's powerlessness while pathologizing their anger.⁴⁶ Daniels' play portrays a therapy which Mary Daly perceives as 'mind rape'⁴⁷; the dramatic action foregrounds women's situation in mental hospitals where drug treatment, physical abuse and isolation simulate the hostile environment women experience in patriarchal society.

It becomes clear that institutionalization is not about 'helping people' (*HRH* I/5:214) but it is 'the end of the road' (*HRH* II/16:241). Women are incarcerated in frightening (mental) institutions just as they are in rigid supposedly feminine roles. Spending their days 'making teddybears', which is – according to one of the patients – 'in comparison to most stuff they make you do here a picnic' (*HRH* I/3:204), women in mental health hospitals are shown to be reduced to a helpless, infantile state. As in *Ripen Our Darkness*, the dramatic action highlights the disembodiment and fragmentation of women as a result of their positioning in society. Dee feels 'so torn apart' that she imagines her 'flesh exploding and huge chunks of it careering around the ward' (*HRH* II/12:231) while Ruth cannot 'connect herself to [her] body anymore' (*HRH* II/13:233). Again, the female body is

⁴⁶ Jane Ussher, *Women's Madness: Misogyny or Mental Illness?*, p.201

⁴⁷ Mary Daly, *Gyn/Ecology: The MetaEthics of Radical Feminism* (Boston, 1978), p.287

depicted as the site of male violence, represented by electric shock treatment and solitary confinement.

In *Head-Rot Holiday*, women's restriction to the domestic domain is replaced by corporeal confinement and imprisonment. However, the course of the play is determined by the effort of women to change their situation. Dee finally decides to do 'what they want when they want' (*HRH* II/2:198), which means to acquiesce and 'be predictable' (*HRH* II/2: 224). Her preparation for the tribunal is a highly visible act:

DEE. I got all dolled up. *You saw me.* I did it so I would be thought of as more normal and therefore more better I mean betterer. You know what I mean less mad. Am I making any sense?
(*HRH* II/14:237 my emphasis)

The pleasure of scopophilia results from the feeling of control over the image one creates. Sartre writes that to be looked at is to apprehend oneself as the unknown object of unknowable appraisals, in particular of value judgements. However, being the object of values which come to qualify being 'without my being able to act on this or even to know it' means to be 'enslaved', and in danger. The object is, therefore, constituted as a defenseless being.⁴⁸ Dee's performance makes clear her awareness of the power the public has in the determination of her worth. In *Head-Rot Holiday*, the audience is recognized as crucial to the cycle of role-playing because it is the spectator's gaze which sanctions and approves the appearance of the performer.

⁴⁸ Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, p.267

In their traditional role, women signify men's desire, but they are at the same time looked-at and displayed. Their appearance is coded for strong visual and erotic impact. As Laura Mulvey argues in *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema*, the very perfection of the female eroticized image acts as a defence against castration anxiety. The male unconscious has two possibilities of escape: either the preoccupation with the re-enactment of the original trauma which involves the analysis of the mysterious other, the dark continent, or the substitution of anxiety with a fetish object that becomes reassuring rather than dangerous.⁴⁹ In this context, the gloss of appearance creates a binary space in which the problematic body is erased under a seductive surface. In the context of women's mental health, Ussher confirms that artificial beauty, passivity and gentleness replace the anger and the depression for which (mad) women are condemned.⁵⁰ Cure consists in the beautification of the body, and its consequent transformation into a specular object.

However, this is precisely not what Dee offers the audience; she does not offer an erotic vision to entice the male gaze but dresses up in a grotesque parody of femininity that underlines and undermines the absurdity of woman as spectacle:

Dee flings open the door and makes a great entrance. She is wearing a dress. The dress is nice enough but Dee looks very odd in it. She is carrying a pair of high-heeled shoes. She starts to prance and pirouette around the room.
All three of them laugh.
(*HRH I/8:220*)

⁴⁹ Laura Mulvey, 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema', p.21

⁵⁰ Jane Ussher, *Women's Madness: Misogyny or Mental Illness?*, p.175

In *Head-Rot Holiday* Daniels attempts to unsettle woman-as-spectacle by making the process and dynamics of specularization visible to the audience. For Barbara Freedman theatricality shows that 'it knows that it shows', thus setting in motion a process of framing. Theatrical representation does not merely refer to a show but to 'a showing of a mask', a display of displacement.⁵¹ In various other scenes in Daniels' play, beautification is central to the dramatic action: Claudia and Ruth are shown in *The washroom. Both are getting ready to go to the disco... Ruth tries to put on her lipstick. It misses her mouth badly (HRH 6:214)*. Both Dee's performance and Ruth's misapplication of make-up - *'her lipstick exceeds the outline of her mouth, her dress is askew' (HRH 6:214)* - are so artificial, so masklike, that they draw attention to the constructedness, vulnerability and instability of gender positions. Their performance exposes ideas of femininity as insubstantial, imitative and dangerous since 'the Ozone layer is the last thing in danger from these cans [of hairspray] – and the damage one of these (*Holds up Stiletto Heel*) can do' (*HRH 1/5:214*).

Dramatizing the signifying gestures through which gender is established, Dee constitutes herself as spectacle. Dee watches herself being looked at; transforming herself into a fetish object, she demands to have 'all eyes on me' (*HRH 1/3:209*) and exclaims that 'they're all outside there now, lining up ready for a big gawk' (*HRH 1/8:221*). In the play, the acquisition of a socially recognizable subject position is

⁵¹ Barbara Freedman, *Staging the Gaze: Postmodernism, Psychoanalysis and Shakespearean Comedy*, p.70

closely linked to the function of the gaze. Lacan acknowledges that seeing and being-looked-at are essential determinants of human subjectivity. However, these processes remain invisible; he emphasizes that the world is 'all-seeing' but it does not provoke our gaze. 'When it begins to provoke it, the feeling of strangeness begins, too'.⁵² This strangeness can be used by women to subvert the representational structures since it opens up a gap between the image and object it purports to represent.

The dramatization in *Head-Rot Holiday* recalls Luce Irigaray's proposition of mimicry as subversive process. She argues that the entry to the symbolic order depends on disguise. Woman can only be known and recognized under disguises that denature her. Therefore, she borrows forms that are never her own and that she must yet mimic if she is to participate in the symbolic order. The aim of mimicry is a playful repetition of what is supposed to remain invisible. These are ideas, images of the feminine that 'act as the cover-up of a possible operation of the feminine in language'.⁵³ For women, to play with mimesis means to recover the place of their exploitation by discourse but without simply being reduced to that discursive positioning. The deliberate assumption of the feminine role with its cultural connotations 'means already to convert a form of subordination into an affirmation and thus to begin to thwart it'.⁵⁴ By staging what women do to participate in man's desire, this conscious

⁵² Jacques Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis*, p.75

⁵³ Luce Irigaray, *This Sex Which is not One*, p.76

⁵⁴ *ibid.*, p.76

acting out of an allotted mimetic position seeks to unravel its effects through exaggeration. Mimicry is, therefore, a subversive strategy that is aimed at disrupting phallogentrism by forcing it to admit the consequences of its own logic.

This interpretation correlates with the concept of masquerade introduced by Joan Riviere's paper *Womanliness as a Masquerade* in which she highlights the persistent construction of femininity in relation to male expectations. In accordance with Riviere's claim, Dee's masquerade transforms aggression and the fear of reprisal into seduction and flirtation, putting on the mask of excessive femininity as a defensive strategy to avoid punishment. However, there is no difference between this masquerade and supposedly genuine femininity, 'they are the same thing'.⁵⁵ Imitating her gender role, Dee reveals the imitative structure of gender as a concept. Her performance simultaneously foregrounds accepted appearances of women and rejects them, thus highlighting the artificiality of the construction of femininity. When Dee later decides to abandon her performance and has to be restrained 'like a mad tiger' (*HRH* II:9:225) this abrupt change underscores the view of femininity as a mask that can be worn or removed, questioning the validity of the mask by virtue of its ability to be replaced.

⁵⁵ Joan Riviere, 'Womanliness as a Masquerade', *Formations of Fantasy*, eds. Victor Burgin, James Donald and Cora Kaplan (London, 1986), p.38

But what is masked by this masquerade? And is there a way out of the self if the self itself is and has always been constituted by performance? *Head-Rot Holiday* communicates a notion of an irreducible female essence when Dee declares that 'they can take away everything, they can strip you naked but they can't take away your self, who you are, not inside' (*HRH: I:2:199*) With this statement, Dee insists upon an ontological specification of femininity that refuses to participate in the circle of recognition which forms the basis of a Hegelian dialectic. From this perspective, masquerade seems to conceal a pre-given femininity, a desire which would establish an insubordinate alterity to the male subject and, thus, expose the illusory universality attributed to masculinity. Here, self-consciousness is presented as pure existence for itself; it is *not* a consciousness determined by a relation to the other but an independent existence outside the process of identification that determines the constitution of subject positions.

This postulation of the self as an authentic sexual identity hidden/masked by the impersonation of gender required by the repressive culture is a recurrent feature of many of Daniels' plays. However, is not what Dee conceives as pre-discursive - a female self - actually a discursive formation? Judith Butler claims that there is no self prior to its entrance into the conflicted cultural field.⁵⁶ Is not this move merely another effort to replace the abstract subject of male

⁵⁶ Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble*, p.7

structuring with an equally abstract female subject untouched by cultural inscriptions? And what are the political implications of this strategy? Is it merely a politically impracticable strategy which prevents women from re-thinking the subversive possibilities for identity within the terms of discourse itself? How, then, can the repressive structure of discourse be dissolved without creating a reverse-binary, thus opening up the ways for a plurality of expression and alternative figurations of subjectivity?

5 No Laughing Matter

The physiological processes involved
in the production of laughter...
are identical in men and women the world over.
(Nancy Chiaro, *The Language of Jokes*)

The way forward is to use men
- and have some fun.
(*Ripen Our Darkness*)

The question of the subversion of dominant discourse is a central issue in Sarah Daniels' work. Relying on exaggeration, puns or wordplay, bawdy jokes and hilarious ridicule, her plays take on serious themes in a flippant style, engaging her audiences in an interplay of comic provocation and entertainment. Comedy has been identified as an important vehicle for woman-conscious drama. Moreover, claims have been made for the power of laughter in terms of transgression, opposition and pleasure. Refusing the symbolic order, laughter is presented as destabilizing the performatives which are experienced as an exercise of male power, defining and controlling women's subject position. The suppression of this 'passion without a name'¹ in philosophical discourse and theoretical investigation seems to testify to its potential to challenge dominant categories. Dealing with theories of comedy, Umberto Eco confirms a

¹ Thomas Hobbes: 'There is a passion that hath no name; but the sign of it is that distortion of the countenance which we call laughter', cit. Mikkel Borch-Jacobsen, 'The Laughter of Being', tr. Terry Thomas, *MLN* 102/4 (September 1984), p.740

certain uneasiness manifested by those philosophers who have theorized the comic. This, he concludes, inclines us to think that the comic itself must be somehow connected with uneasiness.²

This chapter attempts to explain this uneasiness by suggesting various possible approaches to the reading of laughter (at both a theoretical and performance level) especially in relation to the capacity to deconstruct traditional categories of representation. In the first part, *Masterpieces* and *Ripen Our Darkness* are further explored to offer an introductory analysis of theories and functions of laughter. The laughter of the audience as well as onstage laughter are of importance in this context. Examining *Beside Herself*, *The Devil's Gateway* and *Byrthrite*, the study delineates how woman-conscious drama uses laughter in a variety of subversive ways. Exploring the potential of laughter to expose the structures of representation to re-evaluation and re-definition, the following argument addresses questions of truth and exclusion, language and heteroglossia, as well as concerning the transgressive power of carnivalesque experience.

Even though comic elements are central determinants of the dramatic action, Daniels' plays nonetheless acknowledge the ambivalent position laughter occupies in the very structures that her plays seek to subvert. Laughter and humour as mechanisms of

² Umberto Eco, *The Limits of Interpretation* (Bloomington, 1990), p.165

power in society are central aspects explored in *Masterpieces*. In its dramatizing of the hierarchical structuration and social motivation of the lewd joke, the interaction between the female and male characters exposes the gendered implications involved in using humour as a form of expression in the public sphere:

RON. Oh that's it, hang on. Two nuns walking through a forest, right? When a man jumps out on them and rapes them, one of them reckons, 'How are we going to explain to the Mother Superior that we've been raped twice?' The other one says, 'But, Sister, we've only been raped once'. 'I know', says the first, 'but aren't we going back the same way?'
The men laugh.
(MP 1:166)

Susan Purdie confirms that joking masters discourse in that by seizing ideological power it serves to confirm and construct socio-economic superiority.³ In the opening scene of the play, a series of misogynist jokes, that are told by each of the male characters, defines the immediate area of communication. In *Masterpieces*, it is very obvious that the effect of jokes relies on differentiation. Based upon shared assumptions about women, jokes as a mode of discourse form a relationship with their object based upon exclusion. For the female spectator, this staging of misogynist humour is a distilled dramatization of the process of negotiation of their position inscribed in the theatrical event itself. Because they are the object of the jokes told on the stage they are invited to engage in a process of decoding and interpretation that underscores their complicity in

³ Susan Purdie, *Comedy: The Mastery of Discourse* (London, 1993), p.147

the social practices being critically represented.

The opening scene of *Masterpieces* addresses the question of the relationship between laughter and power. In classical theories, laughter is closely linked with the experience of superiority. Aristotle claims that comedy is a representation of inferior people, who are not evil but who are in some sense base, ugly or deformed: 'because what we find funny is a blunder that does no serious damage or an ugliness that does not imply pain.'⁴ Arthur Koestler confirms the persistence of theories of degradation in Western thought.⁵ For Kant, for instance, in order for us to be able to laugh, it is also necessary that we are not involved as the objects of laughter, so that we experience a feeling of superiority. This stance is confirmed by Hegel who identifies the essential element of the comic as being dependent upon the superiority and detachment of the subject whose laughter assures him of his own rightness and integrity. This process, however, involves the detachment of the subject and the degradation of the other as laughable object. For Bergson, laughter – and its unavowed intention to humiliate – acts as social corrective:

Laughter punishes certain failings somewhat as disease punishes certain forms of excess, striking down some who are innocent and sparing some who are guilty, aiming at a general result and incapable of dealing separately with each individual case.⁶

⁴ Aristotle, 'Poetics', tr. E. Hubbard, D.A. Russell and M. Winterbottom, *Classical Literary Criticism* (Oxford, 1989), p.56

⁵ Arthur Koestler, *The Act of Creation* (London, 1989), p.53

⁶ Henri Bergson, *Laughter: An Essay on the Meaning of the Comic*, tr. Cloudesley Brereton and Fred Bothwell (Kobenhavn and Los Angeles, 1999), p. 177

In this context, laughter is understood as an instrument of dominant discourse, shaped by and in the power structures of society. Following Bergson, society requires of each member a constant alertness that permits the adaptation of the self to changing conditions and circumstances. An 'inelasticity of characters, of mind and even of body' is a possible sign of a lack of awareness as well as of an activity with separatist or subversive tendencies that inclines 'to swerve from the common centre round which society gravitates' and which opens up the object to derisive laughter.⁷ From this point of view, laughter works towards ideological unification and centralization, serving to guarantee and ensure a social whole.

The interaction between the female and male characters in the opening scene of *Masterpieces* emphasizes the proposition that joking reinforces already existing social gender relations. This interaction functions as a paradigm for the ways in which humour acts to support male bonding while pointing out the various ways in which women might react to this dominant discourse. Daniels stages an exchange of jokes that – as Eddie Waters puts it in Trevor Griffith's play *Comedians* – hate women and sex. In the first joke, the threatening refusal of sex signified by the stereotype woman-as-nun, is jokingly revealed as a false claim to power. This revelation acts to confirm women's dependence on men and, thus, supports male superiority. However, caused by the fear of female sexuality,

⁷ *ibid.*, p.18

these jokes do not liberate this anxiety; instead they recognize it and trap it, leaving it, in Waters' terms, 'exactly where it is'.⁸ In *Masterpieces*, women as targets of male humour are not merely exposed as objects of the male gaze but of the male laugh. Like the scopophilic gaze, male laughter positions women as objects, existing solely for a male pleasure which derives from their degradation. The play shows that laughter feeds 'prejudice and fear and blinkered vision'⁹ and is, therefore, another means of controlling and vilifying the other. This makes of laughter a way of seeing, yet another means of reducing women to silence.

In Freud's theory, jokes depict repressed feelings that emerge into the open in socially acceptable disguises; they reveal contained aggression, and function to prevent actual physical harm.¹⁰ The play, however, denies any claim that aggression is cathartically discharged in laughter. *Masterpieces* explores the cultural implications of misogynist jokes by placing them on a direct thought-line with violent pornographic images which escalate to the point of the actual dismemberment of a woman in a 'snuff' film. This connection is taken up, and further emphasized at the end of the play when Rowena, who has pushed a man in front of an oncoming train, states that she does not want 'anything to do with men who have knives or whips or men who look at photographs of women tied

⁸ Trevor Griffiths, *Comedians* (London, 1976), III:59

⁹ *ibid.*, I:23

¹⁰ Sigmund Freud, *Der Witz und seine Beziehung zum Unbewussten* (Frankfurt, 1992), pp.156ff

and bound, or men who say relax and enjoy it. Or men who tell *misogynist jokes*" (MP 18:230).

Confronted with this situation in which women function as the butt of the jokes, they either remain silent (Yvonne *doesn't even smile*) or they identify with the male subject position (Rowena *rather hesitantly joins in the male laughter*). However, Jennifer makes herself heard; *'she laughs uproariously and rather disconcertingly so, laughs even louder and, finally, laughs raucously'*(MP 1:166). Exaggeration as a tool of subversion is a central element of the dramatic action in each of Daniels' plays. This strategy of presentation allows the spectator to recognize an image/structure but at the same time makes it seem unfamiliar and questionable. Jennifer's response unsettles; she steps out of her assigned role as silent observer and takes on the male subject position. However, her exaggerated response turns a critical spotlight on the function of laughter in the communication between male/female characters, thus allowing for the possibility of critical inquiry.

Masterpieces dramatizes women's attempts to reverse the tripartite structure (male mockers, female objects, male audience) that is – according to Freud – characteristic of the lewd joke. Whereas Jennifer's narrative makes the men laugh even though they are less inclined to do so, Yvonne's hostile joke is completely ignored by the other characters:

JENNIFER
(to CLIVE). What a shame you can't seriously think of an investment in tiling the bathroom.

YVONNE. How many men does it take to tile a bathroom ?
(Pause) Three but you have to slice them thinly.

TREVOR. Couldn't you see your way clear to investing in one for me, Clive ?

JENNIFER. I don't think tiles are the 'in' thing for stripped pine bathrooms.
(MP 1:167)

In this scene, humorous aggression is presented as a defence mechanism employed in order to redirect hostility; it represents an attempt at taking back power. Yvonne's narrative is an example of verbal violence in that it anticipates the images of cruelty depicted later in the play , and opens up an atmosphere of mutual hostility that exists between the female and the male characters. However, the capacity to joke is closely connected with a possession of language that commands subjectivity. Nancy Walker argues that humour isn't submissive, it isn't 'ladylike'. For a woman to be a comic is to step outside her assigned role as the passive recipient of cultural expectations and to 'take on the role of truth-teller and gadfly'.¹¹

Various details and situations depicted in Daniels' plays indicate that women are denied the discursive space of the joke teller; they are, moreover, denied the possession of a sense of humour. 'Please don't try to be funny, Mummy. It doesn't suit you'

¹¹ Nancy Walker, *A Very Serious Thing: Women's Humour and American Culture* (Minneapolis , 1988), p.76

claims Mary's son in *Ripen Our Darkness* (ROD 1:7) while in *Masterpieces*, Clive confirms the stereotypical representation of women's humour as one of deficiency:

JENNIFER. I know a good one.

CLIVE. My dear, I don't think so.
... You haven't heard my wife's jokes.
(MP 1:167)

This dialogue reflects what Susan Purdie calls the 'ancient absurdity' that humour is essentially a male attribute.¹² In Daniels' plays, women are positioned as incompetent tellers of jokes, forgetting punchlines or obscuring the point of the joke. Women's assumed *lack* of humour is, however, just another of the many ways in which they are prevented from taking up an active position in the process of interaction and communication or, as Byrony Lavery states: 'humour is a weapon and if we say that women are not funny, they can't use that weapon'.¹³

For male theatregoers, Daniels' plays offer the opportunity to experience the lack of humour that is usually associated with women. The stimulus offered in her work is, certainly, not funny to everyone. The plays do not even pretend to present both sides of the argument since all men are subsumed under the umbrella of oppressive masculinity: men constitute an important part of the

¹² Susan Purdie, *Comedy: The Mastery of Discourse*, p.128

¹³ Byrony Lavery, cit. Morwenna Banks and Amanda Swift, eds., *The Jokes On us: Women in Comedy from the Music Hall to the Present* (London, 1987), p.215

question, but they are, however, never part of the answer. *Byrthrite* exemplifies the prevailing tendency to present men as constituting a homogenous group; in addition to eleven female characters, there is only 'A man', depicted at various stages of life, who functions as a representative of the repressive patriarchal system. Daniels' obnoxious male characters generally are clearly designed for parodic effect, and her plays are determined by the relentless mocking of apparently self-evident values associated with masculinity:

BETTY. And what are you planning to do in those four minutes,
 Lord Jim ?

JIM (*considers this*).
 A bit of hanky panky with my wife ?

BETTY. And then what ?
 (*DG 1:83*)

In the opening scene of *Ripen Our Darkness* Daniels stages a comedy of martial combat in which the masculine demands of propriety and domesticity are ridiculed. Much of the comic effect derives from Daniels' staging of the absurd way in which men seek to maintain their authority and to regulate women's lives. The use of dramatic language is of importance here; by juxtaposing a vocabulary associated with the analytic/philosophical tradition with the banalities of everyday life this representation functions as a subversive strategy to parody and hence to undermine masculine modes and forms of articulation. The comic effect derives from the

focus on the pompous, clichéd speech style of the speaker. In the quest for his trousers David is wearing a dressing gown over a shirt and a tie: 'if I were to follow it through to its logical conclusion, it would simply imply that they should be by the side of the bed where I stepped out of them'(ROD 1:4). Moreover, Mary's husband insists on a methodical and logical way of fitting important things - such as reorganizing the bedroom - into the day. David's manner of speech makes him the very image of a fossilized patriarchal order. This language of universal rationality is, to use Allon White's expression, 'plagued by parodic echoes and jokey versions of [its] sacred words'.¹⁴ This presentation is parodic in the sense that it ridicules ways of seeing, thinking and speaking. What is presented on stage is the laughing image, a caricature of official/authoritative languages which are simultaneously recognized and made questionable through the creation of comic discrepancy effected through the incongruous juxtaposition of different texts.

It is important at this point to stress the destructive power of rhetorical parody. The language it represents is not used simply as a means of communication, transmitting a productive point of view, but rather as an exposé aimed at disrupting its own structures. As Margaret Rose argues:

¹⁴ Allon White, 'Bakhtin, Sociolinguistics and Deconstruction', *Carnival, Hysteria and Writing* (Oxford, 1993), p.145

Parodies are determined by a negative tendency towards opposition. A protest is made against that which has been transmitted. Boredom, satiation, or lack of belief unburden themselves in laughter.¹⁵

This description illuminates the Bakhtinian point that in parody, two different texts are brought together in an oppositional relationship. The parodied language is suffused with a tone of voice that implies an alternative perspective that challenges the apparent truth of the original statement. In Daniels' play, the self-proclaimed language of authority is reinflected, made strange and, thus, open to question. It is shown to be what Frederic Jameson calls 'speech in a dead language'¹⁶, ridiculous, hollow and formulaic. The depiction of male characters brings us back to Koestler's definition of parody as the most aggressive form of impersonation. It is designed not merely to deflate hollow pretence but also to destroy illusion in all its forms. Pathos is undermined by harping on the trivial, all-too-human aspects of the victim.¹⁷ During the course of the play this practice strips away the complacency of authoritative figures. The paternal figure is reduced to the level of a signifier that is more and more emptied of meaning – an insipid formalism deprived of authority.

Daniels' use of humour has been criticized for being inappropriate given the seriousness of the topics she tackles. Whether dealing with child abuse, pornography or mental illness, her

¹⁵ Margaret A. Rose, *Parody: Ancient, Modern, and Post-Modern* (Cambridge: 1993), p.46

¹⁶ Frederic Jameson, 'Postmodernism and Consumer Society', *Postmodern Culture*, ed. Hal Foster (London, 1985), p.113

¹⁷ Arthur Koestler, *The Act of Creation*, p.69

plays locate unexpected comic potential in these topics, offering access to them through parody, puns, word-play, jokes, exaggeration and ridicule. However, the problems involved in this use of humour as a means of communication are not ignored but explicitly offered for discussion:

GRACE. There is too many scenes of hanging and swimming
and is not for us to present as entertainment.
(*BR II/8:411*)

However, in *Ripen Our Darkness*, even suicide is presented by means of a pun when Mary – as always remaining in the frame of reference shared with her husband - writes him a note , stating that 'your dinner and my head are in the oven' (*ROD 11:64*). By exaggerating tragic events to such a degree that they become ridiculous humour is thus employed as a means of confronting the experiences of women. Here, laughter becomes an outlet for women's frustration when they, as individuals, face their powerlessness in changing systems of oppression. But more than this, comic presentation in Daniels' plays does not merely allow the spectator to bear the oppressive nature of the issues presented on stage. Laughter functions neither as a mechanism of self-protection nor is it an instrument that 'deflates anger, apprehension or pride'¹⁸, rather, Daniels' dramatic work provides an example of how woman-conscious theatre treats issues of comedy as issues of power. There is an unmistakable element of anger and aggression in the use of humour while comic performance

¹⁸ *ibid.*, p.51

is employed as a polemical strategy designed to provoke and to foreground the contradictions and problems inherent in women's position in discourse and society.

In these plays both the combination and juxtaposition of humour and seriousness keeps the spectators continuously off-balance. The spectators, both female and male, are, therefore, forced to negotiate their position within the various discourses represented onstage. The comic effect does not eliminate the seriousness of topics but supports the transmission of complex messages. The sudden change of tone and audience address is part of this strategy and constitutes an important structuring element as the following example in *Ripen Our Darkness* demonstrates:

RENE (*starts reading from the back page of Woman's Own aloud*).

Dear Mary Grant. My wife and I make love about five times a week, which suits me to the ground, but she will insist watching telly over my shoulder. I don't mind this so much, but she will keep one hand free so she can switch stations with the remote control.

Pause.

Rene puts down the magazine.

Dear Mary Grant. I have a husband who drinks all my money away. I have two jobs to try to give him enough so he doesn't feel the need to slap me and my daughter around, but usually fail. I have to lie in piss-soaked sheets, as my husband wets the bed every night. My daughter's severely handicapped baby has just died and I just can't stop fucking talking. I have dreams of doing myself in. Please don't reply as my husband rips up my mail regardless.

Blackout.

(*ROD* 3:16)

The comedian Peter Sellers declared that some forms of reality are so horrible that we refuse to face them unless we are trapped into it

by comedy.¹⁹ This scene confirms the use of the comic as a strategy of surprise and alienation, a means of playing upon the audience's expectations. Lizbeth Goodman points out that comic theatre demands an enhanced audience response for it requires not merely attention and applause at the end but laughter throughout the performance.²⁰ In Daniels' plays, however, laughter is often a serious matter. The playwright constantly commits what Bert Challenor in Griffiths' *Comedians* describes as the cardinal sin of embarrassing her audience, since the spectators' laughter sometimes seems inappropriate. Laugh lines (which accompany the telling of painful stories) are immediately followed by statements which are aggressively unfunny and which confront the spectators with the tragic reality of women's lives. There is no question of comic relief but very often the laughter generated is one that sticks in the audience's throat.

In *Beside Herself*, a play about the sexual abuse of children, the tone and audience address of the play contrasts with the humorous 'myth-debunking' prelude which presents the spectators with a parodic revision of biblical characters and their stories. In her attempt to dig up prevailing myths glorifying patriarchal values, Daniels exposes their contribution to women's oppression in modern society, challenging popular fantasies about female identity. The

¹⁹ cit., Margery Morgan, *Drama: Plays, Theatre and Performance* (Harlow, 1987), p.68

²⁰ Lizbeth Goodman, 'Comic Subversions: Comedy as Strategy in Feminist Theatre', *Imagining Women*, ed. Francis Bonner (London, 1992), p.305

prelude brings together seven biblical wives in 'A dream. A supermarket' (BH:1). Seeking to explore experiences which have been excluded from history, these women try to make clear the narrative that sustains masculine power. The play confirms that the re-vision of history and myth constitutes an important step in changing the continual oppression of women in contemporary society, since these stories still influence their lives and continue to exert pressure on them. Eve, Delilah, Jezebel, Mrs. Lot and Martha complain about the ways in which they (or rather images of them and stories about them) have been preserved or reproduced in 'two thousand years of misrepresentation'(BH:1).²¹ Many of the women do not even have names. Lot's wife envies Delilah for this privilege since she herself is only known as 'the wife of Lot, the stupid slag who deserved all she got'(BH:3).

However, the prelude also shows a distinct lack of female unity, understanding and interest which has permitted the process of allocating blame to continue. Eve is not exactly welcome in the circle of the Old Testament wives who are tempted to 'ignore her, then she'll go away'(BH:1). Most women have opted for 'How to survive a barbeque in a storm', a seminar that Mrs. Noah leads as an alternative to Eve's tutorial group:

²¹ *Delilah*: Samson's Philistine mistress, who deprived him of his strength by cutting of his hair (*Judges* 16:4-22), *Mrs.Lot*: was changed into a pillar of salt for looking back to Sodom (*Old Testament/Genesis* 19), *Jezebel*: the wife of Ahab, King of Israel. She fostered the worship of Baal, trying to destroy the prophets of Israel (*I Kings* 18:4-13). She was killed by Jehu (*II Kings* 9:29.37), *Martha*: A sister of Mary and Lazarus who lived at Bethany and ministered to Jesus (*New Testament*). From : *The Collins English Dictionary* 2nd edition (London, 1986)

EVE. I'm supposed to be taking a tutorial group on 'The burden of guilt and two thousand years of misrepresentation'.

JEZEBEL. Oh Lor, who to ?

EVE. You, Jezebel, well all of you.

JEZEBEL. Me ? I only came over here for a trim.
(*BH:1*)

The audience realizes that too many women agree with Jezebel who wants to 'let sleeping mud puddles lie' (*BH:2*), in other words Jezebel is willing to let (his)story continue without questioning the gendering processes which determine women's disempowered position.

Through the strategy of looking back into the forgotten past, Daniels' characters uncover stories of the masculine apportion of blame, Eve's consequent guilt being the most persistent myth of all:

EVE. Just being. That was my crime. When mankind gets found out he points at me. Her fault – seducer. Made from Adam. His wife and his daughter – legitimizer of his will.
(*BH 1:5*)

Eve follows her desire and, thus, defies the patriarchal prohibition not to eat from the Tree of Knowledge. Her refusal is threatening since it creates for women the possibility of unmediated knowledge and uncensored choice. A few lines later, the comic echo takes up and, thus, emphasizes the absurdity of women's positioning as wrong-doers, as well as highlighting the significance of the past. Women's lives are still controlled by men who are 'holding them responsible', even though 'some poor devil has collapsed by fresh

fruit' and not in the 'biscuit aisle' (BH:7) of the supermarket, where the group of women sits together. Here, the comic analogue to Eve who has tried 'a ripe avocado' (BH:5) shows that man is obviously capable of causing his own downfall without the intervention of women. Moreover, the image of the supermarket signifies the domestication and commodification of what was once considered to be dangerous. However, this presentation also reveals that patriarchal ideology is still an active force which constantly reproduces the historically determined images of women. One cannot but agree with Mrs Lot who thinks that 'this is getting a bit depressing' (BH:7) when Daniels presents the audience with the situation of the contemporary woman whose day is determined by children who 'can't sit still' in 'a bloody boring supermarket' and who soon will be 'asking for a padded cell' because for her, 'life is hell'(BH:6). 'What's new?' asks Delilah at the end of the prelude and the audience certainly gets the impression that 'women causing absolute havoc' (BH:7) could well be the starting point for a change of the unacceptable position in which they find themselves.

In *Beside Herself*, the historical context is comically dislocated through the amalgamation of historical and mythical narrative and contemporary elements. Linda Hutcheon suggests that postmodern parodic strategies are used by feminist artists to indicate the power of particular cultural representations while ironically re-

contextualizing them in such a way as to deconstruct them.²² This leads to the audience's critical engagement with historical context since both the text of the parodist and the parodied work become the subject of attention. Daniels' strategy is a kind of contesting revision of the past which aims at subverting the power of women's historically determined position. The prelude of *Beside Herself* reflects a desire to recuperate female historical figures in an attempt to re-articulate and situate them within a new socio-cultural history. In the opening scene, images and experiences of women are transferred from the seemingly irrefutable past to the reality of contemporary life.

In his treatment of epic discourse, Mikhail Bakhtin explains the concept of an absolute past as distanced, finished and closed like a circle. It is located in the zone of an absolute image, beyond the sphere of any possible contact with the developing, incomplete, and, as a consequence, open to re-thinking and re-evaluating, present. This understanding of temporality relies upon a linear development which defines history as an 'utterly finished thing', seemingly immutable as a fact, an idea and a value.²³ Bakhtin stresses that laughter destroys any hierarchical and valorizing distancing of the past, thereby opening it up to critical inquiry. In the prelude of Daniels' play, the biblical characters come to assume a degree of

²² Linda Hutcheon, 'The Politics of Postmodern Parody', *Intertextuality*, ed. Heinrich F. Plett (New York, 1991), p.225

²³ M.M. Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, p.21

comic familiarity. Images of women are brought closer to the spectator by being represented on a plane equal with contemporary life and in an everyday environment replete with a colloquial language. Thus, the distanced past is brought closer to the present, and opened up to criticism and re-evaluation. This strategy of subversion relies upon a constant inversion of past and present in a process of mutual relativization that challenges any notion of traditional hierarchy.

In *Beside Herself*, the biblical context is evoked by puns and word-play. Since Salomé has got 'enough on her plate', as the woman who requested the head of John the Baptist, she cannot assist Delilah, who deprived Samson of his strength, and who works as a hairdresser:

DELILAH (examines Mrs Lot's hair). Tut,tut, too much conditioning too often. Very bad for your natural body, Lottie love.

MRS.LOT. Oh, just chop the lot off, Delilah.
(*BH:2*)

Such punning and trivializing of biblical narrative, and the resultant wordplay, are central elements of Daniels' dramatic practice and crucial to her interrogation of meaning. Her plays demonstrate the power of wit to demystify authority and, consequently, to unbalance oppressive structures. Mary Crawford confirms that humour temporarily creates a world in which everything has more than one meaning; humour depends on the display of multiple interpretations,

multiple meanings.²⁴ In Daniels' work, irony, too, is systematically employed to expose both the plurality and consequent vulnerability of signification, denying any claim to the unity of being and meaning in expression. Bearing in mind Kristeva's explanation of the effect of poetic language, this approach can be seen as a performance which seduces paternal discourse, leading it astray.²⁵ Employed to subvert discourses within the established representational framework, the play with words sets in motion an operation of disruption and disconnection which leads to the emergence of new and unexpected forms of discourse, challenging tradition, making it ambivalent and, thus, opening it to re-signification.

The use of humour in Daniels' work is a central dramaturgical technique designed to question and undermine attitudes, and to provoke spectators into alternative ways of seeing. In this context, Jo Anna Isaak proposes a strategy that, in the guise of amusement, questions the generative nature and generative bounds of representation.²⁶ The use of humour displays the structural elements of language, it highlights the conventional limits and immanent possibilities of discourse. Through the play with language, dominant discourse is ruptured by the challenge of non-sense. In this way, the discursive play and consequent shifting of meaning within language opens up opportunities of ideological contestation. Roland Barthes

²⁴ Mary Crawford, 'Just Kidding: Gender and Conversational Humor', *Women and Comedy*, ed. Regina Barreca (Philadelphia, 1992), p.25

²⁵ Julia Kristeva, *Desire in Language*, p.138

²⁶ Jo Anna Isaak, *The Revolutionary Power of Women's Laughter*, p.15

suggests that a code cannot be destroyed, only played off. Is this approach, as Isaak argues, the most revolutionary strategy available for women ?

The investigation of the ways in which laughter acts as a subversive force leads to the necessity of engaging a variety of questions concerning laughter's positioning in discourse and the function of humour in the process of the subversion of seemingly fixed identities. An explicit allusion to the assumed power of laughter is provided in *Byrthrite*, a play given a historical setting in the seventeenth century, the period of witchhunts when 'being a woman's a death-bringing crime'(BR II/5:392). The dramatic action depicts a group of women who are accused of witchcraft; the play delineates their attempts to liberate themselves from the oppressive patriarchal system:

ROSE. Is little use sat recounting our plight, we must prepare for his entrance.

MARY. Save your breath to tell us how.

GRACE. Laughing.

ROSE. Laughing ?

GRACE. Aye! 'Tis my new plan. To laugh.

MARY (flatly). I don't feel like laughing.

GRACE. Takes courage beyond man to carry out duties amidst raucous ridicule.

JANE. Takes a courageous man carry out his duties with a rum cuttle run through him.
(BR I:344)

In feminist thought, claims have been made for the power of laughter in terms of transgression, opposition or pleasure. Cixous' women in *Castration or Decapitation* challenge the overpowering patriarchal authority with a laughter that 'sees man as much further away than he has ever been seen'. By refusing to take the language of the drumbeat seriously and to obey the instruction 'turn right, left and about in silence'²⁷, female laughter is presented as destabilizing those performatives that are experienced as exercises of male power which define and control women's subject positions.

From this perspective, laughter functions as an expression of the category of non-differentiation, a state that is, as Cixous suggests, unbordered, unorganized and unpoliced by the phallus and thus 'incoherent, chaotic and embedded in the Imaginary in her ignorance of the Law of the Father'.²⁸ Artaud stresses the physical, anarchic and dissolving power of laughter, confirming a strategy of resistance that threatens the very notions of substance and signification through which rational discourses seek justification and authorization.²⁹ In his writings, the notion of 'humour as destruction' is presented as a transforming force directed at the audience. Humour is, therefore, aimed at disorganizing and pulverizing appearances, challenging and unsettling the representational framework. In her discussion of Artaud's texts, Kristeva explains the

²⁷ Hélène Cixous, 'Castration or Decapitation?', tr. Annette Kuhn, *Signs* 7/1 (1981), p.42

²⁸ *ibid.*, p.42

²⁹ Antonin Artaud, *The Theatre and its Double*, tr. Victor Corti (London, 1993), p.31

aim of this practice as being 'to wipe out sense through nonsense and laughter'.³⁰ This process, however, involves a change in the interaction with the audience. Artaud's approach seeks to abolish all distinctions between stage and audience, uniting spectator and stage. As Kristeva suggests, in this revised relationship, the audience does not have to combine significations in order to negotiate a position within the realm of prescribed representations. Instead, the spectator gives up the obsession with meaning, thus gaining access to the experience of *jouissance*. In this context, laughter is understood as libidinal licence; it communicates a sense of playful linguistic excess, the joy of disrupting or going beyond established, or fixed meanings into the realm of non-sense. As an excessive remainder that cannot be incorporated or assimilated within the dominant framework of signification, laughter offers the possibility of subversion, the means by which discourse may be ruptured.

In Byrthrite, the 'unnerving howl of laughter'(BR II:2:379) marks a decisive moment in the female attempt to attain self-autonomy. Scenes of laughter constitute situations in which women experience a sense of bonding which enables them to demonstrate their own power within patriarchal society:

APPRENTICE. I'll teach you to mock my powers.

He tries to grab Grace but she nimbly avoids him. The three of them screech with laughter.

³⁰ Julia Kristeva, *Desire in Language*, p. 142

APPRENTICE. What is this dively ?
(*He hesitates. The laughter continues*)

GRACE. Run along with you, mister, and tell who's ever
paying you there's no business for him here.

The Pricker's Apprentice turns tail and swiftly exits.
(BR I/3:346)

Laughter is understood here as an intimidating weapon, an instrument of vengeance deliberately employed to shatter male dominance and, as Cixous argues, 'to blow up the law, to break up the "truth" with laughter'.³¹ From this perspective, laughter is granted a performative energy which radically disturbs the foundations of tradition, ideology and closure.

There are, however, obstacles designed to impede this liberation; for example ,when laughter gets serious and invades powerful modes of discourse, it becomes subjected to a form of sanctioning:'how can it be women of our time are stronger than ever before and yet persecuted worse at the same time ?'(BH I/3:347). Artaud argues that laughter is silenced by authority because it is not parody but murder and revolution. Kristeva emphasizes the ways in which powerful discourses eliminate or weaken subversive potential through exclusion or devaluation. Taking the word 'carnival' as an example, she argues that it has acquired a strongly derogatory or narrowly defined burlesque meaning in society. In *How to do Things with Words*, J.L. Austin apparently regards laughter as unworthy of

³¹ Hélène Cixous, 'The Laugh of the Medusa', p.248

theoretical investigation since he explicitly excludes 'joking (and other non-serious uses of language)' from his analysis of language and performativity.³² Jacqueline Rose emphasizes that the heads of laughing women (images of exuberance portrayed in Leonardo's early sketches) are expunged from the canon of his art. Even though these images have now attained the status of fragments, their vision of excess continues to unsettle. This, as Rose concludes, 'indicates a truth about the tradition which excludes them'.³³

Another example of a tradition based upon the exclusion of laughter from the closure of systematic thought is provided in Plato's *Republic*. In his discussion of the education of guardians, he states that 'we should, therefore, refuse admittance to any poetry which portrays eminent humans as being overcome by laughter, and do so even more vigorously, if it shows gods in that state'.³⁴ In this context, Samuel Weber confirms that the tendency to devalue laughter derives from a loss of control experienced by the subject: one does not laugh the way one speaks since it is not an act the subject performs (or avoids) at will.³⁵ These views, however, presuppose a notion of agency and a control over language. Laughter, in this sense, is positioned as uncontrollable excess, dangerous to the constitution of subjectivity. Mark Taylor argues that a Hegelian system, preoccupied with the way in which the spirit can

³² J.L. Austin, *How to do Things with Words* (New York, 1976), p.122

³³ Jacqueline Rose, *Sexuality in the Field of Vision* (London, 1986), p.233

³⁴ Plato, *The Republic*, tr. Desmond Lee (London, 1987), p.83/388e

³⁵ Samuel Weber, 'Laughter in the Meanwhile', *MLN Vol. 102* (9/1998), p.28

return from its dismemberment to itself, is based upon the exclusion of excess, loss, meaninglessness and laughter.³⁶ In Kantian thought, the temporary function of laughter is emphasized. It results from an affection arising from a strained expectation suddenly reduced to nothing. Even though, understanding cannot rejoice at this reduction, it is still a source of very lively enjoyment *for a moment*.³⁷ These perspectives reveal a philosophical stance that works towards positioning laughter at the margins, as the other opposed to logos and self-knowledge. Laughter is refused access to being. It is presented as retardation, irritation and disturbance in contrast to reason/logic which form the basis for the constitution of unified selfhood.

In *Über das Lachen*, Joachim Ritter confirms the threat of laughter to a self-contained subjectivity. He argues that laughter recognizes the excluded, the silent and the invisible as belonging to discourse, acknowledging it as a constituting element. Limited seriousness (*der ausgrenzende Ernst*) is dependent upon the exclusion of these elements; its border zones function as a protection against the threat posed by the other.³⁸ Laughter, however, manifests the domain of abject beings within the very discourse

³⁶ Mark C. Taylor, ed., *Deconstruction in Context: Literature and Philosophy* (Chicago, 1986), p.28

³⁷ Immanuel Kant, 'Critique of Judgment', *Deconstruction in Context: Literature and Philosophy*, p.63

³⁸ Joachim Ritter, 'Über das Lachen', *Luzifer lacht: Philosophische Betrachtungen von Nietzsche bis Tabori*, ed. Steffen Dietzsch (Leipzig, Reclam), p.104:

'Der Ernst besteht überhaupt darin, daß er nur das zur Sache Gehörige geltend läßt und so hiermit zugleich unzählige Gedanken, Wünsche, Neigungen, Vorstellungen, ... zwingt in der Form des Unwesentlichen und Nichtdazugehörigen fortzubestehen'.

which tries to ignore it.³⁹ The exclusion of laughter, however, always constitutes the possibility of exploding the category of the symbolic. In the theatrical context, Herbert Blau argues that every laugh in the theatre is a semiotic break. He emphasizes that meaning stops for that moment of laughter, 'as in homage to more than meaning' which is explained as the millennial fantasy of coherence in language as the play of an ultimate form.⁴⁰ For Blau, comedy and laughter explode the illusion of language as something that is positioned as a seemingly self-sufficient whole whose elements amount to a closed system that presumes nothing beyond itself. Laughter initiates a process that makes visible the borders which structure our perception of reality and, thus, makes them vulnerable to re-evaluation. This corresponds with Ritter's perspective. He stresses that each invasion of laughter that makes itself heard within dominant discourse, constitutes a 'small subversion' (*die kleine Subversion*) which constantly questions and destabilizes authoritative truths and hierarchies.⁴¹

In *Byrthrite* Daniels demonstrates the restrictions encountered by women whose laughter dares to challenge the patriarchal authority:

³⁹ *ibid.*, p.104: 'Was mit dem Lachen ausgespielt wird, ist diese *geheime Zugehörigkeit des Nichtigen zum Dasein*; sie wird ergriffen und ausgespielt, nicht in der Weise des ausgrenzenden Ernstes, der sie nur als das Nichtige von sich weghalten kann, sondern so, daß es in der es ausgrenzenden Ordnung selbst gleichsam als zu ihr gehörig sichtbar und lautbar wird.'

⁴⁰ Herbert Blau 'Comedy since the Absurd' *Modern Drama Downview* 25 ,(Dec 1982), p.555

⁴¹ Joachim Ritter, 'Über das Lachen', p.107

Grace, Rose, Helen and Mary stand on the edge of a large crowd. All that can be seen is the cross-bar of the gallows with the tops of the rope hanging from it. At the moment the box is kicked away, they turn and face outwards, eyes down, unable to look at each other, isolated by a sense of powerlessness and grief. Grace, Helen and Mary go off in different directions. The only sound is that of the rope straining against the wood.
(BR I/5:352)

Women's silence, their submission and oppression is necessary to validate the symbolic order. This finds its parallel in *Castration or Decapitation*. Cixous argues that decapitation is exercised as the displacement of men's castration anxiety; women who are silent, aphonic and decapitated cannot speak, let alone laugh. They 'only keep [their heads] on the condition that they lose them' with the result that they 'turned right, left, and about in silence and with never a single mistake'.⁴² *Byrthrite* addresses the limits of laughter as defined above, and that is aimed at challenging the dominant system:

HELEN. There has been one hundred hung since you've been gone and to my reckoning double that number swam and drowned unrecorded.
(BR II/4:390)

Can laughter, therefore, have politically transformative power or is this 'luxury reflex'⁴³, as Arthur Koestler calls it, merely a temporary release from oppression and, therefore, something that functions as a stabilizing subversion of the status quo?

⁴² Hélène Cixous, 'Castration or Decapitation?', p.42

⁴³ Arthur Koestler, *The Act of Creation*, p.31

In Daniels' plays, the aim of comic performance is to effect a permanent transgression of existing discourses in a playful mode. Grace's speech in *Byrthrite* confirms the view that laughter offers a pathway to a vision of truth that would otherwise remain unacknowledged:

GRACE. I wanted us to remain together and form a band of travelling players to go from county to county entertaining women ... Making them laugh, dispelling myths and superstitions and fears so that life and health and well-being were no longer mysteries but understood by one and all.
(*BR I/8:371*)

Grace's statement expresses the intention of theatre to effect change in society through playful transgression. This scene anticipates a change in women's perception of their bodies, their sexuality and their self-knowledge. Therefore, the plan 'to put some words together so we can perform them' (*BH I/3:347*) emphasizes the subversive possibilities of performance, anticipating effects which go beyond the temporarily limited theatrical event.

In addition to identifying oppressive structures in the hierarchical systems which determine women's subject positions, *Byrthrite* also addresses issues of playwriting, theatre and history. These questions highlight the marginalization and exclusion of women from theatre history:

HELEN (to ROSE). So you'll choose a man's name ?

ROSE. No. My own.

HELEN. No doubt I'll see it anon then.
(*BR II:10:420*)

In her account of the history of women's theatre, Katherine Cockin emphasizes that the search for historical origins of the theatre reveals that women have had a long history as performers in theatres of low status and informal organizations and as travelling players. Their performances were often effected without scripts, on makeshift stages in the open street rather than in theatres equipped with permanent buildings and royal patronage.⁴⁴ Theatre history, however, neglects these female forms of theatre, thus marginalizing both the spaces and the formal structures of women's performance, a process that is confirmed in *Byrthrite*: 'I have not heard of women doing that' (*BR I/3:347*). In this context, Jane de Gay points out that work by women has often not been sufficiently highly valued to be recorded.⁴⁵ Daniels' play augments this history through its revelation of the silencing of women both in the theatre and in society at large.

The play highlights the importance of recovering women's (theatrical) past, and suggests that the pathway to this recovery lies in its potential to change the present/future lives of women. The play thus points out the need to seek out women's contributions to the theatre:

HELEN. And what of your play ? I heard it is very good ?

JANE (*remembering*). That's why I brought this box for copied version. To be secured within and buried next to Grace.

⁴⁴ Katharine Cockin, 'Introduction to Part One', *The Routledge Reader in Gender and Performance*, p.19

⁴⁵ Jane de Gay, 'Naming Names: An Overview of Women in Theatre 1500-1900', *The Routledge Reader in Gender and Performance*, p.25

ROSE. But it's not had a life yet.

HELEN. So if it doesn't cam to pass in your lifetime one day
when you're long gone it'll be uncovered.

ROSE. But s'pose it never gets unearthed.

JANE (*turning to face* ROSE). You're not the only woman in the
world, Rose.
(*BR II:10:420*)

Jane's statement is the final speech in the play, demanding a collective responsibility to unbury female-authored dramatic texts that have been neglected in official theatre histories. This process of marginalization seems to be closely linked to the suppression of women's subversive activities. Elaine Aston stresses that the pattern of a historical silencing of women's texts appears to occur whenever and wherever female authorship critiques or ridicules the forms or ideologies of the dominant culture.⁴⁶ Emphasizing the dynamics of history-making and forgetting, Daniels' play therefore proffers a new perspective on the past which has so far privileged the values and interests of a dominant group.

Byrthrite foregrounds women's attempt to seize comic power in order to question the validity of myths, thus voiding them both of credibility and of the fearful power they exert over women's lives. Trevor Griffiths' play *Comedians* advances the argument that comic presentation is a daring enterprise. A real comedian 'dares to see what his listeners shy away from, fear to express'. By engaging in

⁴⁶ Elaine Aston, 'Finding a Tradition: Feminism and Theatre History', *The Routledge Reader in Gender and Performance*, p.38

this activity, the genuine comedian reveals 'a sort of truth about people, about what hurts or terrifies them'⁴⁷. Similarly, in *Byrthrite*, performance functions as a means for women to confront their fears and superstitions. The play acknowledges that female repression is a result of the constraining structures created by phallogentric discourse. Women's lives and subject positions are determined by 'myths, superstitions and fears' (*BR* I/8:371). Hélène Cixous confirms that men have riveted women between two horrifying myths: between the Medusa and the abyss. In phallogentric discourse, these myths are positioned as being too dark to withstand exploration. However, *Byrthrite* demands that women confront their fears and dare to challenge male-determined myths. As Cixous puts it, they dare to look at the Medusa straight on to discover that 'she's not deadly. She's beautiful and she's laughing'.⁴⁸

In Daniels' play, laughter is represented as a vital factor in women's attempts at achieving self-determination. Bakhtin's writings highlight the importance of laughter; it is a prerequisite for fearlessness without which it would be impossible to approach the world realistically. Narrowing hierarchical distance, laughter makes possible critical investigation and free experimental play, thus challenging value orientations inherent in hierarchical structures:

⁴⁷ Trevor Griffiths, *Comedians*, 1:20

⁴⁸ Hélène Cixous, 'The Laugh of the Medusa', p.255

Laughter has the remarkable power of making an object come up close, of drawing it into a zone of crude contact where one can finger it familiarly on all sides, turn it upside down, inside out, peer at it from above and below, break open its external shell, look into its center, doubt it, take it apart, dismember it, lay it bare and expose it, examine it freely and experiment with it.⁴⁹

Entertainment, in this context, is no escape from an oppressive reality; it is more than a brief release from inhibition and logic. Umberto Eco confirms that humour subverts the law, and makes us aware of the uneasiness of living under a law – any law. Therefore, the effect of laughter lasts longer than the time allocated for performance; it does not 'kindly ensure that you leave this room as you found it'⁵⁰, as Eddie Waters puts it, but anticipates changes in the social reality of women's lives. From these perspectives, the comic has an analytical and transgressive force, questioning existing interpretations and concepts in a playful mode. Dealing critically with seemingly fixed values and processes of perception, comedy which works through laughter, not for it, acknowledges other possibilities of 'truth' apart from official, authoritative discourses.

Laughter is a phenomenon that transgresses the oppositions of inclusion/exclusion on which concepts of meaning/truth are dependent. It sets in motion a process that does not merely question the concept of reason as the basis for meaning but through the reintegration of that which is excluded, exposes the restrictions and

⁴⁹ M.M. Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, p. 23

⁵⁰ Trevor Griffiths, *Comedians*, III:59

limitations inherent in the structure of the symbolic economy. This argument brings us back to Cixous who makes the connection between laughter and feminine power. She identifies laughter as the inscription of a female jouissance:

laughs exude from our mouths; our blood flows and we extend ourselves without ever reaching an end; we never hold back our thoughts, our signs, our writing...⁵¹

For Cixous, laughter signifies the return of the repressed in the form of an excluded feminine that dislocates the oppressive structure of phallogentric language; thus, it is the precursory movement of a transformation of social and cultural structures. This perspective stresses the liberating force of laughter and its function as a source of creativity. The questioning of meaning structures and the opening up of creative potential also recalls Bakhtin's approach to the problem. Bakhtin's interpretation of the Menippean tradition of satire orientates the rhetorical power of laughter towards Western metaphysics and grants laughter a performative function directed against the logocentrism of hierarchical and ideological structures.

Julia Kristeva confirms that Menippean language and carnivalesque discourses which provoke laughter are politically and socially disturbing, undermining the stonewall of monological reason.⁵² However, a laughter that functions as a purely negating tool aimed at the destruction of existing discourses would be 'a

⁵¹ Hélène Cixous, 'The Laugh of the Medusa', p.248

⁵² Julia Kristeva, *Desire in Language*, p.82

laughter that does not laugh'.⁵³ Lacking creative potential, it is a dependent negation which remains enmeshed within the very discursive structures it attempts to subvert. For Bakhtin, the laughter of the carnival is more than negation because it possesses an important, creative element. Historically, carnival was regarded as a limited licenced suspension and reversal of order, a moment of 'the world turned upside down'.⁵⁴ This prompts the question of the extent to which carnival is complicitous with the law, sustaining it while providing a temporary suspension of its rule. Stuart Hall suggests that the Bakhtinian notion of carnival cannot simply be regarded as a metaphor of inversion but breaks up and thus transgresses the binary distinctions that characterize the symbolic order. He recognizes the carnivalesque as a critical shift in the metaphors of transformation:

The low invades the high, blurring the hierarchical imposition of order; creating not simply the triumph of one aesthetic over another, but those impure and hybrid forms of the "grotesque"; revealing the interdependency of the low on the high and vice versa, the inextricably mixed and ambivalent nature of all cultural life, the reversibility of cultural symbols, language and meaning...⁵⁵

Exposing the hierarchical structure of cultural power, its mechanisms of simplification and exclusion, carnival is, therefore, not merely a

⁵³ M.M.Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, p.45

⁵⁴ *ibid.*, p.6

⁵⁵ Stuart Hall, 'For Allon White: Metaphors of Transformation' , *Stuart Hall: Critical Dialogues in Cultural Studies* , eds. David Morley and Kuan-Hsing Chen (London , 1996), p.292

metaphor of inversion, but it is 'precisely the purity of this binary distinction which is transgressed'.⁵⁶

A Kristevan perspective confirms that laughter resists a positioning as only one element of the binary structure which characterizes experience. Laughter is inclusive, it is the only site where prohibition and its transgression coexist:

The laughter of the carnival is not simply parodic, it is no more comic than tragic; it is both and one might say that it is serious. This is the only way that it can avoid becoming either the scene of law or the scene of parody in order to become the scene of its other.⁵⁷

A notion of transformation that goes beyond the mere reversal of the masculine position is addressed in *This Sex which is not One*. Luce Irigaray equates the phallic with the seriousness of meaning; in order to escape a redefinition of the female subject position within the dominant binary structures, she reminds women that it is necessary not to forget to laugh. While identifying laughter as a liberating force directed against a secular oppression, Irigaray makes clear the inability of a logical system to account for the operations of laughter: these are 'untranslatable, unrepresentable, irrecuperable, in the "seriousness" – the adequacy, the univocity, the truth ... – of a discourse that claims to state its meaning'.⁵⁸ This approach supports a view of laughter as constituting a force which questions and

⁵⁶ *ibid.*, p.292

⁵⁷ Julia Kristeva, 'Word, Dialogue and Novel', *The Kristeva Reader*, ed. Toril Moi, tr. Alice Jardine, Thomas Gora and Leon S. Roudiez (London, 1986), p.50

⁵⁸ Luce Irigaray, *This Sex which is not One*, p.162

undermines the very thought-processes determining reality and subjectivity. Thus, its operations open up the way for women to re-evaluate their subject positioning.

It is possible to conclude from these arguments that laughter is not merely a process of opposing non-sense or meaninglessness to meaning/truth. Such a strategy would confuse laughter with meaning (as it is often the case with language), granting it an essentialized, metaphysical significance. The low, from this perspective, is no longer the mirror-image of the high, waiting to substitute it, as in the classic metaphors of revolution, but it is, rather, another related but different figure, which disturbs that paradigmatic metaphor. Laughter changes the concept of exclusion/inclusion, of logic/irrationality and of meaning/non-sense, offering a way out of a self-limiting reversal of the (gendered) positions made available in discourse. This, however, makes of laughter a critical method that undermines all absolute foundations and, therefore, allows for the imagining of a new, unsuspected restructuring of the ways in which we think.

The notion of laughter as challenging the very thought-processes which determine the view of reality returns us to Foucault's explosive laughter which anticipates more than a 'small subversion', and advances a radicality that 'shatters ... all the familiar landmarks of ... thought':

Ridding oneself of philosophy necessarily implies a similar lack of deference. You will not get out of it by staying within philosophy, by refining it as much as you can, by circumventing it with one's own discourse. No. It is by opposing it with a sort of astonished, joyful stupidity, a sort of uncomprehending burst of laughter, which, in the end, understands, or, in any case shatters. Yes... it shatters rather than understands.⁵⁹

Meaning, in this sense, is no longer determined by an 'orientation towards the whole', rather, laughter initiates an uncompromising dissolution of the concept of reason upon which representation and truth are traditionally based.

Laughter as an element of Daniels' plays, is closely connected with the question of language. In Bakhtinian thought, the transcendence made possible by laughter is captured by the idea of heteroglossia. Dave's speech in *Beside Herself* does not merely reveal the repressive power of words, articulating a concept of language as a closed system determined by impermeable monoglossia, but it also indicates a potential for creative change offered by laughter and non-sense:

LIL. Why haven't you spoken before ?

DAVE. Under the scrutiny of the psychiatric profession, each syllable is weighed, waiting to be labelled before it's even uttered. Much meaning is heaped upon the spoken word that one becomes too inhibited to perform the act. Humour – that's a no go area. And as for flippancy, try that out on them and they look at you as if you're about to self-destruct.
(BH 4:50)

⁵⁹ Michel Foucault, *Politics, Philosophy, Culture: Interviews and other Writings 1977-1984*, ed. Lawrence D.Kritzman, tr. Alan Sheridan (London , 1988), p.312

This scene emphasizes the normative-centralizing processes of language and patriarchy's insistence upon the dominance of a transcendental signifier which leads to the construction of seemingly fixed values, legitimating domination and producing subjection. Dave's lines stress the reliance of discourse on security limits and borders; his speech focuses upon the operations of fixing the flow of language and suturing it to univocal meaning. Bakhtin stresses that unitary language always makes its presence felt as a force for overcoming the threat of heterogeneous elements by imposing specific limits upon it. In *The Dialogic Imagination*, he draws the connection between the workings of language and the processes of centralization.⁶⁰ Unitary language expresses the forces at work towards verbal and ideological unification which develop in accordance with political and social centralizing processes. Kristeva confirms that the dialogue inherent in every discourse is smothered by a prohibition and censorship.

Beside Herself confirms that laughter and non-sense are excluded from logic/reason - a 'no-go area', the realm of abject beings. Humour, flippancy and non-sense arouse suspicion. They open up possibilities which set in motion the infinite semiotic play of language and, thus, destabilize the apparently dissoluble and naturalized link between signifier and signified. Bakhtin confirms the effect laughter has on discourse:

⁶⁰ M.M.Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, p. 272

It is as if words had been released from the shackles of sense, to enjoy a play period of complete freedom and establish unusual relationships among themselves. True, no new consistent links are formed in most cases, but the brief coexistence of these words, expressions and objects outside the usual logical conditions discloses their inherent ambivalence. Their multiple meanings and potentialities that would not manifest themselves in normal conditions are revealed.⁶¹

This extract from *Rabelais and His World* describes the enjoyment of unfixed language, anticipating the 'gay relativity' of the relationship between signifier and signified. Introducing a dialogic dimension to discourse, laughter relativizes language and its inherent values, acting to transform the concepts of knowledge and intersubjectivity. A language which is permeated by laughter is invaded by an indeterminacy and semantic openness which brings us back to the Kristevan idea of the multiple meanings of poetic language. Poetic language is by definition an infinity of pairings and combinations, dissolving the hierarchical division of signifier/signified. For Kristeva, however, carnival is the only place where discourse attains its potential infinity.⁶² Again, the temporary event of carnivalesque laughter is shown to have long-term effects upon discourse which remains ever-questioning, ever examining itself, constantly subjecting its established forms to review. In their use of humour, parody and irony, Daniels' plays expose the ambivalence of language, the possibility of more than a single, fixed meaning that restricts the position of women in dominant discourse.

⁶¹ M.M. Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, p. 423

⁶² Julia Kristeva, 'Word, Dialogue, Novel', p.49

From this position carnivalesque discourse takes on a determining role in the political agenda of social transformation. Acknowledging the infinite reversibility of the logic of ideological discourse, Hall stresses that the sign is 'Janus-faced'; this dialogic quality is present in 'ordinary conditions of life' but particularly important in times of 'social crisis and revolutionary change'.⁶³ Kristeva emphasizes that poetic language as an unsettling process (or outright destruction) accompanies crises in the social structure, moments of revolution, change or disarray. She confirms the connection between linguistic and social change:

Carnavalesque discourse breaks through the laws of a language censored by grammar and semantics and, at the same time, is a social and political protests. There is no equivalence, but rather, identity between challenging official linguistic codes and challenging official law.⁶⁴

The laughter of the carnival has, therefore, long term effects since it reveals the intrinsic reversibility of the symbolic order, the arbitrariness of hierarchical structures and, thus, makes possible their critical evaluation.

In New Perspectives on Women's Comedy, Regina Barreca draws the connection between carnivalesque structure and comic performance as powerful tools of subversion. She confirms that 'the world upside down' can prove that hierarchical structures have no rightful position at all, and that systems of balance are based upon

⁶³ Stuart Hall, *Critical Dialogues in Cultural Studies*, p.14

⁶⁴ Julia Kristeva, *Desire in Language*, p.65

nothing more than the reliance on tradition. Therefore, certain forms of comedy are able to invert the world not merely temporarily but permanently; they strip away the dignity of powerful figures 'only to refuse to hand them back these attributes when the allotted time for carnival is finished'.⁶⁵ The power of comedy is confirmed in Griffiths' *Comedians*. Comic performance is not a safety-valve to release tension but 'a true joke has to liberate the will and the desire, it has to change the situation'.⁶⁶ This perspective clearly acknowledges comedy as a vehicle for cultural and political change.

In Daniels' dramatic work the power of laughter is closely connected with a process whereby women confront their situation, their fears and the possibilities for change. The relaxed atmosphere of women among themselves is often accompanied by laughter. Isaak confirms that laughter is first and foremost a communal response; what is requested is not a private depoliticized *jouissance* but sensuous solidarity.⁶⁷ In *The Devil's Gateway*, laughter is only powerful in solidarity. When Betty and Enid '*start roaring with laughter*' (*DG* 5:112), this acts as a prelude to the disorderly female laughter of the women's peace movement. The dramatic action depicts working-class families living in Bethnal Green. The women's lives are determined by domestic violence: 'well, he actually didn't hit my head, and it was my fault' (*DG* 5:117), sexual abuse 'I know I

⁶⁵ Regina Barreca, ed., *New Perspectives on Women and Comedy* (Philadelphia, 1992), p.6

⁶⁶ Trevor Griffiths, *Comedians*, 1:20

⁶⁷ Jo Anna Isaak, *The Revolutionary Power of Women's Laughter*, p.5

can't call it rape because I was in no position to' (DG 12:154), and economic dependence on men: 'anyway, the money you'd earn would be a piss in the ocean' (DG 1:79). The play explores these experiences within the larger context of the women's peace camp on Greenham Common, an event which raises the characters' awareness of the extent of patriarchal oppression: 'makes you think, doesn't it ?' (DG 5:111).

Betty, who 'feels like a washing-up machine on legs'(DG 1:75) and who is convinced that 'we live in modern times, bin years since we got the vote' (DG 3:93) starts to collect news cuttings covering the protests; gradually she realizes that her own situation is no individual problem, but, rather, part of the larger context of masculine power structures which exert pressure upon 'fifty-two percent of the population'(DG 3:91). *The Devil's Gateway* foregrounds the attempts to stifle women's laughter, and to divide women from themselves and from other women because, as Betty's husband Jim puts it, 'women's talk ...only means one thing – trouble' (DG 2:86). In the course of the play, the relationships between mother and daughter, and between neighbours and friends are threatened by patriarchal intervention. Betty explains to her daughter that ' the last thing we did together was buy the material for your wedding dress' (DG 12:155), while she and her close friend Enid 'walked past each other on the stairs, never said a word'(DG 10:140).

The female characters start to realize the importance of a strong female community since 'together we give each other strength' (DG 3:92):

BETTY. Listen, Enid, we ain't ever going to get in this sort of misery again, right ?

ENID. From now on whatever spills outta Jim or Bob's mouth, we will take no notice.

BETTY. We make up our own minds.
(DG 10:147)

In *The Devil's Gateway*, women have the last laugh. At the end of the play, three generations of women (grandmother Ivy, Betty and her friend Enid, and Betty's daughter Carol) agree that 'we should take a move' (DG 12:157). Enid who at the beginning of the play only 'cares about having a laugh...laughing all the way to teatime'(DG 3:97) decides to stay with her sister; Carol no longer acts as a mouthpiece for her husband Darrel but decides to 'bugger the Sunday dinner' (DG 12:158); grandmother Ivy tells everyone to 'git [their] coats' (DG 12:158) and Betty comes to the conclusion that 'marriages are made uneven'(DG 5:177). In the final scene of the play, she leaves her husband to join the peace protest since she wants to do something more, something that will lead to changes in women's social lives. Daniels' dramatic work does not, however, ignore the problematic involved in this strategy of subversion: 'But why live on a common ? Why not sit in the House of Parliament ?' (DG 1:82) asks Betty, thus addressing the necessity for women to

initiate change and to occupy power positions within the established political and social structures.

In *The Devil's Gateway* carnivalesque experience is acknowledged as an interim strategy with serious political intent:

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

LINDA. I ain't going dancing naked through no woods painting myself with menstrual blood.

FIONA. But where is your creativity ?
(*DG 5:105*)

This scene exemplifies that even though Daniels' use of humour is aimed at the relentless dismantling of patriarchy and its values and self-justifications, it does not spare the female characters. The dramatization of radical feminist positions always retains a comic cynicism sometimes levelled against these reformulations:

JULIE. Yer bleedin' knitting, ain't yer ? Yer disgusting pervert. Yer know what yer equivalent to, eh ? A man exposin' himself in public.
(*ROD 3:17*)

Whether it is Julie's 'cranky sabotage of the Open University'(ROD 7:41) in *Ripen Our Darkness* or Linda in *The Devil's Gateway*, who has 'only got to see a bit of thigh on the telly to go mad ... hitting the

set with her garlic press thing' (*DG* 5:106), these elements of self-humour are important features of Daniels' work. They are indications of a newly attained female power and self-confidence, aimed at unsettling the seriousness of phallocratic discourse. Dealing with issues which are by no means a laughing matter, Daniels' approach nonetheless expresses a tendency not to take oneself too seriously while aiming at a woman-conscious position that is able to laugh - even at itself.

6 Limits of Representation

What would you like?
What would you really like?
I can get you anything you like.
(*A Mouthful of Birds*)

Why should our bodies end at the skin,
or include at best other beings
encapsulated by skin?
(Donna Haraway
A Manifestation for Cyborgs)

In plays by women, the definition of subjectivity is shown to be caught up in a hierarchical system which is dependent upon the processes of exclusion and abjection caught in this dialectic of 'otherness', with the attendant possibilities of approaching the non-representable. How, then, can subjectivity be rethought, in its diversity, in terms quite other than those implied by various dualisms? This chapter re-addresses the problem of dialectic sovereignty in relation to transgressive experience through an analysis of Churchill's plays *A Mouthful of Birds* and *The Skriker*. In the context of transgression, the investigation of the subversive power of laughter is further developed as part of this argument; the focus, however, is redirected towards the status of the subject and its other. These two plays are strongly informed by elements of carnival while at the same time dealing with contemporary concerns. The emphasis on the body, the merging of contradictions within the

characters, the staging of the grotesque and the subversion of authorities, all suggest carnival. However, while in *A Mouthful of Birds*, bacchic possession and carnivalesque structure lead to a redefinition of identity concepts and structures of meaning, the elements of carnival in *The Skriker* amount to a menacing disintegration of value categories and social relationships altogether. The following argument relates both works to questions of (inter)subjectivity, focussing upon the deconstruction of gender and representation. Consequently, it attempts to negotiate a definition of the subject-in-process which is determined by continuous re-negotiations and erasure.

A Mouthful of Birds, written in collaboration with David Lan, deals with usually repressed desires and explores multiple aspects of selves. The play uses dance and bacchic possession to challenge the representations of sexual difference and the construction of the body in gender opposition. The parodic adaption of Euripides' *The Bacchae* juxtaposes the closed economy of the Hegelian dialectic with the notion of senseless expenditure of which laughter is one aspect. The dramatic action opens with an image of Dionysos dancing: 'he is played by a man. He wears a white petticoat' (*MB* I/1.1:19). The god takes possession of the stage, his ambivalent sexuality is emphasized, and, in the course of the play, the focus on the confusion of sexual identities is intensified. The dramatic action is determined by abrupt and constant changes of characters and

themes. At the beginning of the play, Churchill presents her audience with groups of apparently unconnected characters in their social context. Short, self-contained episodic scenes stage rituals of conformity to the injunctions of society; through the use of metaphors for order, logic and rules, the play depicts Marcia, '*operating a switchboard*', unemployed men who are '*doing weights*' and characters '*playing chess*'(MB I/1.2:19).

Repetition and rhythmic monotony are the dominant elements in these episodes. The characters merely function; they present automatized routines of behaving and thinking and their activities signify boredom, stagnation and dependence on external determinants. In the play's opening scenes, the characters define themselves in terms of their particular roles as evidenced in the example of Derek's father who 'thought he wasn't a man without a job'(MB I/1.3:20). Sartre argues that the self-limiting reliance on external factors and on standard common values manifests itself in a *spirit of seriousness*. Rather than accepting the unlimited freedom for self-creation, he writes, the subject 'makes himself such that he is waited for by all the tasks along his way. Objects are mute demands, and he is nothing in himself but the obedience to these demands'.¹ This view implies a passive obedience to authority and an understanding of social values as possessing a transcendental quality of their own. However, the life of subjection to given conditions does

¹ J.P.Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, tr. Hazel E.Barnes (London, 1958), p.626

not simply guarantee a feeling of security but at the same time causes pain and suffering, as one recognizes oneself as the subject of (other's) discourse, tributary of a universal law.

In the first part of the play, the characters' social situations evoke a concept of identity that seeks to exclude heterogeneity. The heterogeneous is explained by Bataille as the pole of expenditure (*dépense*) which is opposed to the pole of utility and production. The process of socialization is based upon the exclusion of heterogeneous elements. Bataille identifies a fundamental distinction between feeble communication as the basis of profane society - that is, active society in the sense in which activity merges with productivity - and powerful communication which 'abandons the consciousnesses that reflect each other'.² The habitual activity of beings, their so-called occupation, separates the subject from the privileged moments of powerful communication. However, the dissolution of ego-borders, of isolation and individuality is experienced in the emotions of festivity, drama, love, laughter and death.

Anxiety and loss are central to the issues dramatized in *A Mouthful of Birds*. In the opening scenes, identity only appears negatively, as loss and fragmentation. The characters only know they exist through the emotion of anxiety that they feel. The dramatic action increasingly foregrounds the cracks and discontinuities of

² Georges Bataille, *Literature and Evil: Essays*, tr. Alastair Hamilton (London, 1985), p.200

subjectivity, what Lacan describes as the fragmented body that always threatens to shatter the boundaries of the Imaginary.³ *A Mouthful of Birds* makes explicit the tension which determines the characters' lives. Yvonne speaks to the other character on stage; at the same time she addresses the audience and, thus, redirects the spectators' attention to themselves and to their own situation while comparing it to the state of mind/body Mr Wood finds himself in:

YVONNE, an acupuncturist, is attending to MR WOOD who is lying down. She wears a white coat.

YVONNE (to audience). What makes you so angry?
(To MR WOOD). Relax your arm. No, relax it. All right. Let's start at the top. Back. Relax your back.... Let the tension flow away. Good. So Mr Wood, tell me – what is it that makes you so angry?
(*MB I/4:21*)

In the course of the play, the apparently composed rationality of the isolated individual is completely shattered. Seemingly fixed identities and discourses predicated on sense, usefulness and productivity are broken down in scenes of dionysian frenzy and violence.

This breakdown of identities is anticipated in Part One of Act One which closes with a scene in which all the characters bring forward excuses that will prevent them from meeting their social responsibilities. These statements range from seemingly everyday apologies: 'I'm sorry I can't make the conference. I have sprained my ankle', to more extreme statements like 'I can't come in for a

³ Jacques Lacan, *Écrits*, p.4

perm. My sister's been kidnapped', and 'I can't come to dinner, there's a bull in the garden' (*MB I/1.8:23*). The play relies on unusual juxtapositions of incongruous, seemingly unrelated images. The characters' excuses anticipate the overtaking of the body (a body which seeks to escape its social construction by malfunction or illness) and the shift to extreme experiences and images. In the course of the play, the women become gradually possessed by the Bacchae. Doreen (who doubles in the mystic scenes with Agave) and who 'wanted peace and quiet' , engages in a violent struggle with her neighbour:

DIONYSOS passes DOREEN as she enters. He goes out. Suddenly both rush out of their rooms shouting. They meet. DOREEN slashes MRS BLAIR in the face with a knife. MRS BLAIR stands there with blood coming out of her face. DOREEN pulls her onto the floor and rolls her up in the carpet. DOREEN pulls the end of the carpet so MRS BLAIR is rolled out. DOREEN turns off the radio, both radios go off.
(*MB II/ 23:58*)

The release of emotions and violence is a central part of the action on stage. This focus, as Elin Diamonds points out, emphasizes the libidinal and psychic turmoil within each social entity.⁴ Moreover, it is an attempt to further displace the centrality of reason/mind/consciousness in the conception of the subject. The characters are finally moved out of their social context into legendary, mythical roles:

⁴ Elin Diamond, '(In)Visible Bodies in Churchill's Theatre, *Theatre Journal VXL No.2* (1988), p.188

In the midst of this, the four WOMEN become possessed by AGAVE and the spirits of three BACCHANTS.

DOREEN is possessed by AGAVE:

AGAVE. Why are my feet cut and blistered? I've been running all night.

MARCIA is possessed by a BACCHANT:

BACCHANT 1. Honey in my hair !

YVONNE is possessed by a BACCHANT:

BACCHANT 2. It's wine !

LENA is possessed by a BACCHANT:

BACCHANT 3. Salt and sweet. I can feel its heart throb !
(*MB I/2.18:49*)

Through scenes of dionysian possession which are located in contemporary, oppressive social structures, Churchill juxtaposes the overtaking of the body, which sets people free from their usual fear, with its attendant restraints and strict regulation of (gender) roles that usually determine the characters' lives. However, possession overtakes the characters without warning, it occurs '*in the midst*' (*MB I/2.18:49*) of habitual activities. Bataille confirms that with a *sudden impulse* the effort to suppress, both radically and systematically, ceases to be systematic: the limitations and constraints are broken passively, not by intense will-power.⁵ Here, experience of self is not a systematic quest but it is achieved in complete loss and abandonment of rational discourse. Therefore, it is contradictory to plan the repetition of these experiences. Thus, possession is

⁵ Georges Bataille, 'The Labyrinth', *Visions of Excess : Selected Writings 1927-1939*, ed. and tr. Allan Stoerke (Minneapolis, 1985), p.174

identified as a movement towards a heterogeneity which cannot be reduced to the instance of conscious mastery.

In *Die Geburt der Tragödie*, Nietzsche describes the dionysian Rausch as an experience of a total loss of subjectivity and sense of individuality.⁶ Within the circular closure of representation embedded in Hegelian thought, meaninglessness and expenditure are an integral part of the dialectical process. However, as Hegel assumes, they become gradually rationalized and incorporated:

.... conscious of its own distraught and torn condition and to express itself accordingly – this is to pour scornful laughter on existence, on the confusion pervading the whole and on itself as well: it is at the same time this whole confusion dying away and yet apprehending itself to be doing so.⁷

A Hegelian perspective challenges Nietzsche's argument and denies the radicality of negativity; it regards the disruption of expenditure as leading to a higher state of self-integration : 'self-alienation ... moulds itself into its opposite, and in this way reverses the nature of this opposite'.⁸ Negation is, therefore, never merely negative, but always retains a positive reserve. Nothingness, in this sense, is transformed into being; expenditure leads ultimately to wholeness.

⁶ Friedrich Nietzsche, 'Die Geburt der Tragödie', *Sämtliche Werke Kritische Studienausgabe Band 1* (München, 1980), p.29/4-5 : 'jene dionysischen Regungen, in deren Steigerung das Subjective zu völliger Selbstvergessenheit hinschwindet'.

⁷ G.W.F.Hegel, 'Culture and its realm of actual reality', *Phenomenology of Mind*, tr. J.B. Baillie (London, 1949), p.546

⁸ *ibid.*, p.542

In contrast to Hegel, Bataille insists upon the disruptive, excessive power of transgressive experience, comparing it with the experience of laughter:

... to illuminate the night, for an instant with an immense laugh – a laugh it never would have attained if this nothingness had not totally opened up beneath its feet.⁹

Bataille's approach, as described by Derrida, is a 'Hegelianism without reserve'. It is an expenditure which is not productive, since it must give us 'no certitude, no result, no profit. It is absolutely adventurous, it is a chance and not a technique'.¹⁰ Therefore, the *dépense sans réserve* is expenditure without return and without history; it hangs in suspense, affirms nothing, alleviates nothing; it is the absolute melting away of everything stable. Bataille's inflection of sovereignty proposes what is unthinkable in Hegel's closed economy, that is precisely the negated/conserved that was its condition. However, these experiences are not representable in discourse; language (based upon differentiation and on the suppression of heterogeneity) fails to communicate this aspect of self.

This perspective brings us back to the question of (theatrical) language, representation and subjectivity. 'Il n'est pas parole que de langue' writes Lacan. He insists upon a definite break between the Imaginary/Symbolic which are separated by the rupture caused by

⁹ Georges Bataille, 'The Labyrinth', *Visions of Excess: Selected Writings 1927-1939*, ed. and tr. Allan Stoerke (Minneapolis, 1985), p.177

¹⁰ Jacques Derrida, 'From Restricted to General Economy: A Hegelianism without Reserve', *Writing and Difference*, tr. Alan Bass (London : 1978), p.273

castration and the repression of pre-Oedipal desires.¹¹ However, *A Mouthful of Birds* experiments with stages ranging from unnameable sensation, to fragmentary deciphering and, finally, to linguistic articulation. Moreover, the play explores dance as a process which exceeds the limits of culturally useful discourse, depicting the blurred fields of the unconscious psychic process. Thus, *A Mouthful of Birds* grants a physicality to the stage that lends a subordinate role to the spoken word. This recalls Artaud who proposes to escape 'the dictatorship of words'. In his writings, he advocates a process of giving to words an importance they have in dreams. His idea of theatre is concerned with addressing

not the primordial directions of the mind, which our logical and abusive intellectualism would reduce to useless schemas, but states of such intense acuteness, of such an absolute sharpness, that one might feel through the tremors of music and form, the subterranean threats of a chaos that is both decisive and dangerous.¹²

Churchill makes the performance field an increasingly visual space. The actresses/actors' bodies are central elements of the dramatic action, given equal status to the text. Foregrounding the performing body, *A Mouthful of Birds* challenges the privileged position of the Symbolic and the name of the father as the foundation of sign, meaning and discourse.

¹¹ Jacques Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis*, p.118

¹² Antonin Artaud, *The Theatre and its Double*, p.61

This focus on the body and the idea of androgyny is addressed by Kristeva. She criticizes Lacan for overlooking processes that take place prior to the mirror-stage. Kristeva recognizes the archaic stages preceding the mirror stage as part of a whole process that passes through voice, taste, skin, all the senses that yet do not necessarily mobilize sight. According to Kristeva, the linguistic conceptualization of the unconscious processes restricts the access to these hidden elements of experience. She displaces Lacan's distinction between the *Imaginary* and the *Symbolic Order* into a distinction between the *semiotic* and the *symbolic*. The term *semiotic* is linked to the pre-oedipal primary processes which she identifies with the bodily-centred drives of the pleasure-seeking unconscious; they are 'a pre-sentence making disposition to rhythm, intonation, nonsense (that) makes one laugh'.¹³ Thus, the speaking subject is replaced by

...a breathlessness, an acceleration of verbal utterance, concerned not so much with finally reaching a global summing up of the world's meaning, as to the contrary, with revealing, within the interstices of predication, the rhythm of a drive that remains forever unsatisfied.¹⁴

In Churchill's play this is reflected in the fragmented sentences articulated by the dancing characters: pleasures, sounds, colours, taste, smell or movements are emphasized which can be seen as an attempt to visualize the semiotic as a drive-affected dimension of human experience.

¹³ Julia Kristeva, *About Chinese Women*, tr. Anita Barrows (London, 1977), p.25

¹⁴ Julia Kristeva, *Desire in Language*, p.142

In Kristevan thought, scenes of possession visualize the return of the chora in which the pulsions of the oral/anal drives are gathered in and which manifests itself in language through rhythms, gaps, meaninglessness and disruption of the rational symbolic flow. It is 'an invisible and formless being which receives all things and in some mysterious way partakes of the intelligible, and is most incomprehensible'.¹⁵ The chora's articulation is undetermined, lacking form or position, unity or identity. Its revolutionary potential is, however, presented as a signifying practice. It is a practice which sets off the heterogeneity at issue making free with the language code and thereby reordering the psychic drives which have not been harnessed by the dominant process of symbolization. When the fruitballet dramatizes 'the sensuous pleasures of eating and the terrors of being torn up' (*MB I/1.11:28*), this dance is a-subjective, a-social. It is the annihilation of the unitary subject and its capacity to verbalize. In the play, the body is presented as the site of both intense pleasure and violent potentiality, thus the dramatic action confronts its audience with a performance of total spectacle in which the body is the central signifying element intended to disrupt barriers of linguistic construction.

The transgressive experience in *A Mouthful of Birds* is closely bound up with questions of intersubjectivity. The dissolution of the unitary subject anticipates the dissolution of the boundary of self and

¹⁵ *ibid.*, p.6

others, which determines the dualism of meaning. This corresponds with Bataille's notion of *expérience intérieure*, an aspect of human experience not amenable to representation in objectifying discourse:

Above all no more object. There is no longer subject = object, but a 'gaping breach' between one and the other and, in the breach, the subject, the object are dissolved, there is passage, communication, but not from the one to the other, *the one* and *the other* have lost distinct existence.¹⁶

Possession as well as carnivalesque experience involve the spectator, dissolving the distance necessary for the constitution of individual identities. In the development of his theatrical concepts, Artaud focuses upon the audience's immersion and involvement in the spectacle. He intends to 'do away with stage and auditorium', replacing the two oppositions by a single, undivided locale which is 'the scene of action'.¹⁷ Derrida confirms that in festival, the spectator becomes the centre and the spectacle surrounds him. Thus, the infused spectator is no longer in a position to constitute his spectacle and hence cannot provide himself with his object.¹⁸

On stage the dissolution of the border between self and other, between spectator and spectacle, is dramatized by the dismemberment of Pentheus. Pentheus goes to the mountain with the intention of killing the possessed women, he wants 'to see them' (*MB II/20:54*). However, after his attack on Dionysos1 and Dionysos2,

¹⁶ Georges Bataille, *Oeuvres Complètes No. V* (Paris: Gallimard, 1973), p.74

¹⁷ Antonin Artaud, *The Theatre and its Double*, p.74

¹⁸ Jacques Derrida, 'The Theatre of Cruelty and the Closure of Representation', p.244

Pentheus gives up his detached position:

PENTHEUS is brought by DIONYSOS into a dance of the whole company in which moments of Extreme Happiness and of violence from earlier parts of the play are repeated... PENTHEUS is torn to pieces by DOREEN who is possessed by AGAVE and the other WOMEN who are possessed by BACCHANTS.
(*MB II/24:66*)

In this scene, mechanisms of representation which determine the subject/object division are unsettled. During transgressive experience, a shift from subjectivism to ambivalence occurs and the objectifying gaze as a structuring moment of subjectivity loses its power. In *Desire in Language*, Kristeva makes the connection of this process of loss to carnivalesque experience:

carnival ignores substance, causality or identity. It is a spectacle but without a stage, a game, but also a daily undertaking, a signifier, but also a signified. A carnival participant is both actor and spectator. He loses his sense of individuality, passes through a zero point of carnivalesque activity, and splits into a subject of the spectacle and an object of the game'.¹⁹

Therefore, as Bakhtin writes, carnival is not a spectacle 'seen by the people' but an activity in which everyone participates.²⁰

The dissolution of ego-borders in possession and carnival recalls the experience of laughter. For Bataille, laughter is 'always the whole movement of the festival in a nutshell'²¹; it is essentially contagious and does not allow for any possibility of observation. Mikkel Borch-

¹⁹ Julia Kristeva, *Desire in Language*, p.78

²⁰ M.M.Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, p.7

²¹ George Bataille, 'The Festival', *The Bataille Reader*, ed.Fred Botting and Scott Wilson, tr. Robert Hurley (Oxford, 1997), p.249

Jacobsen observes that laughter in Bataillean thought is never objective. In laughter we lose ourselves in another, reaching a state where distance from the other vanishes: 'seeing laughter, hearing laughter, I participate from within in the emotion of the one who laughs'.²² Laughter is, therefore, a radical form of dialogue working towards the other and alterity. This corresponds with Foucault's shattering laughter which breaks up all ordered, systematic surfaces and 'all the planes with which we are accustomed to tame the wild profusion of existing things', continuing long afterwards to disturb and unsettle 'our age-old distinction between the Same and the other'.²³ This process initiates and makes possible a communication with the other that is no longer determined by distinctions and differentiation.

In Euripides' *The Bacchae*, the murder of the patriarchal figure results in excluding the Bacchantes from the community, allowing for the reconstruction of the social equilibrium. Since the symbolic order is patriarchal, ruled by the Law of the Father, any subject who tries to disrupt it, who allows unconscious forces to slip through the veneer of symbolic representation, puts herself / himself in the position of revolt. As Kristeva states, the semiotic can serve only as a temporary and futile disruption of the hegemony of paternal law. At

²² Mikkel Borch-Jacobsen, 'The Laughter of Being', p.737

²³ Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences*, p.1

the moment of entry into language, it is sublated into a thetic stage – that is the phase of the division signifier/signified.²⁴ It is an important linguistic force but cannot be turned into either an alternative origin or an independent symbolic position. The semiotic is thus re-codified into a new symbolic system that has absorbed the subversive potential, thus negating the possibility of an alternative politics. Is Churchill, therefore, putting forward a strategy that can never be a sustained political practice? What effect can this temporary release from the symbolic order have if the dominant system absorbs the subversive potential?

Kristeva explains the transformation of the semiotic with the Hegelian concept of *Aufhebung* (with the double meaning of negation and conservation). The symbolic fails to subsume entirely the semiotic heterogeneity: no signifier can effect the *Aufhebung* of the semiotic without leaving its remainder. In Churchill's play Doreen can find no rest; however, her speech emphasizes that language always remains open to the irruption of heterogeneity into the presumed unity:

DOREEN. My head is filled with horrible images. I can't say *I see* them, it's more *I feel* them. It seems that my mouth is full of birds which I crunch between my teeth. Their feathers, their blood and broken bones are choking me. I carry on my work as a secretary.
(*MB* II/3.31:71, my emphasis)

²⁴ Julia Kristeva, 'Revolution in Poetic Language', *The Kristeva Reader*, ed. Toril Moi, tr. Margaret Waller (London, 1986), p.98

Doreen's speech and the violent images it evokes, closes the monologues and opens again the question of ideological repression which is representation. Swallowing her repressed desires, Doreen subordinates herself to the structure of disciplinary control. Doreen's statement still carries traces of the repressed forces, for the semiotic always challenges the subject of understanding. At the end of the play, Dionysos dances again, emphasizing that carnival is a 'daily undertaking' which continues to unsettle. Therefore, the order restored at the end of the play is shown to be lacking in stability.

A Mouthful of Birds does not present the semiotic as an alternative to language, but evoking Kristeva's emphasis on the pre-discursive, the dramatic action shows that the two modalities are inseparable within the domain of language production. This view denies a progression from the imaginary to the symbolic but suggests a process of constant inversion and interaction. The play advances a discourse which is – as Kristeva argues – neither the imaginary discourse of the self, nor the discourse of transcendental knowledge but 'a permanent go-between from one to the other, a pulsation of sign and rhythm, of consciousness and instinctual drive'.²⁵ This representation takes into account the fact that meaning is not a closed sign-system but a signifying process. Thus, the subject is always both semiotic and symbolic since each signifying system is marked by an indebtedness to the other. The semiotic fluxes

²⁵ Julia Kristeva, *Desire in Language*, p.139

are, therefore, not futile but open up a new understanding of language which questions the fundamental metaphysical notion of presence and identity. The bacchic dance as disruptive force is not merely a temporarily limited contestation of social norms but rather a critical resource in the struggle to rearticulate the very terms of symbolic legitimacy and intelligibility.

In its dealing with repressed desires and libidinal forces, *A Mouthful of Birds* recognizes the representational importance of the body as a frame of sexual identity and difference. Dominated by the androgynous god, the dramatic action makes of gender a free-floating artifice. Thus, it deconstructs the singularity of the available categories, freeing the characters from a narrowly conceived, static notion of difference. Moments of transformation, like in the Prison Scene, anticipate the dissolution of identities based upon gender opposition:

FEMALE PRISON OFFICER. All right, a mistake's a mistake.
But – this. No, you're kidding me.

MALE PRISON OFFICER. It wasn't your mistake.

FEMALE PRISON OFFICER. You admitted him.

MALE PRISON OFFICER. Her.

FEMALE PRISON OFFICER. Her.

MALE PRISON OFFICER. It was him when we admitted
her. I can guarantee that.

FEMALE PRISON OFFICER. Guarantee?

MALE PRISON OFFICER. You want a cup of coffee?
Guarantee!
(*MB I/2.15:37*)

'What the hell is going on?' asks the Female Prison Officer at the end of the dialogue, expressing her (?) confusion about a sexual identity that is impossible to pin down. In order to maintain its dominant position, patriarchy has to 'guarantee' the system of difference in which femininity and masculinity are posited as stable, unchanging essences and which consequently places men in a position of power in opposition to women.

The tyranny of sexual difference which splits subjectivity into two mutually exclusive domains is taken up and emphasized in Act Two, Scene 19, when Herculine/Abel Barbin tells her (his) story. The nineteenth-century French hermaphrodite whose journals have been published by Foucault, was legally compelled to change her/his sex to male: until 'nobody doubted I was a girl no one worried about my body' (*MB* II/19:51) Herculine narrates. However, 'the doctors were fascinated, how to define this body' and this story reveals the body as a frame of sexual identity and difference, recognizing its representational importance in relation to social meanings. Signified as girl/boy, the subject officially enters the system of representations by exclusion. 'Yes. I should be declared a man' (*MB* II/19:51), Herculine explains when s/he is forced into only one of the gender roles available.

The hermaphrodite's narrative realizes the subject's suffering and loss as a result of its representational status:

HERCULINE. Into the unknown like now, breathing in fumes,
soon dead, how to get back, all the girls' bodies, Sara's body,
my girl's body, all lost, couldn't you have stayed?
(*MB II/19:52*)

The social necessity separates Herculine from an aspect of self which s/he still desires. Herculine commits suicide but in *A Mouthful of Birds*, the narrative is taken over by Derek who repeats the story of suffering and loss word by word. As Elin Diamond points out, the scene between Derek and Herculine extends the body's representational limits more definitely than ever before in Churchill's work.²⁶ Barbin is played by a woman but dressed in the clothes of a Frenchman of the nineteenth century. However, the male actor playing Derek does not make this image symmetrical, since he does not dress himself as a female. The result is a scene of sexual fluidity in which the characters' sexual identities are difficult to evaluate within the available discourse. When Herculine starts to leave, Derek repeats 'couldn't you have stayed?' and Herculine 'turns back to kiss him on the neck' (*MB II/19:54*). In this scene, the chaotic multiplicity and diffuseness of representations displaces the authority and the traditional ideology of sexual hegemony.

In *A Mouthful of Birds*, Churchill does not offer an alternative subject but replaces the spirit of seriousness with a dramatization of the strategies of the polymorphous which is the apotheosis of play. Seeking to disrupt visual form and questioning sexual certainties and

²⁶ Elin Diamond, '(In)Visible Bodies in Churchill's Theatre', p.202

stereotypes, she uses the body as a metaphor to challenge the ideology of the visible which underlies representation and gender division. This strategy dissolves any essentialist notions of self and others; the play does not provide alternate possibilities for identity positions outside those authenticated by conventional representation but affirms identity categories as sites of inevitable rifting. The play dramatizes Bakhtin's sense of the grotesque body. It is not a closed, completed unit, rather it is unfinished, outgrowing itself and transgressing its own limits. The plenitude of being is never reached but replaced by 'the ever-unfinished, ever-creating body'.²⁷ This evokes the Kristevan *sujet en procès* that refers to a constantly changing subject whose identity always remains open to question. The unitary subject is, in this context, merely a moment, a time of arrest, a stasis, already threatened and exceeded by the movement of never-ending self-constitution.

This idea of subject constitution implies an ongoing process: the subject is never fully constituted, but is subjected and produced time and again. Identity, therefore, participates in a synchronic and diachronic dimension – it is both of its own, concrete contextual moment and also part of the long evolution of social transformation. However, this evolution does not consist of isolated, self-sufficient temporal segments that are arranged in no more than one linear development. Judith Butler emphasizes the effect of sedimentation

²⁷ M.M. Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, p.26

that the temporality of construction implies.²⁸ Time is not to be understood as a succession of distinct moments but the past consists of the accumulation and congealing of such moments to the point of their indistinguishability from each other. It will also contain that which construction refuses, the domain of the repressed.

The subject in *A Mouthful of Birds* no longer relies on what Nietzsche, in *Die Geburt der Tragödie*, calls metaphysical comfort, but Derek's 'I' is determined by negations, contradictions and questions. Bodily shape and libidinal energy (smell) merge; thus identity that demands a fiction of closure is replaced by a body of diffuse pleasures. This representation calls into question the boundaries of self and other, past and present, evoking a carnivalesque structure that gives free play to the contradictions within being:

DEREK. My breasts aren't big but I like them. My waist isn't small but it makes me smile. My shoulders are still strong. And my new shape is the least of it. I smell light and sweet. I come into a room who has been here?... Was I this all the time? I've almost forgotten the man who possessed this body.
(*MB* II/3.30:71)

Monologized discourse and the silencing of the other ('couldn't you have stayed?') are replaced by an open mixture of selves and others. The scene dramatizes a multiplicity of representations which are never fixed, never secure, always and constantly shifting. Androgyny does not function as a fantasy of complete being but stands for the

²⁸ Judith Butler, *Bodies that Matter*, p.245

non-exclusion of difference - as if there were no limits, the outer space is filled by the subject's presence. However, paradoxically the loss of ontological security turns into a moment of continuity. Derek, whose existence is determined by the uncertainties of what the future might bring, experiences a state of disequilibrium that causes no anxiety but confidence and curiosity and expresses a certain consistency in feeling, happiness and content: 'I can't remember what he used to be frightened of. Every day I wake up, I'm comfortable'(MB II/3.30:71).

A Mouthful of Birds closes with an utopian vision of a subject that does not claim any authenticity other than its ability to change, enjoying the positive, regenerating and liberating power of self-creation. However, the characters' statements at the end of the play and their use of 'I' indicate that the play is not a farewell to the subject per se, but a call to rework that notion outside the terms of an epistemological given. Churchill's play does not offer a reversal of gender hierarchies but underscores a feminist politics that contests the very reifications of gender and identity and takes the variable constructions of identity as a political goal. Churchill dramatizes a position that works without a notion of a universal subject or stable self. Her play offers a representation of the subject in the Kristevan sense; it is a subject that is not reduced to one of understanding, but instead is opened up towards the other scene of pre-oedipal functioning.

However, the dramatic action does not romanticize bacchic possession, its experiences and pleasures as the 'happy limbo of non-identity'.²⁹ The play articulates the transitional link to the post-oedipal subject and its symbolic language, and transgression is explored as motivating the subject to re-create its relation to the social code. At the end of the play, the characters function as 'symbolic witnesses' of the shattering experience which has dissolved every entity.³⁰ This dissolution has far-reaching consequences both in its ontological and political aspects. It is obvious that the women are conscious of a different relationship with their bodies; their social lives have changed through what happened to them during the time of possession. Lena is no longer 'frightened of anything, I walk alone at night, throw him over my shoulder if I have to' and Yvonne has 'a feel of the strength of a body. All men know it'(MB III/30).

The women's speeches anticipate changes in their hierarchical position and in their relationship to men; they indicate a sense of newly attained power. This move, however, redirects the focus of the play to the *Realpolitik* of women's lives. The end of the play shows the dissolution of subject positions as leading to the emergence of women's voices which are heard in real, social matters. For women, Kristeva stresses, it is important to control a resurgence of phallic

²⁹ Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble*, p.94

³⁰ Julia Kristeva, *Desire in Language*, p.164

presence in order to arrive at a new concept of meaning, a meaning that goes beyond that what is encoded-spoken-written.³¹ The re-direction of energies is an imperative movement in the process of re-signification. Therefore, women cannot remain in a state of smug polymorphism but have to confront the political demands necessary for changing their social positions.

Carnavalesque elements, the power of possession and the clash of reality and the real are also central determinants of the dramatic action in *The Skriker*. As with *A Mouthful of Birds*, Churchill's later play explores the representational limits of discourse, combining language, dance, mime and gesture. However, *The Skriker* further intensifies the destabilization of the spoken word. The dramatic action takes place in the underworld, in a mental hospital and in contemporary London. It opens in the underworld, presenting a '*giant riding on a piglike man, throwing stones*' (TS:1). Right at the beginning of the play, the symbolic pig, the carnival animal par excellence, anticipates a reversal of 'high' and 'low' and a subversion of order and seemingly fixed values. Bakhtin emphasizes that carnival texts reflect the powerful and regenerative impulse to play, to assume other identities, to turn things upside down. Carnival experience as opposed to all that was ready-made and completed seeks a dynamic expression; it demands ever-changing, playful undefined forms. Carnavalesque discourse thus breaks through the

³¹ *ibid.*, p.164

laws of a language censored by grammar and semantics and, at the same time, is a social and political protest.³²

When the Skriker appears on stage, it is introduced as 'a *shapeshifter, ancient and damaged*' (TS:1); it is a figure of never-ceasing disturbance involved in the disruption of images. An unmotivated signifier, the Skriker subverts any temporal or spatial closure, rejecting any claim towards stability and homogeneity:

JOSIE. She looks about fifty but she's I don't know maybe five hundred a million. I don't know how old these things are.
(TS: 9)

Churchill's most ambivalent figure appears in many guises, abruptly morphing and changing itself into other shapes. The Skriker is 'a *fairy-queen (dressed grandiously)*' (TS:29), 'a woman about 50' (TS: 9), 'a small girl' (TS: 23), 'a part of the sofa (invisible but icy)' (TS: 20), 'a smart woman in her thirties' (TS:36). Its appearance, age, gender and language change constantly; the play is determined by a Bakhtinian heteroglossia that confronts its audience with a complex interplay of texts.

In his review of *Slipstich Productions*, Cary M.Mazer recommends that spectators should read their program notes *carefully* before the 90-minute intermissionless play begins, for most of the production is completely incomprehensible.³³ David Spencer

³² M.M.Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, p.26

³³ *The Skriker Slipstich Productions* (1998), New Arts Salon, rev. Cary M.Mazer, www.english.upenn.edu

observes that for the first time throughout the performance at the *Public Theatre*, 'in dribs and drabs, small pockets, here and there, audience members get pissed off enough to walk out'. This reaction, as Spencer argues, was not caused by an inferior performance but by the confusing complexity of images and sounds.³⁴ The play frustrates the spectator's deep-seated need for interpretation. At the beginning of the play, the audience is attacked by a 'language bursting like a swarm of angry bees'³⁵, for the Skriker's almost incomprehensible non-linear monologue (which introduces the major themes of the play) is obfuscated by nonsense effects and superfluous imagery. In over 160 lines, the Skriker mixes fairy- and folktale elements, the onomatopoeic jingles of nursery-rhyme, word-play, literary associations, puns and mythic references:

SKRIKER. Chop chip pan chap finger chirrup chirrup cheer
Up off with you're no making headway. Weeps
Seeps deeps her pretty puffy cream cake hole in
Her heart operation. Sees a little blackjack
Thingalingo with a long long tale awinding.
.... Open bluebeard's one
bloody chamber maid, eat the one forbidden fruit
of the tree trop down comes cradle and baby.
(TS:1)

The Skriker's opening speech is a proliferation of variously ambiguous partial structures; it offers a combination of quotations and transformations of other texts but none of these voices is predominant. Imagery is a determinant of the Skriker's monologue.

³⁴ *The Skriker, Public Theatre New York* (1998) rev. David Spencer, www.escape.com/theanet/SKRIKER

³⁵ *The Skriker, Slipstich Productions*, rev. Sunday Times, telematix.ie/bedrock/skriker/reviews.html

However, these images are not immediately allegorical, they cannot be reduced to a one-dimensional metaphor. Using a language that merges as, i.e., in the string merging from 'gone with the wind' to 'gone with the windowcleaner' (*TS*:3), the play constructs words that are inhabited by signifiers which bear the traces of other signifiers, thus arriving at an endless chain of meaning, never fixed and complete. In the play, the monologue displaces the audience's attention from the signified to the signifier, from meaning to desire, and from consciousness to the unconscious. In his analysis of the language of nonsense, Jean-Jacques Lecercle observes that the meaningful combination of phonemes, in other words morphemes, does not exhaust the possibilities of lawful combinations, thus leaving room for the nonsensical author's linguistic imagination.³⁶ The dramatic language of *The Skriker* exploits the possibilities offered by the phonotactics of English, i.e. the rules governing the possible combinations of phonemes. The play effectively dramatizes the apotheosis of signifiers, the loss of any reference points and the unbalancing of the seemingly stable word.

The Skriker presents the audience with a form of discourse that questions the most common conceptions of language. The Skriker's speech denies any control over language by a unitary, regulating subject. Lecercle introduces the term *délire*, a concept of discourse

³⁶ Jean-Jacques Lecercle, *Philosophy of Nonsense: The Intuitions of Victorian Nonsense Literature* (London, 1994), p.48

that accounts for the relation between language, desire and nonsense. While language, as the instrument of signification and control, is based upon the suppression of desire, *délire* dissolves this repression. It integrates what has been excluded in order to enable language to signify meaning. Thus, it is a discourse where the material side of language, and its origin in the human body and desire, are no longer covered up by its abstract aspect that harnesses language as an instrument of communication or expression. Gerald L. Bruns points out that in Lacanian thought, this borderline discourse is accounted for in the concept of *lalangue*, a term for that which has to be repressed if consciousness is to form.³⁷ It is a discourse not made for communication. Transgressing the differences coded into *langue*, it evokes a play of heterogeneity which cannot be contained within any system of signification. Ellie Ragland-Sullivan explains that *lalangue* is determined by linguistic confusions, ambiguities, special patterns of internal resonance and multiple meanings. The phonemes of regular language undergo condensation and displacement to form neo-logisms having little to do with their phonetic usage in common discourse.³⁸ Thus, *lalangue* indicates that part of language which reflects the laws of unconscious processes, but whose effects go beyond that reflection, and escape the grasp of the subject.

³⁷ Gerald L. Bruns, 'The Otherness of Words: Joyce, Bakhtin, Heidegger', *Postmodernism – Philosophy and the Arts*, ed. Hugh J. Silverman (London, 1990), p.124

³⁸ Ellie Ragland-Sullivan, *Jaques Lacan – The Philosophy of Psychoanalysis* (London, 1986), p.206

Through the performance of language, *The Skriker* denies any attempts that the audience might make to reinsert the text into the order of signification through constructive interpretation. The play presents the audience with a language that is determined by heterogeneity. Kristeva makes the connection with the discourse of the borderline; this type of discourse is fragmentary, difficult to follow, full of gaps, without logical order.³⁹ She offers an explanation of how to read borderline discourse which she identifies as a non-communicative use of speech. Borderline discourse is, from this perspective, determined by the play of signifiers. It consists of 'puns, portmanteau words, the condensation of signifiers, which are not always, not only, or sometimes not at all, cultural acquisitions'.⁴⁰ Traditionally, interpretation is identified as a logical, associative task. It is a construction of relations aimed at detecting logical sequences in order to endow the speech act with signification: 'to take up bits of discursive chaos in order to indicate their relations (temporal, causal, etc.), ordering these chaotic themes'.⁴¹ Thus, this form of reading reestablishes the very capacities of speech to enunciate exterior referential realities. Attending a performance of *The Skriker*, the difficulty for the spectator involves giving up logocentric, dualistic and other transcendental habits. Therefore, any interpretative

³⁹ Julia Kristeva, 'Feminism and Psychoanalysis : Interview with Elaine Hoffmann-Baruch', *Interviews*, ed. Ross Mitchell Guberman, tr. Brom Anderson (New York : 1996), p.113

⁴⁰ Julia Kristeva, 'Within a Microcosm of the Talking Cure', *Interpreting Lacan : Psychiatry and the Humanities*, ed. Joseph H. Smith and William Kerrigan, tr. Thomas Gora and Margaret Waller (New Haven, 1983), p.42

⁴¹ *ibid.*, p.45

undertaking that is determined by an orientation towards unity can only be doomed to failure. Instead, the performance provokes contradictory interpretations. It escapes the prison of meaning and mobilizes imagination, thus demanding from the audience an acceptance of fragmentation and non-closure, requiring them to float with the situation.

Churchill's play recalls the Artaudian idea of deploying language in a new, exceptional and unusual way. Artaud wanted theatre to make language convey what it does normally not convey by ascribing to it a full 'physical shock potential', involving the desire 'to split it up and distribute it actively in space'.⁴² In this way, Artaud's theatre aims to restore the shattering power of language. Artaud and Derrida call for a use of both speech and writing which subordinates or dissolves the notion of speech as a vehicle of rational transparency. Traditional Western theatre, as Derrida explains, is dominated by speech. It is determined by the logos which secures the movement of representation. However, in Artaud's theatre, the logical and discursive intentions which speech ordinarily deploys in order to guarantee its rational transparency, and in order to purloin its body in the direction of meaning, will be reduced or subordinated. This subordination, however, reveals the heterogeneity that language excludes in order to form consciousness:

⁴² Antonin Artaud, *The Theatre and its Double*, p.35

[it] lays bare the flesh of the word, lays bare the word's sonority, intonation, intensity – the shout that the articulations of language and logic have not yet entirely frozen, that is, the aspect of oppressive gesture which remains in all speech, the unique and irreplaceable movement which the generalities of concept and repetition have never finished rejecting.⁴³

In *The Theatre of Cruelty*, Artaud advocates a language of theatre that appeals to the senses rather than addressing the mind. In the Skriker's monologues, words are construed in an Artaudian, incantatory, magical sense – not exclusively for their meaning but for their forms, their sensual radiation. Churchill's play does not abandon the symbolic order; instead it sets in motion a play with language that foregrounds the materiality of signifiers, the physicality of discourse without transcendental reference.

In its use of the technique of bombarding its audience with an abundance of impressions, images and signifiers, Churchill's play brings to a crisis the spectator's relation with language, a language to which s/he no longer seems to hold the key. The radical convention of forms of expression leads to a high degree of unpredictability and ambiguity which determines the course of the dramatic action. Apart from the disturbance of language, the spectator cannot rely upon any continuity of name, role or behaviour of characters. The play of extremes which determines the course of *A Mouthful of Birds* is also an important structural feature of *The Skriker*. Music is one of the techniques used to support this strategy:

⁴³ Jacques Derrida, 'The Theatre of Cruelty and the Closure of Representation', p.240

Blackout. A horrible shriek like a siren that goes up to a very high sound and holds it. Gradually it relents little by little breaking up into notes and coming down till it is pleasant and even melodious.
(TS:28)

Whereas *A Mouthful of Birds* opens with the staging of the social subject determined by external constraints and prohibitions, from the moment *The Skriker* begins, there is a loss of self. In the opening scene, any positioning as subject, object or image is rejected:

SKRIKER.

If she can't guessing name and safety match my name then I'll take her no mistake... Is it William Gwylliam Guillaume? Is it John Jack the ladder in your stocking is it Joke? Is it Alexander Sandro Andres Drewsteignton? Mephistopheles Toffeenose Tiffany's Timpany Timothy Mossycoat? No't ain't say I, no tainted meat me after the show me what you've got. Then pointing her finger says Tom tit tot ! Tomtom tiny tot blue tit tit! Out of her pinkety lippety loppety, out of her mouthtrap, out came my secreted garden flower of my youth... Skriek ! shrink ! shuck off to a shack, sick, soad, seek a sleep, slope slap of the dark to shelter skelter away, a wail, a whirl a world away.
(TS:1)

In the context of the fairy tale, the name must not be pronounced for it can reveal the real properties of the named. Hegel, in a text that precedes the *Phenomenology of the Spirit* remarks that 'the first act by which Adam made himself master [of the animals] was to give them a name'.⁴⁴ Thus, objects are made meaningful, annihilated in their existence as 'existants', they are transported into the realm of ideas. Language, in this context, is revealed as a mechanism of suppression that makes consciousness possible. From this perspective, naming functions as an act of power,

⁴⁴ cit., Mikkel Borch-Jacobsen, *Lacan: The Absolute Master*, tr. Douglas Brick (Stanford, 1991), p.170

revealing a desire to regulate and organize reality according to well-defined categories. This recalls Kristeva's definition of the thetic stage in which the function of naming establishes meaning and signification. The originary violence of language is to name, to give names. Once the thetic stage has been reached, the subject is able to attribute differences and, therefore, signification to what was the heterogeneity of the chora. In its opening scene, the play dramatizes the intention to stabilize and rationalize the figure of the Skriker by the act of naming. However, the Skriker interrupts and evades the labelling activity. Negating any attempt to fix meaning and to achieve closure, it whirls 'a world away', thus confirming the predominance of the pre-discursive while playing havoc with the symbolic order.

In *The Skriker*, as in *A Mouthful of Birds*, the object of Churchill's analysis is the split subject, divided between unconscious and conscious motivations, between physiological processes and social constraints. The play confronts the audience with situations of human, psychic and social misery. The emergence of the underworld calls into question a conception of reality as being solely determined by 'all the stuff you would call history' since it existed 'long before that, long before England was an idea' (TS:16). In the course of *The Skriker*, the 'call of the unnameable'⁴⁵ gains the upper hand. Lacan defines the Real as the *unspeakable* that which never finds a signifier

⁴⁵ Julia Kristeva, *Desire in Language*, p.36

and is, thus, radically unsymbolizable.⁴⁶ It is not only the effect of representation but also its excess: that which remains outside discourse as potential trauma, and which always threatens to rupture or destabilize representation. That which escapes the dichotomies cannot be inscribed in language, since only the effects of the failure of its inscription can be marked.

In *The Skriker*, the realm of being that remains unsymbolizable and is banished from the symbolic order but nonetheless threatens to disrupt it, takes over the performance space. The play is determined by the appearance of grotesque figures: 'A SPRIGGAN, *grotesquely ugly and ten foot tall*' (TS:12); the 'KELPIE, *part young man and part horse*' (TS:5), 'NELLY LONGARMS'(TS:28), 'RAWHEADANDBLOODYBONES' (TS:28), and various other creatures, wearing masks with multiple eyes or enlarged snouts inhabit and represent the underworld, a space in which 'You don't count anymore' (TS:28). Emerging in stories told through mime and dance, the a-symbolized real is inscribed into the dramatic action: 'RAWHEADANDBLOODYBONES *sits on a shelf watching, invisible to them*' (TS:36), 'A FAMILY *having a picnic on a beach. The beach is covered by BLUE MEN*' and 'A BUSINESSMAN *with a thrumpin riding on his back. He doesn't know it's there*'(TS:48). In these scenes, the borders between reality and underworld are blurred, and

⁴⁶ Jacques Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis*, p.55

heterogeneous elements increasingly manifest themselves (unknown to the characters) in what once was perceived as the 'real' world.

The underworld of *The Skriker* is determined by the structural dyads of carnival which integrate extreme oppositions. This space does, however, not only evoke a sense of threat and uneasiness but it also constitutes an irresistible attraction:

JOSIE. Smash your face in. I did go. They need us to know, they think we're magic. They drink our blood. I miss the dancing.
(TS:37)

The grotesque scenery stages both culture and nature, beauty and destruction, life and death:

Light, music, long table with feast, lavishly dressed people and creatures. It looks wonderful except that it is all glamour and here and there it's not working – some of the foods is twigs, leaves, beetle, some of the clothes are rags, some of the beautiful people have a claw hand or hideous face. But the first impression is of a palace. SKRIKER is a fairy queen, dressed grandiously, with lapses.
(TS: 29)

The banquet is a central element in Bakhtin's writings on carnival. In Bakhtinian thought, the carnivalesque represents the connection with new sources of energy. Access to the underworld is associated with a sense of libidinal gratification which makes it such a strong metaphor of social/symbolic transformation. The grotesque, as Bakhtin explains, leads the subject out of the confines of the apparent (false) unity, of the indisputable and stable. Moreover, it eliminates the opposition of life and death. In grotesque imagery death is not a

negation of life, but part of life as a whole – its indispensable component, the condition of its constant renewal and rejuvenation.⁴⁷ Through this representation, the carnival participant experiences a peculiar gay freedom of fearlessness, thought and imagination. Carnavalesque experience thus liberates human consciousness for new potentialities.

Churchill's underworld, however, is no liberating feast but scenes of ecstatic frenzy which promise 'to make you brave and rave' disintegrate into a feeling of 'silence and gloom' (*TS:31*). Appearance is nothing, everything stable is unsettled, imperfection and destruction lurk behind facades of pretence and attraction. In *The Skriker*, the creative, inspiring laughter of the carnival is completely absent. The carnivalesque, multilevel play that opens up alternative discursive possibilities, does not renew social codes by restoring powers that have been suppressed, rather, it leaves the audience with an outlook that is confusing, and an overwhelming sense of insecurity and loss.

In the course of the dramatic action, the play presents the audience with a bleak fable of the end of representation. *The Skriker* denies its spectators any stable point of reference. In this context, the play also questions the notion of time. In various scenes it plays upon the antimony of time and duration. Josie finally agrees to enter

⁴⁷ M.M. Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, p.48

the underworld and thinks that she has 'lived longer than they do up there':

JOSIE. Years and years, longer than I lived here. I wasn't much more than a child here hardly. I've got children there, Lily, and they are grown up but I didn't mean to leave them. How can I live now?
(TS:35)

However, when she gets back to Lily, virtually no time has passed since Lily has 'never stopped seeing youIt's just today, like it's been all day'(TS:35). Later in the play, the audience expects Lily to experience the same fate and to 'be back in no time'(TS:51). Coming back she enters a future-world, having lost her baby forever. Instead, she meets her grandchildren and great-grandchildren:

SKRIKER. Lily was solid flash. If she was back on earth where on earth where was the rockabye baby gone the treetrop? Lost and gone everybody was dead years and tears ago, it was another cementary, a black whole hundred years. And this old dear me was Lily's granddaughter...
(TS:52)

Through these scenes, the play disturbs the spectator's sense of linear time as a predictable progress and as a structuring element of subjectivity and experience. The disturbance of time adds to the confusion of meaning and identity communicated by the dramatic action. Jacques Derrida argues that within Western thought, being can only be understood in its being as presence. Meaning derives from its relation to the present as the determinate mode of time. The

notion of time thus delineates logic in Western discourse.⁴⁸ Entering the underworld, the characters are transported out of the category of the representational, and hence, out of time. The dispersion of representation leads to the fragmentation of categories of knowledge and history. 'How can I live now?' (TS:35) Josie asks, 'That's horrible' (TS:28) she reveals her confusion and anxiety about an existence that can no longer be accounted for in the circle of representation.

In the course of the play, the insecurity of images upon which the perception of reality is based is further intensified. In various scenes, Churchill disrupts the predominance of the gaze:

A YOUNG GIRL is looking through a telescope.
Through the telescope THE GIRL sees a GREEN LADY DANCING
with a BOGLE.
The GREEN LADY and the BOGLE disappear when the girl looks
away from the telescope. The GIRL looks again but they don't
reappear. The GIRL goes.
(TS:12)

The Skriker continues to defamiliarize what is perceived as reality. When the Skriker asks for an explanation of how television works, 'Take your time. In your own words' (TS:13), Lily is at a complete loss:

LILY.... let's say this is something live we're seeing, there's a camera there pointing at the picture at the thing that is the picture, camera, you want me to explain – the light gets in and there's the film, the tape, the tape, it picks up the light somehow and it gets the picture *on* it, don't ask me, and there you are if it was a tape like you hire a tape down the video shop/ that's it, they...

⁴⁸ Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, p.12

SKRIKER. No, tell me.

LILY. Make a whole lot of copies.
(TS:13)

The dialogue between the Skriker and Lily depicts a mediated world in which images constantly invade the everyday. The invasion of the mass media is shown to debase irredeemably modern society. Lily's speech reflects despair and insecurity, being dominated by forces she cannot understand or control. However, the scene expresses a seemingly unbridgeable distance between image and spectator. Thus, the scene displaces the seemingly direct ('live') access to a signified reality.

The play foregrounds the mechanisms of the symbolic signifying systems through which reality is perceived. 'It's happening *there* and its *here*', the Skriker summarizes Lily's speech and concludes 'This is crap'(TS:13). Thus, the play emphasizes that there is no direct access to reality, truths or universal meanings, but merely representations. These merely simulate presence, but are without origins, referent or foundation. In accordance with Baudrillard's analysis of modern technological society, the play depicts a world determined by simulations.⁴⁹ A simulacrum presents absence as presence, undermining any contrast between image and reality. In *The Skriker* appearances do not mask or falsify realities, but the play dramatizes the loss of referents. This condition is

⁴⁹ Jean Baudrillard, 'Simulacra and Simulations', *Selected Writings*, ed. Mark Poster, tr. Paul Foss, Paul Patton and Philip Beitchman (Stanford, 1988), p.168

described by Baudrillard as the *hyperreal*, the end of representation. The hyperreal depicts a world of self-referential signs: 'simulation is no longer that of a territory, a referential being or a substance. It is the generation by models of a real without origin or reality'.⁵⁰ In the age of simulation, reality can be reproduced indefinitely as image. This potentially endless repetition ('Make a whole lot of copies') further intensifies the notion of life as being determined exclusively by fabricated images. For Baudrillard, reality is the ultimately unknowable sum of all appearances. However, it is constantly changing, it 'flickers'. The subject cannot stand back as a rational cogito and totalize reality on the basis of experience. It is left in a world which is without meaning and without history which is nothing more than a ceaseless procession of simulacra.

The dramatic action constantly shifts between reality and the real, unsettling the sign-systems which determine contemporary life. The play upon the audience's expectations is a central element of this process. Churchill's play is determined by the basic structure of the fairy-tale, with its magical wish-fulfillments, its utopian fantasies of plenty and the dichotomy of good and evil. The Skriker 'can give you heart's desire':

⁵⁰ *ibid.*, p.167

SKRIKER. Don't you want a wish, Lily?
What would you like, Lily?

JOSIE. Lily, / be careful

LILY. I wish for flowers.

Flowers fall from above.
(TS:22)

The Skriker claims that 'I am here to do good. I am a good fairy' (TS:17); throughout the dramatic action it grants wishes, one of which gets Josie out of mental hospital. Lily is helpful –even though very suspicious of the Skriker – and, therefore, rewarded by the fact that *'pounds come out of her mouth when she speaks'* (TS:11). On the other hand, Josie was always 'a nasty, girl... always were' (TS:19); she rejects the Skriker, *'picks up dirt from the ground and stuffs it into the SKRIKER's mouth'* (TS:25), while Lily tries to rescue the Skriker. It is not surprising that when Josie starts to speak, not money but toads come out of her mouth:

JOSIE. Is it you, come back – uh. What? uh uh I'm sick,
what, it's alive, it's – it's toads is it, where from,
me is it, what?
*She opens her mouth to cry out in rage after SKRIKER, and
shuts it, forcing herself to be silent to prevent more toads. She
goes.*
(TS:20)

The dramatic action simultaneously evokes and unsettles the narrative form of the fairy tale. 'I was impressed by the magic but now I think there is something wrong with her' (TS:8), Josie states; she reveals the Skriker as being 'a spastic fairy .. you need us more

than we need you' (TS:27). Wishes which come true prove to be destructive, rewards prove to be threatening. A critique of society, of 'a world hurled hurting hurtling hurt very badly' (TS:31) emerges. Capitalist greed: 'bloodmoney is the root of evil' (TS:12) and other destructive forces such as aids: 'All good many come to the aids party... blue blood bad blood blue blood bad blood blah blah blah', environmental pollution: 'toxic waste paper basketcase', war: 'wars whores hip hip hoorays it to the ground glass' (TS:32), child sexual abuse: 'My Dad did things to me. I never told you that' (TS:47) and the poisoning of food as the basis for human existence: 'poison in the food chain saw massacre salmonelephantiasis'(TS:31) depict an image of society as corrupt and damaged. It becomes clear that individuals are not only threatened by terrors of the unknown but even more by social structures and the political development. Moreover, the play exposes the inability of society to care for people who cannot cope on their own. In various scenes, the Skriker takes on the appearance of people in need. It is a child, looking for a mother, a foreigner looking for friends, or it impersonates an old, homeless woman who states that 'Nobody gives us a hug'(TS:11). Thus, the play communicates a feeling of senselessness and disorder that determines modern life in an age of instability and crisis.

Repugnance and fascination are the twin poles which determine the relationship between the Skriker, Josie and Lily:

JOSIE. But when you lost her you want her back. Because you see what she can do and you've lost your chance and it could be the only chance ever / in my life to –

LILY. Josie, don't.
(TS:28)

The interaction between the three characters is determined by needs which are never fulfilled. In Lacanian thought, desire is an indestructible force that is insatiable. Seeking compensation for the lost *jouissance* of the semiotic union, desire is never satisfied by moi/other relations, since it always refers to a primal repression. The dynamic process of wanting is emphasized in the play; however, apart from dealing with semiotic forces, Churchill redirects the focus towards the destructive structures of social life.

At the beginning, the Skriker merely asks for 'a cup of tea .. I haven't eaten all day' (TS:19); however, later in the play, its needs become more and more threatening. When Josie, who has been institutionalized in order 'to be punished'(TS:5) for killing her baby, is released from mental hospital, she moves in with Lily, who is pregnant. The Skriker pursues the two women, seeking a baby to rejuvenate itself and its fellow underworld denizens:

SKRIKER. Look at it floating in the dark with its pretty empty head upside down, not knowing what 's waiting for it. It's been so busy doubling, doubling and now it's just hovering nicely decorating itself with hair and toenails. But once's its born it starts again, double, double, but this time the mind, think of the energy in that. Maybe I could be the godmother.
(TS:15)

However, the Skriker's attempts at regeneration provide a mirror of the operation of society to rejuvenate itself. In the play, Churchill presents the audience with a society which is feeding on itself and on its people, with an appetite that grows sharper every day: 'Lovely lively lads and maiden England, succulent suck your living daylight...'(TS:31). The dramatic action shows society in its attempt to endlessly regenerate itself, leaving the individuals wasted, 'dry as dustpans, foul as shitpandemoninum'(TS:32). The individual is powerless; 'Let go. I'm telling you. Now let go' Lily tries to defend herself, but it becomes clear that the Skriker will 'Never never never/never' (TS:26) stop.

At the end of the play, the Skriker emerges 'full of energy', for Josie is 'trying to keep [it] sated, seated, besotted with gobbets ... to stop it from wolfing, stop it engulfing'(TS:49). It has got 'blood in all my veins'(TS:51); however, its energetic potential proves to be destructive and insatiable:

JOSIE. So that'll do for a bit, yeh. You'll feel ok. There's an earthquake on the telly last night. There is a motorway pileup in the fog.

SKRIKER. You are a good girl.

JOSIE. There's dead children.
(TS:48)

In *The Skriker*, the optimistic and confident perspective of *A Mouthful of Birds* is replaced by sinister intimations of apocalypse and destruction, leaving the audience with an acute sense of insecurity.

The increasing dominance of the underworld exposes contemporary society as moving towards self-destruction. This involves the complete disintegration of values and relationships in a hostile environment:

SKRIKER. Have you noticed the large number of meteorological phenomena lately? Earthquakes. Volcanos. Drought. Apocalyptic meteorological phenomena. The increase of sickness. Spring will return and nothing will grow. Some people might feel concerned about that. But it makes me feel important. I'm going to be around when the world as we know it ends. I'm going to witness unprecedented catastrophe. I like a pileup on the motorway. I like the kind of war we're having lately. I like snuff movies. But this is going to be the big one.
(TS: 44)

The Skriker's monologue affirms a society heading for collapse. The play has 'a horror-story book ending' (TS:52). Thus, it recalls Artaud's claim that theatre – above all else – has to teach us that 'we are not free and the sky can still fall on our heads'.⁵¹ For Artaud, theatrical fascination lies in its ability to shatter the illusory world of security; disorientating the spectators from the certainties of everyday existence, performance makes impossible the audience's desire to ignore unpleasant reality and to bury its collective head in the sand.

⁵¹ Antonin Artaud, *The Theatre and its Double*, p.60

Thus, *The Skriker* intends to shake its audience out of complacency and the delusion of stability.

In the closing monologue, the Skriker destroys the final simulacrum – the collective imagination that there is something outside the social system. The final speech leads to the rejection of the view that an independent world of seemingly natural/eternal values exists:

SKRIKER. It was always possible to think whatever your personal problem, there is always nature. Spring will return even if it's without me. Nobody loves me but at least it's a sunny day. This has been a comfort to people as long as they've existed. But it's not available any more. Sorry. Nobody loves me and the sun is going to kill me. Spring will return but nothing will grow.
(TS: 44)

In this speech, the loss of reference is complete. The 'I' is left in a world of empty signifiers. Moreover, the subject itself is revealed to be an illusion, a fictive entity. In Churchill's play, the fabric of social living does not protect its individual members but, rather, society is exposed in its fragmentation, corruption and de-humanizing structures. *The Skriker* does not ignore the horrors of contemporary society but portrays them as adding imagined horrors to existing ones. Thus, the play follows the basic Artaudian principle of disturbing the spectators, forcing them out of their complacent certainty that they are only sitting in a theatre, watching a play – 'No. This is the real world'(TS:51).

Exit:

Threatening Theory ?

The plays of Caryl Churchill, Sarah Daniels and Timberlake Wertenbaker offer a provocative and often devastating portrait of contemporary society, of the 'real world'. Their work emphasizes that even though the situation of women has undergone considerable change during the last decades, their position in the social/political context is still determined by forms of marginalization, discrimination and exclusion. The ways in which their dramatic writings engage in systems of representation reveal the repression at work designed to sustain as truths the illusions of dominant ideology which depends upon the objectification of woman as other in order to guarantee its coherence. Emerging through a set of permissions and interdictions, the subject is inscribed within a structure of power determined by mutually exclusionary positions. Plays by women persistently interrogate and challenge the ways in which truths are produced, and seek to show how this process limits female subjectivity, leaving it in a state of deep self-alienation. Theatrical representation emerges as ideology critique, as a protest against existing hierarchical structures. However, operating within the very

framework it rejects, plays by women are marked by a self-awareness of the difficulties involved in re-negotiating women's representation in social and theatrical discourse.

The dramatic works discussed in this thesis subject assumptions about subjectivity, knowledge, rationality and progress to disturbing interrogation. Interrogating the construction of gender, plays by women stage the gaps and silences which mark the exclusionary processes involved in the constitution as subjects within masculine discourse. These silences are deployed to take over the performance space, and to disturb the coherence of dominant discourses, thus opening up sites for transgressing the dualism of meaning. Dismantling normative constructions of gender identities, Churchill, Daniels and Wertebaker present the audience with alternative forms of representation that offer women the possibility to free their notions of self from patriarchal structures of meaning. However, the attempt to 'speak for yourself' (*BH* : 4), as Eve in *Beside Herself* demands, always encounters the difficulties involved in making oneself heard within a context of prohibitions that is designed to ensure the silence and invisibility of women. In the plays, it becomes obvious that to achieve a position of power within dominant discourse inevitably involves the adaptation of the standards, the measures, the values of a society that has been male-dominated, and this entails the risk of accepting the existing material and symbolic framework. Therefore, plays by women operate on two

levels: while they negotiate a politically recognizable subject position for women, their work questions the very framework within which this negotiation takes place.

However, evidence of conceptions of the female subject which are either located in a pre-discursive reality or which depend upon its own differentiated specificity can be found in many of the plays, even though the emphasis might vary from one dramatist to another. The staging of counterfactual histories which manifest women's achievements in the past, the reversal of power positions, the issue of female communities situated outside the patriarchal structures, or the insistence upon an ontological specificity of female sexuality and desires exemplify this strategy generally. This approach should not, however, merely be devalued as an essentialist position. Essentialism in this context should instead be considered as a political strategy of a temporary value in a larger struggle. The analysis confirms the need for thinking of identities as strategic, enabling women to make truth claims within dominant discourse, mobilizing collective action and mutual support. These tactics are employed to empower women, thus making possible socio-symbolic changes.

The plays put forward a need for female bonding as a means of challenging the hierarchical status quo. Women's support of each other emerges as a decisive element in the political struggle. Security and the opportunity for achieving change can only be found in a network of subjects which is supportive rather than exclusionary. In

this context, the condition of inclusiveness is a distinctive female experience, the experience of being the 'other'. However, at the same time the plays continue to question the singularity of a category of woman; class divisions, the issue of the generation gap, different educational and economic backgrounds as well as conflicting interests are shown to prevent women from uniting amongst themselves. In many of the plays, the female characters are shown at odds with one another, or, as Enid in *The Devil's Gateway* puts it, 'well I ain't joining in because I ain't protesting next to some posh woman so she can make sure her cut glass and Capo da Monte flowerpots are still intact' (DG 3:97).

The dramatic work dealt with in this study acknowledges the difficulties involved in achieving a subject position for women. The plays' endings confirm this stance; the playwrights do not leave their audiences with any ready answers but, rather, highlight the necessity for the spectator to engage in a critical reformulation of her own position in discourse. However, while the work of Churchill, Daniels and Wertebaker reveal different attempts to account for female identity by posing some form of substantial self/agent existing ontologically prior to particular acts of the subject, there are attempts in their plays to remove the self from an epistemologically central position. Performance emerges as a politically empowering repetition, addressing issues of identity, identification and political subjecthood. This strategy undermines the notion of gender as an

attribute imposed on the body, but reveals the materiality of the body as part of the construction of gender. Identities are constituted by a ceaseless repetition of actions by which the subject positions itself within a framework of power. The means by which the three playwrights explore performance as a tool of resistance, disclose different points of emphasis and theatrical techniques. Daniels' polemical and provocative plays, for instance, do not merely rely upon open confrontation and outright refusal, but the performative dimension is to be found in her use of parody and irony, in exaggeration and the play with language.

Even though these are powerful and effective strategies, it becomes clear that performance is a double-edged process, always risking the possibility of collusion in the legitimization of power structures. In order to question these power structures, and to redefine the rules of the game, it is crucial to undermine the notion of the subject as entity, as opposed to the concept of an other which functions to guarantee the masculine subject's illusory self-coherence. This approach maintains the concept of identity as a figuration that transcends, confuses, or destroys the boundaries between self and other, thus unsettling the very notion of gender that is the product of these demarcations. Replacing a humanist male-centred notion of the self that depends upon exclusionary processes, with a view of subjectivity as heterogenous, multiple and determined by constant process is an important feature of women's

dramatic writing. In Churchill's work this becomes evident in the exploration of non-conscious forces of subjectivity, in the emphasis on semiotic forces which unsettle the fixity of meaning and language. In Daniels' plays, the power of laughter unsettles the stability of the logos, making possible the polysemy of the signifier which can no longer be restricted to monological meaning. Wertebaker's dramatic work offers a figuration of subjectivity that resists any stable locus of meaning, but is determined by a process of constant transformation.

The subject-in-process is, therefore, not determined by a movement towards a fictive entity, but this figuration of subjectivity reveals a transparency, a willingness to communicate, and to constantly re-negotiate its position. The indeterminacy of this construction, and the delineation of a subject that is in a constant state of flux brings its own anxieties. However, taking into account the existence of a multiplicity of discourses, representations and meanings need not be equated with losing sight of political necessities. Rather, it has to be acknowledged that long-term changes in the socio-symbolic system only become possible if identities can no longer be contained in the domain of metaphysically opposed concepts of male and female. Operating in a realm that undermines the logic of identity could, however, lead to the emergence of values which do not merely benefit women, but society as a whole. In this study, it has only been possible to include a small sample of plays written by women. It makes no claim to

being exhaustive: there are many more women's stories which need to be told, many more women's stories which need to be explored in performance.

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