

Collaborating with Ghosts to Inhabit the Body
Adapting Women's Literary Modernism to the Stage

A thesis for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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Declaration of Authorship

I hereby declare that this thesis and the work presented in it is entirely my own. Where I have consulted the work of others, this is always clearly stated.

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ABSTRACT

The novels and short stories of the modernist women writers of the late 1920s and early 1930s were considered radical in their time, not just for the ways they experimented with language and narrative style, but also for their content. My thesis explores the challenges of adapting these novels to the stage, drawing upon my own adaptation of American modernist Margery Latimer's novel *This Is My Body* (1930). My primary methodology is traditional scholarly research that has provided a framework for writing the play; my analysis of the play is the final focus. I argue that given the manner in which many of these narratives perform – specifically, modernist women's autobiographical novels – adaptation is already built-in, such that adapting them to the stage becomes a process of highlighting and foregrounding what is already in place.

Chapter One considers the intersection of modernism and feminism, and traces the thread of feminism through the modernist movement, with a focus on the relationship between the women's rights activists and the modernist women writers.

Chapter Two looks at the intersection of feminism and adaptation, with a focus on authorship, issues of fidelity and feminist adaptation strategies.

Chapter Three examines the intersection between modernism and adaptation from both a historical and ideological standpoint, with a focus on the contentious relationship between modernism and theatre, and the generative impact of this tension.

Chapter Four looks at the intersection of modernism, feminism and adaptation; specifically, how modernist women's autobiographical narratives perform, which in turn lends them to the stage.

In order to examine my arguments in practice, I have included *Portage Fancy*, my own stage adaptation of Margery Latimer's novel *This Is My Body* (1930), which is followed by an analysis.

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The additional play drafts included in Appendix A and Appendix B are not required reading as part of the dissertation as a whole. They are included for reference, as they are discussed in Chapter Five. However, following the analysis should not be contingent on whether or not one has read these drafts.

INTRODUCTION

The novels and short stories of the modernist women writers of the late 1920s and early 1930s were considered radical in their time, not just for the ways they experimented with language and narrative style, but also for their content. Their handling of themes related to marriage, women's independence and sexual freedom shocked and challenged a society that was still grappling with 'The Woman Question' – a legacy of the middle-class Victorian debate about a woman's nature and place in society. This dissertation explores the challenges and strategies for adapting these novels to the stage, and does so within a framework that investigates the intersections between modernism, feminism and adaptation. I argue that given the manner in which many of these narratives perform – specifically, modernist women's autobiographical novels – adaptation is already built-in, such that adapting them to the stage becomes a process of highlighting and foregrounding what is already in place.

Examining the possibilities for these novels on the contemporary stage requires moving beyond simply opening them up to identify their structure, themes and meanings; as Linda Hutcheon points out in *A Theory of Adaptation*, it means opening them up for '(re)interpretation and then (re-)creation' (8). As Hutcheon defines it, an adaptation is both the process and the product; the process being one of creation, while the product involves the transposition to a new medium, which might also entail changes in context, point of view and focal point. Adaptation 'is about engagement with the text that makes us see the text in different ways'; or as she quotes Susan Bassnett, it is 'an act of both inter-cultural and inter-temporal communication' (16; Bassnett 10). In terms of modernist women's novels, their experimental aspects pose unique challenges –

generative challenges, I argue, conducive to a particularly exciting adaptation process, especially in terms of the stylistic, structural and dramaturgical experimentation they encourage.

My primary methodology is traditional scholarly research that has provided a framework for writing my own adaptation of American modernist Margery Latimer's novel *This Is My Body* (1930). My analysis of the play is the final focus. The process of adapting Latimer's novel has proven to be particularly challenging and informative for how it explores themes related to women's independence, marriage, and the devastating aftermath of an abortion in the late 1920s.

This dissertation addresses the following questions: What is it that lends these novels to the stage? How important is the role of fidelity and authorship in adapting these texts? What are the challenges and strategies for effecting a stage adaptation of these novels that foregrounds their feminism? What can the adaptation process tell us about both feminist adaptation, and women's literary modernism? And finally, how might these narratives as adapted for the stage function to inform how women 'perform' today?

Modernism, Feminism and Adaptation: Critical Underpinnings

Modernism

My focus is modernism as a literary movement, although references to the movement as a whole, which spanned the visual arts, architecture, film and music, are inevitable. Indeed, as Malcolm Bradbury and James McFarlane write, the term 'modernism' has been applied to 'a wide variety of movements subversive of the realist or the romantic impulse and disposed towards abstraction (Impressionism, Post-Impressionism, Expressionism, Cubism, Futurism, Symbolism, Imagism, Vorticism, Dadaism, Surrealism)'; rather than being movements of a kind, 'some are

radical reactions against others' (23). Peter Childs also points out that 'Modernism is regularly viewed as either a time-bound or a genre-bound art form'; as time-bound, Childs places it primarily in the period between 1890-1930, 'with the wider acknowledgement that it develops from the mid-nineteenth century and begins to lose its influence in the mid-twentieth century' (19). Given my interest in women's literary production, this thesis focuses largely on the period between 1900 and 1935.

Rather than establishing a strict formal definition of modernism – in part because this generates exclusions that have tended to underplay the significance of women's autobiographical writing in the period – this thesis approaches modernism as a period of cultural production around the turn of the century, with an awareness that its edges are blurred and it is comprised of multiple, competing voices; moreover, some works produced in the period may employ modernist motifs, partially or intermittently, and from the liminal position may even offer a place of critique of modernism while still repeating some of its gestures.

Given realism's unique relationship to modernism, and especially the modernist women's autobiographical narratives that are the focus of this thesis, it bears a closer look. However, it should also be noted that this complicates the periodization of modernism because realism in the novel – from Balzac, to Flaubert, Zola and Hardy – predates Childs's description of modernism as starting around 1890.

'Classic realism', which Catherine Belsey cites as the dominant popular mode in literature, film and television drama is, as she defines it, 'characterized by illusionism, narrative which leads to closure, and a hierarchy of voices which establishes the "truth" of the story' (64). In terms of literary realism, 'plots and characters are constructed in accordance with secular empirical rules'; aspects that 'are explicable in terms of natural causation without resort to the supernatural or divine intervention' – as opposed to idealism, which 'is grounded upon a view of Truth as universal

and timeless' (Morris 3). In other words, realism seeks for truth in external details, an aspect that Virginia Woolf takes apart in 'Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown' when she condemns writers such as Arnold Bennett for being so mired in their aim for documentary specificity that their characters lack even a hint of personality (Morris 16).

Perhaps for this obsession with finding the truth in outer specifics and hard details, realism has endured a reputation for being 'formulaic', 'predictable and simple'; a form that functions merely as 'the foil (or the cling-film) for showing up the more exotic or more complex discourses that are always to be preferred to it' (Bowlby xiv). Chief among these are modernism and postmodernism, which succeeded it. Pam Morris argues that 'modernism, postmodernism and poststructuralism, have tended to define themselves against their own versions of realism'; this in turn has 'produced a many-faceted critique of realist forms of writing that has become the dominant critical orthodoxy' (13).

Yet rather than being opposed to one another, many critics have argued for the manner in which modernism and realism 'are in dialogue' with each other; Esther Leslie writes that the modernist experimentalists in fact 'radically [reconceived] the realist project rather than aborting it altogether' (143). She points out that 'arguments [have been] made for realist modernism, modernist realism, or modernism as realism' (144). Indeed, despite realism's insistence 'that art cannot turn away from the more sordid and harsh aspects of human existence', it has also 'given expression to some of the most powerful representations of spiritual conviction and commitment' (Morris 3). By the same token, citing the fragmentary quality of modern experience, one in which an individual's alienation from the world sees it processed 'in bits and pieces', Esther Leslie writes that modernist art, 'in re-mediating that fragmentariness, produces a historically authentic mirror of experience. To that extent, it is an art of the real' (Leslie 144).

Virginia Woolf in 'Modern Fiction' writes of the necessity of exploring these interior experiences in order to come closer to capturing any true sense of an individual's real experiences; for her it is a move inwards, to examine one's mind, which 'receives a myriad impressions - trivial, fantastic, evanescent, or engraved with the sharpness of steel' (160). As she writes,

Life is not a series of gig lamps symmetrically arranged; life is a luminous halo, a semi-transparent envelope surrounding us from the beginning of consciousness to the end. Is it not the task of the novelist to convey this varying, this unknown and uncircumscribed spirit, whatever aberration or complexity it may display, with as little mixture of the alien and external as possible? (160-161)

Not only is intellectual understanding less important to her than 'the sharp recall of physical sensation inseparably bound to an emotion still felt freshly on the pulses', but as Pam Morris also points out, for Woolf, words are more than simply a means of communication – she emphasizes their creative capacity: 'the rhythm and sound of words are utilized to directly suggest something of the actual texture and flow inner feeling' (15). This aspect is in turn linked to what Gillian Beer describes as a central problem for women in writing: expressing the body and emotions (xii-xv); an aspect central to my argument in terms of how modernist women's narratives perform – that the language and rhythm of their narratives allow for both a unique connection with the reader, and also functions to distinguish their work from the male modernists.

Indeed, the relationship between women's literary modernism and realism is unique – on the one hand, as Morris writes, 'realism, as a form uninfluenced by classical conventions, has been developed by women writers and women readers from its beginnings'; on the other, it has come

under sustained attack from feminists, an aspect that will be touched on later in this section, as well as in great detail in Chapter One.

Margery Latimer was one of a number of writers whose work has unmistakable autobiographical elements while still engaging in formal experiments characteristic of modernism. Blurring the line between autobiography and fiction, her second novel, *This Is My Body* (1930), which I have chosen to adapt, ‘ties the protagonist repeatedly to public images of her own body’ as it presents a ‘liberating and apocalyptic’ view of a female artist coming of age; in doing so, the narrative also functions to challenge the ‘masculinist assumptions within leftist, high modernist, and futurist circles about reproductive choice and women’s creativity’ (Castro, ‘Margery’ 180). In addition to a plot that closely mirrors events in her own life, as well as a protagonist who shares her physical attributes, the narrative segues into interior monologues that unfold as stream of consciousness and moments of mystical transcendence.

To understand how these aspects may be put together, various people have written on modernism and biography. Sabine Vanacker writes that the experimentalism of women modernists such as Dorothy Richardson, Gertrude Stein and H.D. stems from an autobiographical pursuit, such that they might be viewed as ‘communicative autobiographies’ (5). Max Saunders argues that far from being in opposition to autobiography, modernism served to ‘make it new’ – and further, that ‘to synthesize modernism and life-writing is to redefine modernism’ (13). Lynette Felber introduces the concept of the ‘liaison novel’, a form of the roman à clef – perhaps the most autobiographical of autobiographical novels – which she argues was taken up by many women modernists as a means of ‘[critiquing] the consequences of patriarchy for the woman artist’ (4). This is particularly relevant to Margery Latimer’s *This Is My Body*, which focuses on a heterosexual romantic relationship between two young writers.

I draw on the notion of ‘autobiografiction’, a hybrid genre first identified by the critic Stephen Reynolds in 1906 as a form that sees the convergence of fiction, autobiography and the essay; for Reynolds, the form ultimately serves as a vehicle to express a spiritual or religious experience in a manner that is still ‘coherent and readable’:

[The author] invents a certain amount of autobiographical detail, or (which comes to much the same) he selects from his life the requisite amount of autobiographical material, adding perhaps a quantity of pure fiction, and on that he builds the spiritual experience, with that he dilutes it, and makes it coherent and readable. The result is autobiografiction, a literary form more direct and intimate probably than any to be found outside poetry. (28)

What this has in common with modernism is the emphasis on one’s interior experience as a means of effecting a more complete, or realistic depiction of life; whether modernist women’s autobiographical narratives conform to Reynolds’s precise definition is debatable. However, Max Saunders’s conception of the term is broader, and his study specifically argues for modernist life writing and autobiography as autobiografiction. Saunders argues autobiografiction’s merging of genres is primarily a literary or formal relationship: ‘that between fiction and a self’s autobiography, rather than between fiction and a self’ (7). And as Peter Nicholls points out, it is through the medium of impressionism that this merging takes place (529).

In this regard, modernist women’s autobiographical narratives in the vein of Latimer’s *This Is My Body* might be viewed as autobiografiction; their experimental narratives that explore a woman’s experience of forging an identity in a patriarchal society are ‘a self’s autobiography’ – in other words, the interior journey of a fictional character that nonetheless shares aspects of the

author's own experiences. This phenomenon as it relates to what lends modernist women's autobiographical narratives to adaptation is explored in depth in Chapter Four.

Feminism

As Rochelle Anne Hurst points out, today 'feminism's branches are multitudinous . . . feminism is rarely invoked sans prefix—post-, neo-, or eco', in addition, it 'can be radical or liberal, black, lesbian, separatist, Marxist, psychoanalytic, first, second or third wave, American, British or French' (4). Clearly feminism is a movement with multiple strands and voices; to accommodate all these feminisms, Catharine Mackinnon offers a broad approach:

Feminism locates the relation of women's consciousness to her life situation in the relation of two moments: being shaped in the image of one's oppression, yet struggling against it. In so doing, women struggle against the world in themselves as well as towards the future. (102)

My arguments rest on an approach that is in line with Mackinnon's; I approach feminism – as put succinctly by Lisa Jeanne Weckerle – as 'both an ideological perspective which validates women's experience and critiques their oppression, and also the practice of working towards the end of women's oppression' (31). From an ideological perspective, I draw on the feminist literary theory and criticism that emerged in the early 1970s to explore the thematic elements in the work of the modernist women writers; in terms of practice, I focus on the three main strands of feminism – liberal, radical and materialist – as applied to feminist theatre and adaptation.

At the heart of my critical approach to women's literary modernism is the split between gynocriticism and gynesis as played out in the clash between Elaine Showalter and Toril Moi. In *Sexual/Textual Politics*, Moi argues that Showalter's gynocritical approach as effected in *A Literature of Their Own* – an approach that considers women's literature from a historical perspective and is rooted in female experience rather than male models and theories – is inadequate as a means of interpreting Virginia Woolf's complex narrative strategies in *A Room of One's Own*; Moi suggests it is these very narrative strategies that hold the key to appreciating Woolf's feminism (1-9). Her critical process weighs heavily on French feminist theory, concerned as it is with the text itself and finding the 'woman' or 'feminine' in the text – what Alice Jardine calls 'gynesis' and Helene Cixous terms *écriture féminine*. In a broader sense, the clash between Moi and Showalter might also be seen as a debate between modernism and realism. Chapter One explores this debate in depth for how it exposes the split between the French/poststructuralist feminist critics and the Anglo-American gynocritics, and for what it reveals about the relationship between women's literary modernism and the male avant-garde.

The question of authorship is also central to my argument in terms of how to approach adapting women's literary modernism. For some feminists, Barthes's 'The Death of the Author' has meant an end to 'patriarchal tyranny'; doing away with the author means doing away with 'the Author, canonized, anthologized, and institutionalized, who excludes the less-known works of women and minorities from the canon, and who by his authority justifies the exclusion' (Miller, 'Changing' 104). Yet others maintain that 'it matters who writes and *signs* as a woman', and that 'not to do so will reauthorize [women's] oblivion' (Miller, 'Text's Heroine' 49).

I think a more nuanced path needs to be found, as reflected in the approaches of Nancy Miller, Susan Stanford Friedman and Cheryl Walker – one that keeps the author function, while still accommodating Barthes's concept of text as a weaving of multiple texts (Miller, 'Changing'

158, 172; Friedman, 'Post/Post' 482). The impact of death of the author criticism on feminist literary criticism, as well as the various feminist critical approaches to authorship, are discussed in great detail in Chapter Two, as a foundation to formulating a feminist approach to adaptation.

Adaptation

The study of adaptation has predominantly been located within the realm of film studies, a phenomenon that continues today. Indeed, as Simone Murray points out, since its inception in the 1950s that saw the publication of George Bluestone's founding critical text *Novels into Film* (1957), adaptation studies has long been considered 'the bastard offspring of literary studies and film theory' ('Materializing' 4). Along these lines, Deborah Cartmell writes that while adaptation – which has relied most heavily on literary works as source material – has served as 'the staple of the business of film' since the advent of cinema, so too have such adaptations been 'normally despised by serious film enthusiasts and literary critics alike'; the former desiring film 'to stand on its own feet without a reliance on literature', and the latter 'regarding film as cheapening, contaminating, and potentially threatening the literary text' (2). Colin McCabe writes of the 'valorization of literature against popular culture in general and film in particular'; he goes on to remark that literary criticism 'was largely designed by Eliot and Richards in the late 1920s to render the elephant [in the room: film] invisible' ('Introduction' 7; 'Forward' x).

In identifying the major schools of adaptation studies that have evolved since the 1950s, Murray highlights that nearly all have attacked the model of fidelity criticism as inadequate; a rejection characterized by accusations of its 'moralistic and sexually loaded vocabulary' that link the impulse to adapt to 'unfaithfulness', 'betrayal', 'straying' and 'debasement' ('Materializing' 4). Indeed, the initial wave of adaptation studies saw an outright rejection of the concept following on

Bluestone's approach to the novel as merely 'raw material', from which the filmmaker 'ultimately creates his own unique structure' (vii; Murray 'Materializing' 5).

The subsequent wave that emerged in the 1970s endeavored to circumvent the issue of fidelity through a deconstructive approach that drew on principles of narratology; as Murray writes, 'Barthes, Gérard Genette, and Christian Metz were heavily cited in this stream of adaptation work that lingered ... well into the 1990s' ('Materializing' 6). Thomas Leitch cites the pioneering work of Brian McFarlane, Imelda Whelehan, James Naramore, Sarah Cardwell and Cartmell, which culminated in Robert Stam's three volumes on adaptation in 2004 that sought to 'reorient adaptation studies from the fidelity discourse universally attacked by theorists as far back as Bluestone to a focus on Bakhtinian intertextuality' ('Adaptation Studies' 63).

Murray has called for a third wave, one that might 'open adaptation studies up to the concepts of audience agency' ('Materializing' 6). In other words, hers is an invitation to 'rethink adaptation, not as an exercise in comparative textual analysis of individual print works and their screen versions, but as a material phenomenon produced by a system of interlinked interests and actors' ('Materializing' 16).

Beyond highlighting the central role fidelity continues to play, in spite of efforts to do away with it – a phenomenon that is explored in depth in Chapter Two – the surge in adaptation studies since the 1950s has largely neglected adaptation for the stage. However, the last decade has seen an increase in scholarly articles on the subject as evidenced by the emergence of two new journals, *The Journal of Adaptation in Film and Performance* and *Adaptation*. And certainly adaptation theory drawn from film studies has proven useful to critical approaches to stage adaptation, given what film and theatre share, particularly in relation to the novel. As Thomas Leitch points out, literary texts are verbal, whereas film – and theatre – are visual; moreover, film and theatre depend on performances in a manner that literary texts do not; further, because film and theatre depend on

scripts, they are doubly performative; and while novels deal in concepts, film and theatre deal in precepts – they ‘invoke not only visual codes but auditory codes, narrative codes, fictional codes, and a rhetoric of figuration’ (‘Twelve Fallacies’ 153-156). As such, many of the core questions addressed by adaptation studies geared towards a consideration of literature to film also apply to adapting for the stage.

For example, the debate over whether adaptations ought to be faithful to their source texts has seen adaptation divided into three categories, which apply to adaptation across mediums: ‘close, loose or intermediate’ (Desmond and Hawkes 3) or ‘literal, traditional, or radical (Cahir 15). Deborah Cartmell similarly splits adaptation into three categories: transposition, commentary and analogue (Cartmell and Whelehan, *Adaptations* 24). Dividing adaptation into such categories has served to delineate the relationship between an adaptation and source text – further entrenching a comparative approach – but also draws attention to what Julie Sanders views as a constant in all adaptations: an ‘inherent sense of play, produced in part by our informed sense of similarity and difference between the texts being invoked, and the connected interplay of expectation and surprise’ (25).

While such categorizations and considerations related to fidelity serve approaches to stage adaptation as well as they do film, stage and film are nonetheless different mediums, which pose different challenges to an adapter; not only that, but where they differ reflects the new avenues research on novel to stage adaptation opens up – particularly surrounding the concepts of liveness, theatricality and presence, as well as the capacity for the performing body to offer a dialectical image of history, social reality and consciousness on stage.

Some of the fundamental differences that impact the adaptation process include the relationship between the performer and the audience; not only does an audience affect and complete a stage performance, but also the presence of a live performer sets up an exchange

between the two, one that is both exciting and unique to theatre. In addition, as Aleksandar Dundjerovich points out, 'there are temporal limitations of film - its dependency on a specific time frame, the ability to reflect life at a specific moment - whereas theatre performance has the ability to evolve with time' (19).

Recent studies of novel to stage adaptation include Margherita Laera's *Theatre and Adaptation* (2014), which looks at a range of contemporary adaptations from the experimental to popular West End productions; there are also the broader studies that consider adaptation across mediums including theatre, such as Julie Sanders's *Adaptation and Appropriation* (2015), an updated second edition of Linda Hutcheon's *A Theory of Adaptation* (2012) and Jorgen Bruhn's *Adaptation Studies* (2013). Work dedicated to adapting modernist novels – or women's literary modernism in its own right – is limited, but includes Jose Lanter's *Missed Understandings: Study of Stage Adaptations of the Works of James Joyce* (Rodopi 1998); the majority of this work exists in journal articles, including studies of recent stage adaptations of fiction by Virginia Woolf and Jean Rhys¹. *The Cambridge Companion to Modernist Women Writers* has a chapter dedicated to 'Women's Modernism and Performance', although adaptations of modernist women's novels are not discussed; and certainly much has been written about modernist theatre, and modernist and avant-garde performance². An in-depth consideration of modernism and adaptation, and adapting modernist novels, is the focus of Chapter Three.

¹ This includes articles on Katie Mitchell's *Waves* staged at the National theatre in 2006, as well as Polly Teale's *After Mrs. Rochester* (2003), which was largely drawn from Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea*: Janis Jefferies's "... Some Trace of Her": Katie Mitchell's *Waves* in Multimedia Performance.' *Women: A Cultural Review*, vol. 22, no. 4, 2011, pp. 400-10; Paul David Young's 'Technosurfing in Bloomsbury(Katie Mitchell's *Waves*).' *PAJ: A Journal of Performance and Art*, vo. 31, no. 2, 2009, pp.56-64; and Ana Gabriela Macedo's 'After Mrs. Rochester: Rewriting as re-vision.' *Journal of Adaptation in Film & Performance*, vol. 3, no. 3, 2011, pp. 271-289.

² This work includes *Theatre, Performance and the Historical Avant-Garde*, Günter Berghaus (Basingstoke 2005), *Theatre of the Avant-Garde, 1890-1950*, Bert Cardullo and Robert Knopf (eds) (Yale UP 2001), *Not the Other Avant-Garde: Transnational Foundations of Avant-garde Performances*, James Harding and John Rouse (Michigan UP 2006), *Avant Garde Theatre 1892-1992*, Christopher Innes (Routledge 1993), *Modernism and Performance: From Jarry to Brecht*, Olga Taxidou (Basingstoke 2007), and *Modernist and Avant-Garde Performance*, Claire Warden (Edinburgh UP 2015).

Chapter Summary

My thesis rests on the manner in which modernist women's narratives perform, which in turn lends them to the stage. As such, Chapter One begins with an investigation of what shaped these narratives; I argue that a preoccupation with gender brought on by sociological shifts at the time – and particularly the fight for women's rights – informs the women modernists' adoption of the experimental form. The experimental form allowed the women modernists to be taken seriously and express their ideas; it also holds the key to their feminism. Rather than being an evasion of their 'femaleness', or a retreat from social reality, or a repression of feminist critical engagement, this narrative style allows for a more nuanced and layered rendering of these aspects – and also one that fosters a strong female presence and voice. The most effective way to understand this aspect of their work – which is what sets it apart from the male avant-garde – is a critical approach that acknowledges how it both writes the feminine *and* is signed by a woman; in other words, a hybrid approach, one that draws from gynesis and gynocriticism.

In Chapter Two, I argue the impact of death of the author criticism on feminist criticism further instructs this hybrid approach; in other words, it highlights the importance of keeping the author function for women's writing. The ideological split that has consumed feminist criticism surrounding the authorship debate has parallels with the backlash against fidelity criticism; as with authorship, theorists have advocated hybrid approaches to fidelity as the most effective means of theorizing adaptation. Drawing from the discussion of issues of authorship and fidelity, this chapter explores a feminist approach to adaptation that sees it as a conversation and collaboration, and sets out to identify the strategies for effecting a feminist stage adaptation.

In Chapter Three, I argue that another key challenge to adapting modernist women's narratives involves not only the difficulties inherent in translating to the stage their experimental

and interior aspects, but also contending with the ideological conflict between modernism and theatricality, which has historically seen theatricality as the enemy of art, and particularly modern art. However, not only has the modernist period produced many of the most influential dramatists in history, but I argue it is precisely because of the tension between modernism and theatre that their work is so layered, complex and profound – and has lasted. For this same reason, adapting modernist literature for the stage has unique potential to throw into stark relief issues of fidelity, theatricality, presence and the representation of reality – aspects that inform my analysis of my own adaptation in Chapter Five.

In Chapter Four, I argue the distinct performativity in modernist women's autobiographical narratives is one that manifests a strong 'woman's presence', which fosters a point of interaction, reflection and identification between author/narrator and reader/audience. Moreover, it is a performativity rooted in a desire to assert their subjectivity through the performance of their presence as a woman speaker in response to being silenced in a patriarchal society. I argue that what is performed in the text is a search for a distinctly female identity; a search that as translated to the stage might offer in the performing body a dialectical image of history that also speaks to how women 'perform' in the present. As such, on the most basic level, adapting these texts for the stage becomes a process of foregrounding and activating what is already in place.

In Chapter Five, I consider my own stage adaptation of Margery Latimer's *This Is My Body* in the context of contemporary feminist theatre, and as developed through an approach that responds to the ideological conflict between modernism and theatre – one that employs a metatheatrical structure and foregrounds the constructedness of the play. The strategies considered include how the relationship between history and fiction is addressed, which in turn sets up a dialogue between the past and the present; the splitting of the subject, which in turn allows for the performance of the search for and construction of identity; and finally, approaching the play as a performance of

women's history, which highlights the elision of that history and in turn justifies the revisionist nature of the work itself.

CHAPTER ONE

The Intersection of Feminism and Modernism:

Feminism's Formative Influence on Modernism

My approach to adapting Margery Latimer's *This Is My Body* hinges on how modernist women's autobiographical narratives perform. In order to open up these narratives for adaptation, it is necessary to identify what drives them, and the context in which they emerged – as well as conceiving of a critical approach that best accommodates an understanding of their work. This chapter addresses these aspects.

The first wave of the feminist movement and the rise of literary modernism that came to prominence at roughly the same time at the turn of the century were united in a common dilemma; how to contend with the dramatic changes in gender roles brought on by sociological shifts that were well underway in the previous decades, and exacerbated by later developments of the period including a fierce transatlantic suffrage movement and the repercussions of the First World War. Marianne DeKoven argues that this shift in gender roles was 'a key factor in the emergence of Modernism', and that the social and cultural changes championed by the feminist movement prompted an 'unprecedented preoccupation with gender, both thematically and formally' in modernist writing ('Modernism' 212). Along these lines, Janet Lyon points out that 'feminist scholars of literary modernism...have demonstrated the central role of gender semiotics in the emergence of modernism' (6). Specific to the suffrage movement, Mary Chapman and Barbara Green highlight the impact a consideration of its 'dramatic and complex cultural contributions' has had on literary and cultural criticism in terms of '[challenging] our understanding of the formation

of high modernism and [contributing] greatly to current efforts to rethink the “great divide” between modernism and mass culture’ (25). Indeed, Lyon suggests that ‘the whole spectacle of women asking for political rights as individuals, rather than as mothers or as wives or daughters’ – a phenomenon that was ‘perhaps most prominently embodied by the British suffragettes’ – was ‘an abiding though unacknowledged impetus of the pre-war British avant-garde’ (7).

This chapter further explores the above arguments in order to show how they not only inform one another, but also how viewed together they reveal an ever more comprehensive and provocative picture of the interconnectedness of the modernist and feminist movements – one that reflects their congruities and mutual dependence at multiple levels. Towards this end, this chapter begins by tracing the thread of Anglo-American feminism through the modernist period, focusing on the specific relationship between the modernist women writers and the feminist movement. Beyond exploring their mutual dependence, the aim is to examine the formative impact of the feminist movement upon literary and artistic modernism, with a focus on how the modernist women writers’ ambivalence to the feminist movement fostered a preoccupation with gender that they sought to come to terms with in their work. Moving on from this discussion, this chapter approaches the intersection of modernism and feminism from a theoretical standpoint, looking at the debate between Elaine Showalter and Toril Moi over Virginia Woolf’s feminism in *A Room of One’s Own* – a debate that pits realism against modernism, and in turn, the feminist critical concepts of gynesis versus gynocriticism, in a manner that further informs the split between the modernist women writers and the first wave feminists.

Part One considers some of the changing sociological perspectives that shifted concepts of gender and fuelled both the first wave of feminism and the modernist movements in the United States and Britain, including academic and literary challenges to the accepted view of the patriarchal family and the emergence of the ‘New Woman’ as a response to the Victorian ‘Woman Question’.

Part Two examines the first wave of the feminist movement towards identifying its links with and formative influence on the modernists.

Part Three focuses on women's writing of this period, and the specific relationship between the modernist women writers, and the feminists and suffragettes, charting the shift that occurred in the post-war period between these two factions, which saw an increased ambivalence on the part of the modernist women writers towards the feminist cause; a split characterized by the binary relationship between what was perceived as 'High Art' or modernism, and the more realistic forms.

Part Four considers this binary in depth from a theoretical standpoint, as manifest in the clash between Toril Moi and Elaine Showalter over Virginia Woolf's feminism in *A Room of One's Own*. Not only is Woolf's feminism inextricably linked to her preoccupation with gender, but Showalter and Moi's debate on the subject also exposes the conflicting views that have split critics regarding the effectiveness of the realistic versus modernist literary forms in the service of feminism.

I. Sociological Influences: Challenges to the Patriarchy and the Ascendance of the 'New Woman'

Important sociological shifts were well underway in the decades preceding the first wave of feminism; as Anne Taylor Allen points out in 'Feminism, Social Science, and the Meanings of Modernity', the period from 1860 to 1914 has been characterized as one 'of pessimism, alienation, and anxiety' (1085). The West, having been steeped in the reason of the Age of Enlightenment was now uneasy as new technology, philosophies, literature and research—both social and scientific—cast everything into doubt; from Freud's revolutionary introduction of psychoanalysis, to scientific discoveries that challenged existing theories about the nature of the universe, to research that

disputed long-held beliefs as to the patriarchal origins of society – science ‘no longer seemed scientific, if by “scientific” one meant observable, empirical, objective certainty’ (Linett, ‘Introduction’ 7).

If male scholars tended to react to this shattering of accepted paradigms ‘with despair, anxiety, alienation, or a flight into the irrational’, feminist scholars greeted them ‘with a new sense of optimism and intellectual empowerment’ (Allen 1087). One influential study during this period, in terms of its challenge to long-held beliefs regarding the patriarchal origins of society, came from Swiss legal scholar Johann Jakob Bachofen, whose *Myth, Religion, and Mother-Right* published in 1861 claimed the origins of social organization lay in a woman-centered system he called *Mutterrecht* (Allen 1091). As Gerda Lerner writes, ‘[a] wide array of twentieth-century feminists accepted his ethnographic data and his analysis of literary sources and used them to construct a wide range of differing theories’ (26). Indeed, his findings prompted what were perhaps the ‘first explicitly feminist scholarly interpretations’ of the origins of society: American Elizabeth Cady Stanton’s address to the National Council of Women in 1891, ‘The Matriarchate or Mother-Age’, and her countrywoman Matilda Joslyn Gage’s *Woman, Church and State: A Historical Account of the Status of Women through the Christian Ages; With Reminiscences of the Matriarchate*, published in 1893 (Allen 1095). Lerner points out that ‘Bachofen’s original contribution was to claim that women in primitive society developed culture and that there was a stage of “matriarchy”, which led society out of barbarism’ (26). However, as Allen writes, he also attributed the downfall of the matriarchy to the Amazon’s susceptibility to ‘wild ecstasies of drunkenness and lust’ (1091). Stanton and Gage, on the other hand, traced the defeat of patriarchal society to the Middle Ages and the witch burnings at the hands of the Christians—moreover, they saw its demise as a turning point not towards order but into lawlessness and decline (Allen 1096).

Nonetheless, the damage done by Bachofen's widely-accepted beliefs that backed the superiority of a patriarchal society and the inherent weakness of women—physical, moral and intellectual—as compared with men, proved a formidable obstacle for these early feminists; as Stanton notes in her 1891 essay *The Matriarchate, or Mother-Age*:

[the] assertion that women have always been physically inferior to men, and consequently have always been held in a subject condition, has been universally believed. The worst feature of these assumptions is that women themselves believe them. (265)

Although Gage and Stanton were unsuccessful in their early efforts to sway society with their reinterpretation of Bachofen's findings, feminists in both the United States and England continued to cite his work in their campaigns during the early twentieth century, including Charlotte Perkins Gilman, whose 'The Man Made World; or, Our Androcentric Culture' published in 1911, blamed an androcentric culture for halting world development due to its glorification of what Allen describes as 'the trivial male fertilizing function' (1102). Frances Swiney, founder of the Cheltenham Suffrage Society, also held up the matriarchal past to support her efforts to fight venereal disease, prostitution and child mortality (Allen 1102).

Killing the Angel in the House and Emergence of the 'New Woman'

The surge of research in the social sciences played a significant role in fuelling the arguments of the ever-more vocal and growing ranks of feminist intellectuals, suffragettes and others dedicated to women's rights and social reform—a phenomenon that meshed seamlessly with the emerging ideal of the 'New Woman', who was conceived largely to stamp out the previous

Victorian ideal, the ‘Angel in the House’ as glorified by Coventry Patmore in his 1854 paean to his wife: ‘Her disposition is devout,/Her countenance angelical;/The best things that the best believe/Are in her face so kindly writ/ The faithless, seeing her, conceive/ Not only heaven, but hope of it; (11-16; Hellerstein 135). Or, as Virginia Woolf describes her in ‘Professions for Women’: ‘She was intensely sympathetic. She was immensely charming. She was utterly unselfish. She excelled in the difficult arts of family life. She sacrificed herself daily’ (59).

In the same essay, Woolf takes it upon herself to murder the Angel in the House, declaring ‘Killing the Angel in the House was part of the occupation of a woman writer’ (*Women* 60). With the Angel dead, the New Woman became the ideal; unlike the Angel, she possessed ‘a mind and wishes of her own’; she believed in her right to ‘an education equal to that available to men’, and ‘an occupation in which she could put her education to use’; and she was ‘free to marry for love rather than economic security—if, that is, she chose to marry or have children at all’ (Smith, Patricia 79).

By the early 1890’s, the view of women as inferior to men had eroded significantly; challenges to the patriarchal origins of society and Victorian myths regarding a woman’s role and nature were manifest not just in scholarly publications and feminist manifestos, but had also emerged in places like Victorian literature and particularly novels by women. Similarly, trends like the realist theatre movement that included Ibsen and Chekhov had begun to stir society and awaken women to the possibility that they might seek equality—or at least social reforms—that would benefit society and their plight (DiCenzo 45).

It was against this backdrop that the feminist movement on both sides of the Atlantic gathered a fierce momentum – one that resonated powerfully throughout society at-large, and particularly impacted the writers and artists of the burgeoning modernist movement. The section that follows charts the sensational rise of the Anglo-American women’s rights movement in the

period from the 1890s to the First World War in order to explore its congruencies with, and formative influences upon, artistic and literary modernism.

The First Wave of Feminism; Spectacle, Gender Disruption & the Avant-garde

By the 1890s the feminist movement in the United States and England had taken hold; instead of being composed of a few voices—Gage, Stanton and Gilman in the United States; Millicent Garrett Fawcett and the Pankhursts (Emmeline and her daughters Christabel and Sylvia) in Great Britain—feminists started to form dedicated organizations to campaign for their rights, which in turn saw their ranks grow now there was an established center with which to align themselves. In America, where the suffrage movement grew out of the fight to abolish slavery, which came with the Thirteenth Amendment passed in 1865 at the end of the American Civil War, women's rights activists saw their efforts gain new momentum with the formation of the National Association of Colored Woman in 1896 at the same time that the United States Supreme Court upheld the Plessy versus Ferguson 'separate but equal' ruling (Linett, 'Chronology' xi). Meanwhile, feminists in Britain, having recovered from being denied the vote in 1832, led the United States in rallying specific support for suffrage, forming the National Society for Women's Suffrage (NSWS) in 1872, the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies (NUWSS) 1897, and the Women's Social and Political Union in (WSPU) in 1903 (Stinson 64). Clearly the time was right, as Sowon Park points out:

The rapidity with which they became entrenched in British culture was remarkable.

Within five years of its inception, the National Women's Social and Political Union had branches and representatives all over the country and held some 600,000 public meetings. (174-175)

From the beginning, their tactics challenged accepted notions of gender in a manner that reverberated throughout society, and also exhibited an avant-garde aesthetic consistent with much of the modernist art and literature of the period. One example involves the large-scale spectacles – from marches and parades, to plays, speeches, and other forms of entertainment – that women’s rights campaigners in both the United States and Britain engaged in; as Chapman and Green point out, ‘the parade form quickly became the most characteristic form of activism’, often comprised of tens of thousands of women and drawing audiences upwards of 250,000 (27). In staging these mass events, the suffragettes were ‘uncomfortably aware’ from the beginning ‘of the class and gender taboos they were breaking’ and strove to maintain ‘middle-class respectability while invoking the proletarian women’s tradition of public righteousness’ (Lyon 15). As such, they ‘performed a hybrid form of femininity, blending the image of womanly womanhood with the spectacle of women in the street’, an aspect that functioned to merge the notion of ‘femininity on display’ with ‘traditional notions of citizenship’ (Green 3). In other words, spectators were called upon ‘to rethink gender by complicating the universal ideal’; ‘through a display of their ability to organize, negotiate conflicts and achieve solidarity among diverse groups of women’ the suffragettes were effectively performing their fitness as civic leaders (Chapman and Green 27).

However, in Britain specifically, where the tactics of the WSPU led by the Pankhursts grew increasingly more militant, these displays of femininity ‘succeeded in disrupting the meaning of femininity in general’ (Howlett 77). As actress, writer, journalist and suffragette Cicely Hamilton notes, ‘the outfit of a militant setting forth to smash windows would probably include a picture hat’ (qtd. in Howlett 77). Howlett contends that in juxtaposing the explicitly feminine with subversive and often violent behavior, suffragettes not only ‘[drained] femininity of its attractiveness to men’, but also ‘[invested] in it a new attractiveness for women, or at least for other suffragettes’ (78).

The British suffragettes' transition to militant tactics occurred dramatically in 1905 with the WSPU's disruption of the Manchester Trade Hall's meeting on the 15th of October, when Christabel Pankhurst and Annie Kenny began heckling from the audience. After resisting efforts to escort them from the hall, they were forcibly 'flung out of the building' and subsequently arrested and imprisoned, Christabel for seven days and Annie for three (Irving n.p.). As Jane Marcus writes,

by interrupting men's discourse with each other, [these women] were taking one of the most important steps in the history of women....What emancipatory bliss to aggressively enter the space of male political debate! This was the real violence of militancy, the assumption of verbal power. (*Suffrage* 9)

Their strategy – the 'interruption of male public discourse', as conceived by Christabel Pankhurst, not only brought them national attention in newspapers keen for sensational stories, but also represented 'on both the real and symbolic levels the bold breaking out of the straightjacket of the female role' (Marcus, *Suffrage* 9).

Performative Feminism / 'Models' of a Modernist Aesthetic

In addition to the interruption of male public discourse, the women's rights activists began to engage in other performative acts of feminism, which not only linked them in terms of aesthetics with artistic and literary modernism, but also point out differences between the American and English women's attitudes towards feminism. These aspects are illustrated in several key tactics and events that are the focus of this section: the rise in more violent tactics carried out by activists in England, the emphasis on non-violent spectacles in the United States, the advent of hunger strikes,

and the destruction of works of art, most notably the slashing of the Rokeby Venus at the National Gallery.

Given the increased press exposure dedicated to feminist activism on both sides of the Atlantic, it is no surprise they grew bolder in their protests. In England, where tactics turned violent, in the space of a single year (1914) suffragettes burned down or otherwise destroyed 19 churches, 100 buildings, 13 stations, 6 trains and 11 golf links or bowling greens—in addition to 29 cases of attempted arson and the discovery of 27 bombs (Smith, Patricia 175). As Janet Lyon points out, ‘These were neither auxiliaries of Man’s Progress nor mothers begging for bread, but, finally, terrorists fighting with violent means for their own political ends’ (16).

The violence of the British suffragettes stands them in stark contrast to the activism being carried out for ‘The Cause’ in the United States, where the emphasis was similarly on attracting media attention, but not through such overtly destructive tactics. American suffragettes looked to print itself to create a spectacle with their large banners and placards; rather than the more feminine arts and crafts letterfaces of the British, Chapman and Green write that ‘American suffrage banners responded in many respects to male modernist accusations that feminine decoration was to blame for cultural stasis and decay, and anticipated the design of modernist journals like *Blast*’ (29). Their parade spectacles were characterized by ‘[silent] peaceable women...delivering, presenting and carrying suffrage print culture’; they performed voiceless speeches in shop windows, dropped huge banners from public buildings, and presented miles-long petitions to government officials (Chapman and Green 29).

Responding to popular stereotypes of women as garrulous, and suffragettes as ‘lantern-jawed harridans’ or ‘iron-jawed angels’, stereotypes that foreground the mouth as a site of women’s strength and potential unattractiveness, all of these print

cultural spectacles visualized women as temporarily and strategically silent.

Performing their political voicelessness through print was a key tactic of their campaign. (Chapman and Green 29)

In Britain, the protests took on an ever more-brutal aspect with the first hunger strike in 1909, carried out by Marion Dunlop, who was jailed for fixing an excerpt from the Bill of Rights in St. Stephen's Hall (Green 4). Countless others followed suit, and according to Green, 'the hunger strike became the standard form of suffrage protest' – one the government responded to with forcible-feeding, a barbaric practice in which

the hunger-striking suffragette was held down while a physician threaded a long tube into her nostril or throat for liquid feeding. These feedings inevitably resulted in brutal struggle in which suffragettes were injured – teeth chipped as physicians forced their jaws open with metal bits, arms and legs bruised as nurses, wardesses or doctors held them down. (4)

Jane Marcus sees the hunger strike 'as a symbolic refusal of motherhood'; '[when] woman, quintessential nurturer, refuses to eat, she cannot nurture the nation' (*Suffrage* 2-3). She also argues for forcible feeding as 'perhaps the primary image in the public imagination regarding the "meaning" of the suffrage movement' (*Suffrage* 3). Certainly Djuna Barnes's sensational first-person account, 'How it Feels to be Forcibly Fed' did a great deal to cement this image of suffrage sacrifice in the public's imagination; in so doing, as Green writes, Barnes also brought to the fore 'the complex issue of female spectacularity in modern mass culture' (170). Although Barnes was critical of suffrage in much of her writing, Green contends, it 'also [shows] a thorough understanding of the

ways in which performative feminism confronted modern problems of vision, technologies of spectacle, and tendencies of mass culture' (170). In other words, Barnes's 'performance' effectively employed 'the dimensions, strategies, and concerns that characterize the intersection of women's modernism and performance' (Farfan 47).

Another powerful act of protest that involved the mutilation of the female body in a manner that refuted the patriarchal ideal of what a woman should be was Mary Richardson's slashing of Diego Velazquez's *The Toilet of Venus* – commonly known as 'The Rokeby Venus' – at the National Gallery in 1914, in response to Emmeline Pankhurst's re-arrest (Linnett, 'Introduction' 2-3). As Rose-Marie and Rainer Hagen write,

Few other paintings celebrate, so aesthetically and alluringly, the reduction of Woman to a physical body, to the object of male desire. Venus's face, which might reveal something of her individuality and mind, is blurred in the mirror, while her curving pelvis is placed in the center of the composition. The dark sheet sets off Venus's pale skin to particular advantage and is almost like a dish on which the beautiful goddess is presented. (255)

Richardson's selection of the portrait was significant for how it epitomized the patriarchal ideal of femininity; in slashing it she called upon women 'to see themselves differently, neither as objectified players in a romance plot nor as mothers of sons merely' (Linnett, 'Introduction' 3). As Richardson herself admitted years later in a 1952 interview with the *London Star*, 'I didn't like the way men visitors to the gallery gaped at it all day' (qtd. in Howlett 86). In her statement to the court, she accused the public of 'moral and political humbug and hypocrisy' for condemning her destruction of the painting even as they '[allowed] for the destruction of Mrs. Pankhurst and other

beautiful living women' (qtd. in Howlett 84). In effect, as Caroline Howlett writes, she was suggesting that the public had '[failed] to recognize the suffragettes as artists who [produced] themselves as images of female beauty for a feminist audience, just as the Rokeby Venus was produced for male viewers'; Richardson viewed her actions 'not as destroying a piece of art but as creating one' (84). Indeed, Linda Nead describes Richardson's attack as 'a reauthoring of the work that ruptured the aesthetic and cultural codes of the painting and of the female nude more generally' (25).

Thus, as Howlett argues, Richardson's attack on the Rokeby Venus 'indicates the extent to which militant suffragette practices were congruent with contemporary movements in the artistic and literary spheres' (87). Their tactics were very much in line with the Futurists and other Post-impressionists, 'with their representation of powerful group action and the violent reaction against "prettiness" in art' (Howlett 85). Edward Comentale also points out that '[from] its inception, the suffragette movement was aligned with classical modernism in its opposition to the bourgeois culture of modernity'; he cites their 'disgust with the Liberal Party and the "sluggish respectability of the 'plain man'" as resonating with Wyndham Lewis's attack in *Blast* on the 'abysmal inexcusable middle-class' (200). Janet Lyon sees the suffragettes as having become 'thoroughly modernized',

And I mean 'modernized' here in the way that Pound and Marinetti used it: to 'modernize', in this sense, means to demolish the cultural and political value of the 'sentimental', the familial, the domestic, and to valorize instead the transgressive patterns of modern individual expression. (17)

Perhaps most importantly, as it relates to this chapter's argument regarding the pivotal role of gender in modernism, Lyon sees the suffragette attacks on art galleries and museums as not only

‘characteristic (one might say constitutive) of the rhetoric of the contemporary avant-garde’, but also in doing so, ‘they secured an important intersection of political and artistic avant-gardes with the linchpin of gender’ – an aspect she argues has gone unnoticed by ‘historians of modernism from Bradbury to McFarlane in 1975 to Vincent Sherry in 1993, for whom the contours of modernism’s avant-garde are shaped by angry white men in Hamlet capes’ (17). As she points out, ‘whenever the connection between suffragettes and the avant-garde is partially recovered . . . the suffragette is relegated to a separate antechamber of separate events occurring “alongside” avant-garde development’; rather, she insists that not only was ‘an avant-garde woman . . . *there*, in the middle of the Modern’, but also that ‘her contemporary male modernists wanted what she signified, but wanted it for an enterprise that had nothing to do with feminist challenges to hegemony’ (17).

Perhaps nowhere is this appropriation of the feminist challenge to hegemony by way of the avant-garde more pronounced than in modernist literature; as Lyon argues, while ‘the experimental writings of avant-gardists like Mina Loy, Djuna Barnes, Mary Butts, and H.D. foregrounded the political importance of the instability of gender identity’, this focus was displaced by ‘modernism’s subsequent institutionalization . . . onto more formal aspects of experimentation’ (17).

The implicit imperative for women of the avant-garde was that they should write like *not*-women, at the very least by incorporating into their work a sufficient number of indices marking their repudiation of the ‘feminine’ half of the population – and, indeed, of their own ‘femininity’. As a result, experimental woman writers were understood, when understood at all, in strictly formalist (rather than thematic) terms; but, of course, most *post hoc* histories of modernism, in conflating modernism with

experimentalism, never considered experimental woman writers as part of the tradition at all. (Lyon 17-18)

The sections that follow examine this issue in depth; Part Three lays the foundation with a consideration of the complicated, if mutually beneficial relationship between the feminist/suffragette writers and the women modernists – a relationship that helps to illustrate the origins of the divide that grew more pronounced in the post-war period, one in which the women modernists appeared to turn their backs on the feminist cause – effecting a ‘repudiation of the “feminine” half of the population – and, indeed, of their own “femininity”’. Part Four considers this divide – between the more humanist, realist, author-centered approach to narrative as reflected by much of the feminist and suffragette writing of the period, and the experimental forms taken up by the women modernists – as played out in the debate between Toril Moi and Elaine Showalter over Virginia Woolf’s feminism in *A Room of One’s Own*.

The Surge in Women’s Writing and its Impact on Perceptions of Gender

With the groundswell of suffrage activity on both sides of the Atlantic came an explosion of feminist publications; the National Women’s Social and Political Union weekly paper, *Votes for Women* saw its sales increase to 30,000 by 1912, while mainstream publications such as the *Standard*, *Daily Mail* and *Pall Mall Gazette* began to make space for the debate on women’s rights, including the *Standard’s* full page ‘The Women’s Platform’ (Park 178). In the same way that their large-scale demonstrations and parades allowed them to gain mass recognition for their cause – as well as ‘intervene specifically in the discursive sphere of public life by seizing control of their own image-making’ – so too did women’s presses and publications fuel their ‘discourse of interruption’ (Murray, ‘Deeds’ 198). The proliferation of newspapers, journals and various small presses in

England and the United States meant women writers not only had more outlets in which to publish their work, but they also gained a dramatically expanded readership (Park 178).

This also functioned to give women writers a platform and freedom to write in a manner they might not have dared to otherwise – in a sense, it freed them from some of the residual binds cast by the Angel in the House. Elizabeth Robins, the American actress who found fame in England for her performances in Ibsen’s plays – also a novelist, journalist, playwright, and feminist activist – echoes the restrictions many women felt in the male-dominated publishing and literary arena at the turn of the century, when she writes that

[contrary] to the popular impression, to say in print what she thinks is the last thing the woman-novelist or journalist is commonly so rash as to attempt. In print, even more than elsewhere (unless she is reckless), she must wear the aspect that shall have the best chance of pleasing her brothers. Her publishers are not women. Even the professional readers and advisers of publishers are men. The critics in the world outside, men. Money, reputation—these are vested in men. If a woman would win a little at their hands, she must walk warily, and not too much displease them. (qtd. in Murray, ‘Deeds’ 197)

However, as Simone Murray points out, ‘in advising women writers to adopt a placatory tone, Robins was somewhat disingenuous’; the above passage, from Robins’s essay ‘Woman’s Secret’ was published in 1913, when the British suffragettes had taken center stage with their militant tactics – if not for the volume of radical texts, manifestos, dramatic first-person narratives and highly politicized novels flooding the public sphere at the time, Robins’s essay might not have seen print (‘Deeds’ 198).

With the founding of *The Women's Press* and organizations such as the Women Writer's Suffrage League and Actresses' Franchise League, women writers, actresses, editors and publishers now had 'a cohesive and potent base . . . from which to produce a steady stream of literature and performances' (Park 179). Chapman and Green write that this 'dynamic print culture of the modernist suffrage movement composed a feminist "counter-public sphere"' (25). Political activism and writing together were changing the way people—especially women—viewed the world; there was a 'correlation between the world of ideas and the world of action around this period' that brought into discourse 'new words, new ways of looking at gender'—terms such as 'new woman', 'feminist', 'suffragette' and 'androcentricity' were newly articulated 'to correspond to the realities of modernity and resist inequality' (Park 179). In the same way that Lisa Tickner describes the suffragettes' use of symbols and their political associations in their spectacular public displays as a kind of 'intertextuality' (152), so too, as Simone Murray points out, this 'notion of interdisciplinary blurring and discursive cross-fertilization applies equally well to the literary realm of suffrage fiction, and more specifically, to the literary industries controlled by suffrage groups which secured the entry of pro-suffrage texts into public discourse' ('Deeds' 215)

While many of the modernist women writers at the time such as Djuna Barnes, H.D. and Gertrude Stein were appropriating and parodying conventional narratives and myths as a means of challenging male-dominated traditions in literature and a patriarchal society in general, amongst the feminists and suffragettes the emphasis was largely on telling 'real stories' about 'real' women to protest existing norms (Park 180). In a period characterized by simultaneous political and personal awakening, changing the world meant memoirs, autobiographies, *bidungsromanae* and verbatim theatre as much as it did political tracts and manifestos. For example, Charlotte Perkins Gilman's first-person narrative *The Yellow Wallpaper* (1899) contained a strong message for social reform as it exposed the disturbing medical treatment of women with mental illness (Smith, Patricia 80). The

story involves a young wife suffering from post-partum depression, who is relegated by her highly esteemed physician husband to the attic nursery of their summer home, where, cooped up and prevented from leaving, she descends into madness. Gilman wrote of the piece, 'It was not intended to drive people crazy, but to save people from being driven crazy, and it worked . . . It has, to my knowledge, saved one woman from a similar fate—so terrifying her family that they let her out into normal activity and she recovered' (Gilman, 'Why I Wrote').

First-person narratives that blurred the line between fiction and real-life experience were also a large part of what enabled Margaret Sanger's the *Birth Control Review*, founded in 1917, to succeed after her first attempt at publishing, *Woman Rebel* in 1914 was shut down under the Comstock Act for obscenity; her experience with *Woman Rebel* showed her she could not directly confront issues of contraception, but by publishing short stories, poetry and plays about women's experiences of unwanted pregnancies and contraception, she was able to educate and encourage a public discussion of these taboo issues (Wilson, A. 446). The *BCR* editorial board had a dedicated literary editor and in its first year alone published work by Charlotte Perkins Gilman, Angelina Weld Grimke, Olive Schreiner and James Russell Lowell – writers who at the same time were publishing in mainstream literary magazines such as *The Masses*, *The New Republic*, *The Modernist*, and *The Crisis*, effectively blurring the line between politics and art (Wilson, A. 446).

Theatre offered women writers another powerful means of changing society and perceptions of gender while simultaneously allowing them to experiment artistically, expand their audience, and gain recognition in a field that was dominated by men. Like the new journals and small presses run by women, theatre companies such as the Provincetown Players (1915-22) and London's Pioneer Players (1911-20) provided venues for women playwrights, directors, actresses and scenic designers to experiment and create new work; as Cheryl Black points out with regard to the Provincetown Players, it was this unique atmosphere that made the company 'perhaps the most

important platform for feminist drama in America before the 1960s' (qtd. in Farfan 52). Plays written by both feminists and modernists combined art and politics in the same way that their fiction did. Elizabeth Robins's play *Votes for Women* included scenes that incorporated speeches taken directly from suffrage rallies; Edna St. Vincent Millay's *Aria da Capo* (1919) was a powerful indictment of war and human nature; Augusta Gregory's *The Rising of the Moon* (1907) reflected her strong support of a cultural agenda defined by nationalism; and Georgia Douglas Johnson's play *Safe* (1928) was written to protest the widespread practice of lynching in America (Farfan 50-51).

Theatre criticism proved another instrument for challenging gender roles and notions of a woman's place in society; through their reporting and what they chose to review, women had a hand in 'mediating contemporary culture for their readerships' (DiCenzo 36). Critics such as Marjorie Stratchey, who wrote and reviewed for *The Englishwoman* among other feminist journals, were not only in a unique position to view plays of the period and reflect on the larger social and political issues these dramas sought to reform, but also, as Maria DiCenzo points out, '[what] these critics chose to review, endorse, and criticize, in addition to the language they employed, are central to what they self-consciously identified as "modern" and why' (36).

In addition to drawing attention to plays written by and about women and opening up the debates set forth by them, women critics embraced male playwrights such as Ibsen and Shaw, who they considered 'advanced' in recognizing women's plight; Ibsen was seen as 'a champion of their cause', and women who saw his plays, as well as those who read reviews of them in women's journals and papers, could not help but feel both empowered and validated (DiCenzo 44-45). In addition, coverage devoted to the theatre in feminist publications had a great deal to do with the numbers of actresses and playwrights involved with suffrage organizations and the feminist movement; the relationship between the two was mutually beneficial: 'Actresses were held in high

regard in the cult of celebrity within the women's movement and celebrity endorsements of particular organizations or causes were as important as they are now' (DiCenzo 44).

The Impact of the First World War on Gender Roles and Women's Writing

While the period leading up to the First World War saw an explosion in women's writing and publishing, one that included a considerable degree of cross-pollination amongst the women modernists, feminists and suffragettes in terms of the journals they were publishing in, and the blurring of the line between art and politics in their novels, essays, plays and reviews, the impact of the war is significant with regard to the shift that saw the modernist women writers begin to distance themselves from the feminist movement.

Although both the feminist and modernist movements were well-established on both sides of the Atlantic, once the war broke out on August 4th, 1914, women found themselves thrust into jobs, at last enjoying many of the freedoms they had been campaigning for—nearly 1.5 million women joined the workforce in England alone (Linett, 'Introduction' 5). In terms of the suffrage movement the war had a dramatic impact; as Claire Tylee writes, 'many women . . . saw the War itself as overriding their interest in women's suffrage. With the War came the opportunity for them to achieve what they had struggled for: entry to what had been seen as male centers of power' (14).

Moreover, in the wake of the war women at last gained the vote: in England, the Representation of the People Act in 1918 granted women over 30 the vote (although it would take another decade for the privilege to be extended, with the voting age lowered to 21 in 1928); the United States followed Britain's lead granting women the right to vote with the passage of the Nineteenth Amendment in 1920; women in France, however, had to wait until 1944 (Linett, 'Chronology' xvi).

Yet despite their newfound status, once the war ended and men returned to their jobs, women faced a considerable backlash, as well as disappointment that their newfound independence was not to last (Linett, 'Introduction' 5). As Tylee points out, '[the War] re-asserted gender distinctions that women had been contesting: women were frail and had to be defended by strong protectors, who were prepared to kill or die on their behalf' (254). For all the women who felt empowered and liberated by the war, there were others, particularly the elderly, who felt all the more useless—most felt both in succession as they were stripped of their jobs and independence once the men returned home (Linett, 'Introduction' 6).

In the literary arena, women's newfound confidence in their abilities meant they were bolder in both seeking publication, and seeing themselves as 'literary figures' (Dowson 15). That this posed a threat to their male counterparts is evidenced in reviews of the time; one critic had this to say in a 1920 *Times Literary Review* piece on three new books of poetry by women, titled 'The Poetry of Women':

Literature, which answers to every change in the social life of a people, has already begun to register the fact of women's emancipation. The ideal of self-expression, which has supplanted self-sacrifice as the aim of the modern woman has possibly brought with it as many abuses as it has banished . . . Certainly the result in literature may not at first seem very happy. As we contemplate the profusion of modern fiction with women's names on the title page, we may reasonably fear for the welfare of art smothered between the smatterings of science and the anarchy of instincts . . . But though we allow the novel to be abused in the interests of sex propaganda, lyrical poetry, by the very strict limits of its constitution, will permit no such transgression. (qtd. in Dowson 15-16)

The distinction the reviewer makes between ‘the profusion of modern fiction’ authored by women, which has been ‘abused in the interests of sex propaganda’ and ‘lyrical poetry’ with its ‘strict limits’ that will ‘permit no such transgression’ is a revealing one; while the novel had long been handed over as the woman’s domain since the Victorian era, ‘serious’ (as opposed to ‘sentimental’) poetry was considered unsuitable for women, given that they were still viewed to be ‘occupied with religion, nature and the personal life’—presumably areas too trivial for poetry (Dowson 17-18). The suggestion that the novel in a woman’s hands was no more than ‘sex-propaganda’ also hints at what made the modernist women writers’ relationship with the feminist movement such a complicated one.

Women’s Literary Modernism & The Gender of Modernism

After the war, not only did the first wave of the feminist movement dissipate as women gained the right to vote, but the distancing of the modernist women writers from the feminist cause became more pronounced. Sowon Park cites a ‘tension between the elitist literary culture and the populist political culture’;

[the] difficult relationship between the political activism and literary expression is illustrated by the general pattern followed by many prominent modernist writers’ involvement with suffrage politics: initial sympathetic involvement, passing to disillusionment and varying degrees of rejection. (182-183)

As Virginia Woolf wrote in her diary after attending a suffrage rally in 1918, ‘I get one satisfactory thrill from the sense of the multitude; then become disillusioned’ (qtd. in Park 183).

Class certainly played into it, as many of those who enjoyed the new ‘fruits of feminism’ were already in a position of privilege and the resentment of those less fortunate fed the rift between them (Park 184). For example, Gertrude Stein and Willa Cather – who both achieved New Woman ideals such as attending college and pursuing successful careers as writers (not to mention living openly with female partners), also happened to be the recipients of large family inheritances (Smith, Patricia 84).

This split was reflected in novels, plays and poetry; a scene in the 1909 suffrage play *A Defense of the Fighting Spirit* sees the protagonist bemoan the inequalities between the sexes, but when her friend suggests she become a suffragette, she replies, ‘That word offends my literary taste!’ (qtd. in Park 182). Indeed, as Sowon Park writes, ‘One of the more common reasons for the writers’ renunciation stemmed from the feeling that feminist politics was just bad art’ (183).

This is an area that has been opened up and increasingly debated in recent years with the reexaminations of the period focused on the gender of modernism. As Anne Ardis points out, an examination of the gender of modernism is as much about considering women’s *experience* of modernism, as it is about looking at the writing of women of the period—including those considered to be ‘modernists’, but also those overlooked because their work was considered too ‘realist’ and lacking in the experimental, self-conscious aspects that contribute to the ‘modernist sense of rupture’ (‘Introduction’ 1-2, 13). Bonnie Kime Scott echoes this when she quotes Jane Lilienfield’s explanation that ‘[the] “experimental, audience challenging and language-focused” writing that used to be regarded as modernism becomes... a gendered category—“early male modernism”, for example, or “masculinist modernism”’ (‘Introduction’ 4). She points out that writers such as Djuna Barnes, Mina Loy and Marianne Moore who adopted this form ‘were admitted to the “male” category to the neglect of important feminine or feminist elements in their work’ (‘Introduction’ 4).

This suggests that a woman modernist cannot be defined by the same criteria used to celebrate the writing of the men who in many ways defined this period, most notably the 'Men of 1914': T.S. Eliot, James Joyce, Ezra Pound, and Wyndham Lewis (Scott, 'Introduction' 7). Many of the realistic, 'I'-centered approaches mentioned earlier have in fact proven to be just as rupturing and subversive as the more obviously experimental work:

The consideration of a non-experimental group of writers, alongside the more traditional experimental canon, challenges language-centered interpretations of modernism favored in the canonization process from Ezra Pound to Julia Kristeva. (Scott, 'Introduction' 5)

By the same token, women writers who adopted the experimental form of 'masculine' modernism such as Barnes, H.D., and Gertrude Stein played an integral, often overlooked role in the feminist movement, both in terms of how their work challenged and influenced social perceptions of what a woman could and should be, and also in how the movement itself made their work possible. In addition to the increased opportunities for publishing afforded them by the feminist movement, the championing of the New Woman meant that lesbianism and alternative lifestyles, while not accepted, were considered by a large part of the feminist movement to be included in the rights they were fighting for (Smith, Patricia 79). And it was Barnes, Stein and H.D. in particular, who, while adopting the 'masculine' form of modernist writing, were also writing poems and novels that explored lesbian themes. Moreover, their use of this form was precisely what made it possible for them to write about such taboo subjects without fear of persecution, and yet still communicate to an audience adept at deciphering what was deliberately coded. It could be argued that women had developed a facility with these codes—both those who couched their

messages in the more experimental forms, but also those who stuck to the traditional forms—such that on a certain level they developed their own secret language for communicating with one another through literature.

One such example is the writing of Alice Meynell, one of the most renowned English poets at the turn of the century, and regular essayist in the ‘Wares of Autolycus’ column of the *Pall Mall Gazette* (Schaffer 13-14). Known as much for her ‘Victorian ladylikeness’ as for her ‘very abstruse, demanding and feminist writing’ her work challenges ‘the notion that the period was divided between admirably experimental modernism and residually Edwardian popular culture’ (Schaffer 13). Her essays are rich with ‘mystic and highly charged images, emotive language, and strong biblical associations’ that serve to ‘sketch the sense of pure liberations that a fearless public life could give’, but beneath it all, were ‘warnings about loss, pain and suffering’ (Schaffer 14-15).

As a Victorian lady . . . her duty was to keep her personal life sacrosanct . . . Turn-of-the-century critics often believed women’s writing was inherently autobiographical, but the evident artifice of Meynell’s language dissuaded readers from assuming that the essay was an unmediated, transparently personal revelation . . . [One might] read the obliqueness of Meynell’s prose, not as a trace of underlying crisis of self-identity or a failure of feminist consciousness, but rather as a richly complicated new form of identity shared by many women between about 1890 and 1920. (Schaffer 14-15)

Gertrude Stein employed similarly oblique language, and also used it to encode aspects of her personal life. In her short story ‘Miss Furr and Miss Skeene’ Stein depicts a lesbian relationship, but does so through clever wordplay of a style very much in line with the masculine modernist Eliot/Pound tradition:

they were regular in being gay, they learned little things that are things in being gay, they learned many little things that are things in being gay, they were gay every day, they were regular, they were gay, they were gay the same length of time every day, they were gay, they were quite regularly gay. (qtd. in Smith, Patricia 83)

Likewise in *Ryder*, her satirical 1927 novel, Djuna Barnes adopts styles ranging from Chaucer to Shakespeare to the Bible to tell her taboo-filled tale of incest, adultery and polyamory that in turn challenged traditional perspectives on male-authored works (Martin, A. 108-109). Although the book was censored and she was forced to omit passages, she dedicates her forward to this fact, calling on her readers to note where asterisks have been inserted in place of the banned text, that they might see ‘the havoc of this nicety, and what its effects are on the work of imagination’ (Barnes vii).

On some level, the obtuse ‘masculine’ form of modernism was the only option for lesbian writers such as Barnes and Stein if they desired to write their own lives in novels and poems; had they written in the straightforward realistic manner available to their heterosexual counterparts, they risked the fate of Radclyffe Hall, whose *Well of Loneliness* sparked an obscenity trial shortly after its publication in 1928, which saw the book banned (Smith, Patricia 90). That same year Virginia Woolf published *Orlando*, also essentially a lesbian love story and her ‘literary gift of love’ to Vita Sackville West; however, as in Stein’s work, the lesbianism in *Orlando* is ambiguous enough that it did not excite the censors (Smith, Patricia 91).

Hall had no wish to be unambiguous in her presentation of marginalized sexuality—indeed, she intended to draw attention to it . . . Woolf, on the other

hand, understood that to be silenced could render one's message ineffectual, and thus she resorted to ambiguity, fantasy, humor, and modernist experimentalism . . . (Smith, Patricia 90)

The ambiguity Woolf sought is embodied in her theory of androgyny as put forward in *A Room of One's Own*, in which she states:

It is fatal to be a man or woman pure and simple: one must be woman-manly or man-womanly. It is fatal for a woman to lay the least stress on any grievance; to plead even with justice any cause; in any way speak consciously as a woman. (120)

As Jane Dowson points out, the piece 'reflected a climate where the heightened consciousness of sex differences was counter-productive to their careers' (21). In other words, 'feminine' was still connotated with 'weakness' (Dowson 16). *Orlando* emphasizes Woolf's theory of androgyny in that the biological sex of the characters does not ultimately determine their sexuality or gender (Smith, Patricia 91). Orlando the character is not presented as 'hermaphroditic or intersexual', but rather as one who is possessed of equal experience of the world as a man and a woman, having magically changed sexes at some point along the line (Smith, Patricia 91). This sort of androgyny is exactly what Woolf believed women writers needed to strive towards if their work was to be judged equally, and their ideas were to be effectively heard. It is a theory that provoked heated debate – specifically, that between Elaine Showalter and Toril Moi, which is discussed in depth in the section that follows. In brief, Showalter's argument in 'Virginia Woolf and the Flight into Androgyny' deemed Woolf's championing of androgyny to be, as Deborah Parsons describes it, 'a claustrophobic retreat from social reality', one which represents 'a sterile denial of female

sexuality'; Parsons goes on to write that Woolf's 'refusal . . . to admit partisanship to any collective faith, politics or identity, moreover, signal ultimately for Showalter an evasion of the demands of others, and repression of feminist political engagement' (173) Such criticism of Woolf's theory of androgyny is significant, given what it reveals about how Showalter views the relationship between—and indeed, the definition of what it meant to *be*—a feminist versus a modernist woman writer:

[Woolf's] aesthetic, or 'modernist', experimentation with literary focus and form, is regarded as undercutting [her] political duty to write angry manifestos representing women as social agents within a material world. To be both a feminist writer and a Modernist writer, Showalter [seems] to imply, was impossible. (Parsons 173)

Jane Goldman defends Woolf's feminism in her reading of Woolf's essay 'Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown', in which she challenges the notion that 'it is untainted by Woolf's feminism' (*Modernism*, 157). She argues in favor of E.M. Forster's observation; that feminism was 'all over her work . . . and constantly on her mind' (qtd. in Goldman, *Modernism* 157).

'Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown' is well known for being the piece in which Woolf declares that the modernist era began 'on or about December 1910'—a moment when 'human character changed' (3). Beyond the transition from the Edwardian to Georgian era, Woolf emphasizes in the piece that,

All human relations have shifted—those between masters and servants, husbands and wives, parents and children. And when human relations change, there is at the same time a change in religion, conduct, politics and literature. (3)

Goldman contends that Woolf's feminist subtext can be read through her depiction of Mrs. Brown, and that her 1910 manifesto '[resonates] with the formulations and practices of British Suffrage artists' (*Modernism*, 157). She suggests the piece was influenced by 'Black Friday', when a suffragette protest at the 1910 Post-Impressionist Exhibition in London erupted in violence and arrests; although not at the demonstration herself, Woolf did go to the rally beforehand at Royal Albert Hall (Goldman, *Modernism* 157). In September 1910, two months previous to 'Black Friday', which occurred in November of that year, suffrage artist Mary Lowndes' essay, 'On Banners and Banner Making' was published, its manifesto-style employing a language that Goldman sees reflected in some of Woolf's subsequent work:

For example, Lowndes' declaration that the feminist colors will 'illumine woman's own adventure' seems to anticipate some of Woolf's phrasing in *A Room of One's Own*: Mary Beton instructs Mary Carmichael, the aspiring novelist, 'above all, you must illumine your own soul'; and *Life's Adventure* is the title of Mary Carmichael's novel. (*Modernism* 150)

Thus when considering Woolf's singling out of December 1910 as the moment when 'all human relations . . . shifted', her own feminism and her experience of the events going on around her suggest she had something more on her mind than simply the start of the modernist era. As Goldman asserts, '[the] shocking suffrage events of 1910 surrounding the Post-impressionist exhibition inform Woolf's compelling identification of this revolutionary date' (*Modernism* 160).

Woolf's feminism and how it is manifest in her more challenging, experimental narrative style – one that strives for androgyny – stands in stark contrast to the 'I' centered, realist modes

embraced by those actively engaged with the feminist movement at the time. The section that follows examines this aspect in detail as it played out in the debate between Toril Moi and Elaine Showalter over *A Room of One's Own*; a debate that illustrates not only the two primary and divergent strands of feminist literary criticism, but also pits modernism versus realism. In addition to informing the relationship between the women modernists and the feminists, Moi and Showalter's debate also comments on the equally tricky relationship between the men and women modernist writers; a relationship that was shaped by their responses to the social upheavals of the period, and particularly the feminist movement and its impact on gender roles.

II. The Intersection of Feminism and Modernism in Theory: Showalter, Moi and *A Room of One's Own*

In her groundbreaking survey of feminist literary theory published in 1985, *Sexual / Textual Politics*, Toril Moi challenges Elaine Showalter's critique of Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own*, arguing that her frustration with, and ultimate dismissal of Woolf's 'teasing, sly and elusive' style, as well as her theory of androgyny, and the very nature of her feminism, stem from Showalter's own theoretical naiveté (3). Moi attacks Showalter's humanist, gynocritical approach, which seeks for 'one unifying angle of vision'—a futile endeavor according to Moi, given Woolf's complex narrative strategies (3). Moi suggests it is these very narrative strategies that hold the key to appreciating Woolf's feminism; indeed she celebrates Woolf for seeking to 'radically undermine the notion of unitary self, the central concept of Western male humanism' (7).

Showalter and Moi's conflicting views exemplify the differences between Anglo-American and French feminist criticism; whereas the Anglo-American feminist tradition has its roots in a realist/humanist approach focused on the female experience, on 'women'—what Showalter terms

‘gynocriticism’—French feminist theory as influenced by the work of Jacques Derrida, Julia Kristeva and Hélène Cixous is concerned with the text itself, finding the ‘woman’ or ‘feminine’ in the text—the critical process being what Alice Jardine calls ‘gynesis’; the practice itself being what Cixous terms *écriture féminine*. In a broader sense, the clash between Moi and Showalter over Woolf’s feminism in *A Room of One’s Own* might also be seen ‘as a debate between realism and modernism’ (Eagleton 11).

Despite being diametrically opposed as such, gynocriticism and gynesis have been used together by many feminist critics in the decades since to shed new light on the historical tradition of women’s experimental writing, as well as the influence and relationship of such work with the male-dominated modernist canon – and what might be achieved in the future as far as practicing and theorizing experimental feminist literature and performance.

This section takes a closer look at the critical arguments of both Moi and Showalter not only to illuminate the differences between Anglo-American and French feminist theory, but in order to explore the larger implications with regard to the complicated relationship between women’s experimental writing and the male avant-garde; in other words, what does the debate between Moi and Showalter over the legacy of Woolf’s feminism as reflected in her experimental, subversive narratives reveal about the link between ‘feminine’ writing in the tradition of Hélène Cixous’s *écriture féminine*, and the predominantly male modernist tradition? Although some feminist critics including Rachel Blau Duplessis and Mary Jacobus have called for feminists to appropriate the avant-garde/experimental style altogether, and in doing so, move forward without acknowledging the male avant-garde tradition in order to ‘hypothesize *écriture féminine* as if it were an entirely new literary practice’ (DeKoven, ‘Male Signature’ 77), this section argues that daring to explore the *shared* space between the male and female experimental/avant-garde functions to ‘bridge the abyss’ between them; at the same time it reflects the women modernists’ role as originators of this form

of 'feminine discourse', one that became dominated by the male avant-garde to the elision of women writers from the modernist literary canon itself.

Woolf's Theory of Androgyny

A Room of One's Own is drawn from a series of lectures Virginia Woolf gave at Newnham College, Cambridge on 'Women and Fiction' in which she considers what the fate of William Shakespeare's sister 'Judith' would have been, had she existed, and assuming she was possessed of the same genius and desire to pursue her intellectual and artistic gifts to the fullest. Woolf's conclusion reflects her own fierce condemnation of the plight of women, and particularly, female intellectuals and artists in a patriarchal society; 'who shall measure the heat and violence of the poet's heart when caught and tangled in a woman's body?—killed herself one winter's night and lies buried at some cross-roads where the omnibuses now stop outside the Elephant and Castle' (131).

A Room of One's Own also introduces her theory of androgyny, following from Samuel Coleridge's assertion that 'a great mind is androgynous'; for Woolf, it is 'a fusion that takes place' such that 'the mind is fully fertilized and uses all its faculties' (113-114). She suggests that 'a mind that is purely masculine cannot create, any more than a mind that is purely feminine' (114). Her description suggests a mind that has effectively transcended the limits or perhaps biases of one's sex, allowing an individual to draw on both natures; only with such freedom can true genius be realized: 'The whole of the mind must lie wide open if we are to get the sense that the writer is communicating his experience with perfect fullness. There must be freedom and there must be peace' (121).

Perhaps what most distinguishes Woolf's extraordinary essay—and also what draws the brunt of Showalter's impatience—is her narrative strategy, which employs multiple personae,

jumps from thread to thread, is alternately wry and humorous, thoughtful and accusing, and always, '[refuses] to be pinned down' (Moi, *Sexual/Textual* 3). Woolf's style, Showalter writes, has a 'strenuous charm'—its 'spontaneity and intimacy' are but an illusion; for all its 'repetition, exaggeration, parody, whimsy, and multiple viewpoints' it is in fact 'an extremely impersonal and defensive book' (231). As far as Woolf's call for an androgynous mind, Showalter considers the idea 'utopian' and 'abstract'—a 'myth that helped [Woolf] evade confrontation with her own painful femaleness and enabled her to choke and repress her anger and ambition' (216).

Showalter and Gynocriticism

Showalter's approach to Woolf's essay reflects her gynocritical approach, as her interpretations and judgments of Woolf's feminism are influenced as much by the corresponding details of Woolf's personal life and experiences as they are derived from the text. For example, Showalter devotes much discussion to Woolf's relationship with her father (218); her major breakdowns that Showalter views as 'crises in female identity' (219); the death of her mother and half sister Stella in 1897 (220); the trauma of the anorexia nervosa she struggled with throughout her life (220); her sexual abuse at the hands of her half-brothers (220); her depression at her husband's decision that given her mental state, she should not have children, and her supposed 'frigidity' within her marriage (222). For Showalter, all of these factors contributed to Woolf's final breakdown and suicide, which in turn serve as evidence that Woolf's theory of androgyny was a utopian myth, one that could only lead to self-destruction and death:

Woolf's illnesses had always had some source in female experience; they had taken the classic female forms of frigidity, depression, and suicide attempts, and been treated in female asylums with a therapy intended to induce female passivity. It is the peculiarly

poignant irony of female depression that it decreases the ability to express hostility
Deprived of the use of her womanhood, denied the power of manhood, she sought a serene androgynous ‘oneness’, an embrace of eternity that was inevitably an embrace of death. In recognizing that the quest for androgyny was Woolf’s solution to her existential dilemma, we should not confuse flight with liberation. (228-229)

For Showalter, as with gynocriticism in general, the author is very much alive in contrast to the Barthesian concept of the ‘death of the author’; indeed, for Showalter and the gynocritics, the author *is* the text—the boundaries between an author’s experience and her written work are fluid, each informing the other. Woolf, as Showalter writes, may have ‘avoided describing her own experience’ (294) but Showalter supplies what she knows of Woolf’s life as evidence to fuel her argument as to the grave flaws, inconsistencies and damaging aspects of Woolf’s ideas: ‘the concepts of androgyny and the private room are neither liberating nor as obvious as they first appear. They have a darker side that is the sphere of exile and the eunuch’ (285).

Moi’s Case for Woolf’s Feminism Through the Lens of Gynesis

Addressing this critical view of Woolf, Moi points out in *Sexual/Textual Politics* that Showalter ‘implicitly defines feminist writing as work that offers a powerful expression of personal experience in a social framework’ (4). This preference for the kind of writing Moi reminds us is ‘commonly known as critical or bourgeois realism’ does not allow for ‘any real recognition of the value of Virginia Woolf’s modernism’ (4). Instead, Moi calls for a deconstructive approach that combines Derridean and Kristevan theory, effecting a ‘feminist criticism that would do both justice and homage’ to Woolf, ‘[feminism’s] great mother and sister’ (18). Rather than focusing on ‘women’ as flesh and blood entities, French feminist criticism seeks to identify ‘woman’ or the

'feminine' in a text; in other words, 'French interest converges not on women but on 'woman' who, as [Alice] Jardine points out, is not a person but a 'writing-effect' (Eagleton 10). Alice Jardine calls this critical process gynes, and defines it as:

a reincorporation and reconceptualization of that which has been the master narratives' own 'non-knowledge', what has eluded them, what has engulfed them. This other-than-themselves is almost always a 'space' of some kind (over which the narrative has lost control), and this space has been coded as *feminine*, as *woman* . . . (25)

In Kristevan terms, gynes 'gives way to a subject which is unstable and constantly reformed'; this parallels Woolf's narrative strategy in *Room*—as Moi sees it, Woolf's many personae rather than signaling a 'loss of integrity' are in fact an 'interrogation of humanism's obsession with the individual and opening up of subjectivity to change' (Eagleton 11). Woolf's narrative style can also be read as *écriture féminine*, Hélène Cixous's term for a 'decipherable libidinal femininity, which can be read in writing produced by a male or a female' (qtd. in Moi, *Sexual/Textual Politics* 108). What Woolf does in *A Room of One's Own* follows the manner in which Cixous calls for femininity to be inscribed in a text; one that results in 'a text which divides itself, breaks into bits, regroupes itself, is an abundant, maternal, pederastic femininity' (Cixous qtd. in DeKoven, 'Male Signature' 72).

For all the differences between Showalter and Moi's critical approaches, it is important to bear in mind that as Mary Eagleton states, 'they are united in common pursuits'; as she summarizes, 'both are discerning in their analysis of that configuration of material, ideological and psychological factors that situate a woman writer'; 'both share a passion for women's writing and feminist research'; and just as Woolf calls for 'a mass of information about women before', her

‘empirical method and concern with literary and social history’ as well as ‘women-centered forces’ is very much in line with the aims of Showalter’s approach (8). Moreover, both gynocriticism and gynesis seek to tear down the master narrative, which from a feminist perspective, Eagleton writes, is essentially ‘bankrupt’ (10).

However, where gynocriticism seeks to replace the male with female, creating a ‘mistress narrative’ as opposed to a ‘master’, gynesis aims for no such substitution on the basis that it would change nothing except for making woman rather than man the center of what was still a ‘humanist endeavor’—one that in emphasizing the experience of women as opposed to men only serves to further entrench the established patriarchal structures (Eagleton 10). In other words, the Anglo-American gynocritical approach risks reinforcing the cultural stereotypes as dictated by a patriarchal society—what is considered ‘real’ and ‘natural’—whereas gynesis in the French feminist tradition sets out not merely to question, but to explode such ‘truths’. Alice Jardine touches on this when she writes that one of the greatest challenges facing Anglo-American feminists ‘is how to put into practice with less political and intellectual naiveté the distinction between political knowledge and the mythology of pure knowledge; French women remind us that pure knowledge does not exist’ (16).

Women’s Literary Modernism versus the ‘Male’ Avant-garde

In the case of Virginia Woolf and other of her contemporaries on the forefront of experimental, ‘modernist’ writing including Dorothy Richardson and Gertrude Stein, their work explored a ‘new fictional territory of difference and otherness’—what Richardson referred to as ‘feminine prose’ and what Woolf calls for in *A Room of One’s Own* when she speaks of sentences and narratives ‘rightly shaped for a woman’s use’ (Friedman and Fuchs 4). What they sought to accomplish in their writing thus fulfills Cixous’s call for *écriture féminine*, which “‘writes the body”

by imitating the rhythms and sexuality of women' and '[disrupts] conventional narrative . . . is nonlinear, polyphonic, open-ended [and] subverts hegemonic forms' (Friedman and Fuchs 4). Defined as such, 'feminine' writing is hardly distinguishable from what is hailed in the manifestoes of the male modernist canon; as Raymond Friedman writes in *Surfiction*: 'The most striking aspect of the new fiction will be its semblance of disorder, [it will be] illogical, irrational. . . unrealistic, non-sequitur and incoherent' (qtd. in Friedman and Fuchs 5).

Indeed, one of the main problems gynocritics such as Showalter initially expressed with the theoretical approach of the French feminists is that the idea of *écriture féminine* is more of an ideal, with few concrete examples of how it might be practiced. Even the French feminists themselves initially offered little beyond theory—the examples of 'feminine writing' they did put forward were, ironically, authored by men; Hélène Cixous cites Jean Genet as one of the rare few whose writing inscribes femininity (DeKoven, 'Male Signature' 72). Julia Kristeva goes so far as to essentially state that modernism (defined as the male avant-garde) is *écriture féminine*, when she writes:

For at least a century the literary avant-garde (from Mallarmé and Lautréamont to Joyce and Artaud) has been introducing ruptures, blank spaces, and holes into language . . . in a culture where the speaking subjects are conceived of as masters of their speech, they have phallic position. Fragmentation of language in text calls into question the posture of this mastery. The writing that we have been discussing [*écriture féminine*] confronts this phallic position either to traverse it or to deny it. (qtd. in DeKoven 'Male Signature' 72)

And yet, as Ellen Friedman and Miriam Fuchs point out, both the Anglo-American and French feminist critics have overlooked the long tradition of female experimentalists who were pioneers in what became the ‘male’ avant-garde—from Woolf, to Stein, Richardson, Djuna Barnes and H.D.; Friedman and Fuchs attribute the neglect of these innovative writers in part to ‘a legacy of modernism as interpreted through its male critics’ (5).

Although Virginia Woolf and Gertrude Stein have been credited with helping formulate experimental fiction, the credit inadequately expresses their achievements since they are commonly described as being second, if not secondary, to Joyce and Proust. (Friedman and Fuchs 5)

When Eliot famously declared Joyce had ‘killed the nineteenth century’ with *Ulysses*, all subsequent work—particularly that by women—was considered secondary or derivative (DeKoven, *Rich and Strange* 5). While Woolf embraced the role of the ‘outsider’, Stein, on the other hand,

met Joyce’s challenge to her reputation as ‘arch experimentalist’ with the futile question, ‘But who came first, Gertrude Stein or James Joyce? Do not forget that my first great book, *Three Lives*, was published in 1908. That was long before *Ulysses*.’ (qtd. in DeKoven, *Rich and Strange* 6)

The appropriation of the ‘female’ experimental form by the male avant-garde has further complicated the conjunction between modernism and feminism. Friedman and Fuchs point out that ‘despite the fact that the feminine is central to the discourse of modernity, theorists of modernity and feminist literary critics resist acknowledging the similarities in their projects’; in other words,

‘theorists are interested in “woman” as an object of inquiry, but not necessarily in “women”, while feminists ‘are interested in “women,” but suspicious of the theorists’ use of “woman”’ (6).

However, as Alice Jardine asks, ‘is it necessary to be a woman in order to speak as a woman? What does it mean to speak *for* a woman . . . isn’t that what men have always done?’ (35). Such questions have contributed to the impasse faced by feminist critics navigating the difficult path between Anglo-American and French criticism, in their attempts to give serious consideration to modernity; in other words, as Jardine puts it, ‘[it] is always a bit of a shock to the feminist theorist when she recognizes that the repeated and infinitely expanded “feminine” in these theoretical systems often has very little, if anything, to do with women’ (35).

Other factors that have contributed to the complicated relationship between feminism and modernism include the suspicions feminist writers and critics harbor with regard to the ‘cultural marginality of the avant-garde’; a fear ‘that claiming other outsiders as allies or *semblables* will make absolutely impossible a position already quite shaky’ (DeKoven, ‘Male Signature’ 76). Moreover, if women ‘do claim exclusive rights to the margin, to Otherness’, they ‘will yet again be entirely silenced: the battle between conservative, hegemonic center and transgressive margin will yet establish itself, over the silenced body of woman, as a battle between men’; ‘women’ would be ‘annihilated’, reduced to ‘the silenced woman out of whose mouth the male avant-garde speaks’ (DeKoven, ‘Male Signature’ 76-77).

However, a way forward might be traced by returning to *A Room of One’s Own*; Friedman and Fuchs write that in Mary Carmichael, Woolf has created ‘an imaginary woman writer who tampers with the expected sequence of narratives by “breaking it”’ (15). She does so by

[setting] to work to catch those unrecorded gestures, those unsaid or half-said words, which form themselves, no more palpably than the shadows of moths on the ceiling,

when women are alone, unlit by the capricious and colored light of the other sex.
(Woolf 98; Friedman and Fuchs 15).

In breaking the sequence, Woolf effectively '[ruptures] conventional structures of meaning by which the patriarchy reigns in order to give presence and voice to what was denied and repressed' (15).

As such, approaching women's literary modernism through the lens of both gynesis and gynocriticism – acknowledging both the female author and her use of 'feminine prose' – sheds light on the distinction between the male and female avant-garde, as well as the political implications of female 'ownership' of the form; rather than being viewed as an evasion of one's own femaleness, or a retreat from social reality, or a repression of feminist critical engagement, it might be seen as a more nuanced and layered rendering of these aspects – and not only that, but one that fosters a strong female presence and voice.

Contrary to what Jardine, Duplessis and others warn against – that alliance with the avant-garde would not simply further marginalize women, but would erase them altogether, save for being the vessel through which the male avant-garde speaks, what is called for is an acknowledgment of the shared space that as DeKoven points out would allow for the experimental style, whether taken up by women or men, to be directed towards changing culture 'by charting alternatives to hegemonic structures of consciousness' ('Male Signature' 79). What this means for feminist writers and critics is 'acknowledging the antipatriarchal potential of form in historical, male-signed avant-garde writing' while also never losing sight of 'the self-canceling countermove of that writing toward male supremacism and misogyny' (DeKoven, 'Male Signature' 78).

Most relevant to my focus in Chapter Four, which draws from these arguments towards identifying where adaptation is located in modernist women's autobiographical narratives, is the

aspect of this approach that re-evaluates women's experimental narratives such that 'woman' and 'women' naturally converge. In other words, it is an approach that draws from gynesis and gynecriticism, and explores, as Alice Jardine puts it, 'what happens when women take over this discourse [of modernity] in the name of woman' (263). In Chapter Four, I argue that what emerges is the strong presence of a woman. It is a process that involves, as Alice Jardine writes, 'thinking through the apparent contradictions between [the] French and American thinking characterized by the conflict between *woman as process* and *woman as sexual identity*' (41). When feminism and modernity are combined in their efforts – in other words, when 'the theories and practices of modernity, [are] *taken up by female voices*' the result is 'strangely and irresistibly subversive' (Jardine 258).

Conclusion

A closer look at the intersection of modernism and feminism reveals not only the extent of the mutual influence and congruities between the modernist and feminist movements, but also supports the arguments regarding the significance of gender – and specifically, the impact the shifting gender roles at the time had on the emergence of modernism – a view that challenges the idea of a 'great divide' between modernism and mass culture, highlights the modernist aesthetics of the feminists and suffragettes, and informs women's literary modernism, particularly in relation to 'male' high modernism.

One can trace the desire to explode dominant forms and traditions through a shared aesthetic in both the tactics of the first wave feminists and the modernist writers and artists. And as Janet Lyon argues, the links go beyond a shared aesthetic between two ostensibly separate movements. The suffragettes and feminist activists did not exist 'alongside' the development of modernism; they were '*there, in the middle of the Modern*' (17).

With regard to the specific relationship between the modernist women writers and the feminist activists, Marianne DeKoven's assertion that the women modernists feared a backlash for desiring the very hegemony the male modernists feared losing due to the shift in gender roles offers insight as to why the women modernists began to distance themselves from the feminist movement (*Rich and Strange* 4). However, as Friedman and Fuchs argue, by 'exploding dominant forms' with their narrative style, they 'not only assail social structure, but also produce an alternate fictional space, a space in which the feminine, marginalized in traditional fiction and patriarchal culture can be expressed'; as such '[the] rupturing of political forms becomes a political act' (4).

This complex relationship between the male and female avant-garde is exposed as viewed through the two opposed strands of feminist criticism, gynesis and gynocriticism; on the one hand, as Gilbert and Gubar point out, theorists including Kristeva, Cixous, and Jardine 'have celebrated the subversive linguistic *jouissance* that they see as having been facilitated by the "revolution in poetic language," the fragmentation of traditional forms, and the decentering of the "subject" – aspects they associate with modernism (*No Man's* xiv). From this perspective, 'the "feminine" is virtually identical with the anarchic impulse that fuels the disruptive innovations of the avant-garde, whether that avant-garde includes James Joyce or Gertrude Stein, William Carlos Williams or Virginia Woolf' (*No Man's* xiv). In other words, the 'feminine' is at the heart of the modern.

The chapter that follows looks at the intersection of feminism and adaptation, which picks up on the debates discussed in this chapter. Essential to any discussion of adaptation – as well as being able to interpret modernist women's narratives towards opening them up for adaptation – is a consideration of authorship, an aspect that has direct parallels to the opposing threads of gynesis and gynocriticism; whereas gynocriticism sees the author as very much alive, gynesis is aligned with the poststructuralist embrace of the Barthesian concept of the 'death of the author'.

Drawing from a discussion of authorship – as well as the issue of fidelity – the next chapter in turn sets out to identify the components of a feminist theory of adaptation, one that informs the framework through which I analyze my own adaptation in Chapter Five.

CHAPTER TWO

The Intersection of Feminism and Adaptation: Authorship, Fidelity and Feminist Approaches to Stage Adaptation

Critical to approaching my own stage adaptation of Margery Latimer's *This Is My Body* is an understanding of how the concepts of authorship and fidelity function, particularly in a feminist context. This chapter begins with the argument that the issue of authorship has served to fan and focus the discourse around a woman's place not only in the text, but also in society and history; indeed, to chart feminist critical engagement with Barthes's concept of the death of the author is to chart the course of feminist literary criticism—further defining the split between gynesis and gynocriticism, as well as modernism versus realism. Following on this, issues of fidelity are examined. Ultimately, all three – death of the author, fidelity and feminist criticism – are considered in the context of feminist theatre, and feminist stage adaptation, to identify a framework of strategies that inform my own adaptation process.

Part One looks in depth at authorship, and the impact death of the author criticism has had on feminist critical theory, arguing that rather than leading to the demise of feminist criticism, the challenges it poses have had a generative and enriching effect.

Part Two looks at fidelity and how it functions in terms of adaptation.

Part Three draws upon issues of authorship and fidelity in the context of feminist theatre to conceive of a framework of strategies for feminist stage adaptation.

I. Feminist Literary Criticism and the Authorship Debate

The debate over authorship—brought to the fore with the publication of Roland Barthes's 'The Death of the Author' in 1968, although the groundwork had been laid by Julia Kristeva's introduction of the term 'intertextuality' in the early 60's—has had a profound impact on literary criticism, and feminist literary theory in particular. Indeed, some critics consider the legacy of the authorship debate upon feminist discourse to be so devastating as to threaten the very concept of feminism itself; as Seán Burke concludes in *The Death and Return of the Author*, '[feminist] adoptions of the death of the author/subject have led to something very close to the death of feminism as an ethical, social, and political movement' (194). What Sarah Wilson calls the 'insoluble dilemma' for feminist critics lies in the choice the death of the author concept presents them with – whether a woman author ought to claim her own subjectivity, or enter into the claim of an identity that is both originary and paternalistic. In other words, while embracing the death of the author ostensibly offers equal access to what has always been a very white and male-dominated literary canon, doing so also means repressing the very aspects—such as gender, race, and heritage—that form one's identity.

'The Death of the Author': Kristeva and Barthes

While Barthes's essay 'The Death of the Author' is widely considered to have caused a revolution in literary criticism when it was published in 1968, in fact the idea of 'disappearing' the writer/author in favor of an autonomous text was hardly new. The idea was already being vigorously explored, albeit in the context of Julia Kristeva's newly introduced concept of '*intertextualité*' as set out in 'Word, Dialogue, and Novel' (1966) and 'The Bounded Text' (1966-67), in which she builds upon the work of Mikhail Bakhtin by approaching the text 'as a dynamic

site in which relational processes and practices are the focus of analysis instead of static structures and products' (Friedman, 'Weavings' 147). Rather than possessing a fixed meaning, the 'literary word' as Kristeva describes it, might serve as '*an intersection of textual surfaces*', 'a dialogue among several writings' (65). Indeed, she writes of a 'translinguistic doubleness'—the phenomenon in which a word is made up of other words, a text of other texts, which in turn locates texts 'within history and society' (66).

Thus the act of reading involves interpreting this 'doubleness' or 'ambivalence'. The active writer is both reader of these texts and one who rewrites them; as Susan Stanford Friedman points out, 'the writer, as the "writing subject", is presented as one of the three intersecting coordinates of a text, along with the "addressee" (reader) and "exterior texts"' ('Weavings' 148). And it is through this act of writing that the writer *disappears*—'becomes an anonymity, an absence, a blank space' (Kristeva 74). From the moment the narrative begins—which is also 'the very moment the writer appears'—'we feel nothingness', and it is upon 'this zero where the author is situated, [that] the *he/she* of the character is born' (Kristeva 75). As such, Kristeva's 'death of the writer' allows for the 'birth of the author', 'a proper name' that takes up the emptiness in the text—no longer the 'writer', but a 'signifier' (Kristeva 75).

Kristeva's death of the writer in favor of an author-signifier can be traced directly in Barthes's suggestion two years later, in 'The Death of the Author', that 'writing is the destruction of every voice, every point of origin. Writing is that neutral, composite, oblique space where our subject slips away, the negative where all identity is lost, starting with the identity of the body writing' (142). And in the same way that Kristeva marks the beginning of the narrative as the moment a 'writer' becomes a 'zero'—an emptiness in the text only to resurface later as a 'proper noun' and signifier—so too does Barthes proclaim that once 'a fact is narrated no longer with a view to acting directly on reality but intransitively'—in other words, 'outside of any function other

than that of the very practice of the symbol itself—a ‘disconnection occurs, the voice loses its origin’ and ‘the author enters into his own death, writing begins’ (142).

Although the terms ‘writer’ and ‘author’ have different meanings within each of their discourses—for Kristeva, it is the ‘writer’ who disappears and re-emerges later as signifying ‘author’, whereas for Barthes it is the ‘author’ as ‘writer’ who disappears to give birth to the ‘reader’, for the purposes of comparing Kristeva and Barthes, ‘writer’ and ‘author’ might be conflated to signify the same ‘active writer’ or human hand that sets down the text. And the text itself is another aspect that reflects the influence of Kristeva’s concept of intertextuality upon Barthes’s death of the author. For both Barthes and Kristeva, the text might be a ‘mosaic’; as Barthes describes it, it is ‘a tissue of quotations’, ‘a multidimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash’—and it is within this space that the author/writer is subsumed amongst an interplay of signifiers (146).

However, there is a key difference in this vein, as Susan Stanford Friedman points out; for Kristeva, ‘intertextuality invites the “translinguistic” analysis of cultural texts in literary texts’, whereas ‘Barthes asserts that writing is “intransitive”’—in other words, ‘language is nonreferential, signifiers refer only to other signifiers in the ceaseless play of signification, in the endless deferral of the signified’ (‘Weavings’ 148). For Barthes the intransitive act of writing comes not only at the author’s death, but at the hand of a ‘modern scriptor’—it is a hand that is ‘cut off from voice, borne by a pure gesture of inscription (and not of expression)’; one that ‘traces a field without origins—or which, at least, has no other origin than language itself, language which ceaselessly calls into question all origins’ (146). Further, Barthes’s modern scriptor ‘no longer bears within him passions, humors, feelings, impressions’; instead ‘he draws a writing’ from an ‘immense dictionary’, a phenomenon that prompts Barthes to declare that ‘life never does more than imitate the book, and the book itself is only a tissue of signs’ (147).

Following from this, is perhaps the most important consequence of the death of the author—that it allows for the ‘birth of the reader’; as Barthes writes, ‘a text is made of multiple writings, drawn from many cultures’—it is a text that ‘[enters] into mutual relations of dialogue, parody, contestation’, a text that he proposes has ‘one place where this multiplicity is focused, and that place is the reader’ (148). Defined as such, the reader becomes ‘a space’, ‘a destination’ where ‘all the quotations that make up a writing are inscribed without any of them being lost’; one who is ‘without history, biography, psychology’; one, simply, who ‘holds together in a single field all the traces by which the written text is constituted’ (148).

The Author as a Function

Michel Foucault responded with his 1969 essay ‘What is an Author?’ in which, like Barthes, he takes modern literary critics to task for defining the author as ‘the basis for explaining not only the presence of certain events in a work, but also their transformations, distortions, and diverse modifications’ (214). He sees this carried out in the practice of attaching meaning to a text ‘through [an author’s] biography, the determination of his individual perspective, the analysis of his social position, and the revelation of his basic design’ (215). Also in line with Barthes, Foucault faults the manner in which the author is allowed to serve as ‘the principle of a certain unity of writing – all differences having to be resolved, at least in part, by the principles of evolution, maturation, or influence’, where ‘contradictions that may emerge in a series of texts’ are ‘neutralized’ at ‘a point . . . where incompatible elements are at last tied together or organized around a fundamental or originating contradiction’ (215). Instead, he takes a similar path to Barthes and Kristeva, asserting that:

Writing unfolds like a game [jeu] that invariably goes beyond its own rules and transgresses its limits. In writing, the point is not to manifest or exalt the act of writing, nor is it to pin a subject within language; it is, rather, a question of creating a space into which the writing subject constantly disappears. (206)

Foucault's argument with Barthes is that his definition of the author is too simplistic; refining Barthes's argument, Foucault presents the author as a function, which in turn enables him to highlight the distinction between, on the one hand, the author as an institution, and on the other, the author as an autonomous originating subject. As such, he is able to argue that as a function—one that is 'the opposite of [the] historically real function' he has come to represent—the author has never been more alive':

the author is not an indefinite source of significations that fill a work; the author does not precede the works; he is a certain functional principle by which, in our culture, one limits, excludes, and chooses . . . if we are accustomed to presenting the author as a genius, as a perpetual surging of invention, it is because, in reality, we make him function in exactly the opposite fashion. (221)

Foucault also sees *écriture* as another concept that 'has detained us from taking full measure of the author's disappearance', for it 'avoids confronting the specific event that makes it possible' but also, 'in subtle ways, continues to preserve the existence of the author' (208). As Leideke Plate points out, 'To give writing a status of precedence over the author it kills is in no way to dislodge the author from his privileged position in relation to the text' ('I Come from' 161).

For Foucault, the author serves as ‘the ideological figure’ that ‘marks the manner in which we fear the proliferation of meaning’ (222). While he acknowledges that ‘[calling] for a form of culture in which fiction would not be limited by the figure of the author . . . would be pure romanticism’, he also asserts that ‘as our society changes . . . the author function will disappear, and in such a manner that fiction and its polysemous texts will once again function according to another mode’—a mode still bounded by ‘a system of constraint’, but ‘one that will no longer be the author’—rather it ‘will have to be determined or, perhaps, experienced’ (222).

If Barthes and Foucault make a case for the death of the author, it is one that as Sean Burke points out met with little, if any resistance. Referring to Barthes’s essay he writes, ‘On the one hand, its dictates have been accepted unreflectively . . . without the arguments proposed in the seven pages of his essay being themselves held up to any scrutiny’ (*The Death* 20). It was not simply accepted that the author ought to be dead, but that the author for all intents and purposes had died. Yet while both Barthes and Foucault call for the death of the author in their respective essays, nowhere do they suggest this has actually happened; “‘The Death of the Author’”, at its own testament, is not the description of an “event” prior to itself, and only the most spellbound of readers could conclude that it “occurs” in the course of the seven pages that Barthes devotes to the subject’ (Burke, *The Death* 28). Nevertheless, Barthes’s lesson justifying the author’s death proved sufficient for it to be ‘widely accepted by structuralist and poststructuralist critics almost as an article of faith’ (Burke, *The Death* 16).

‘The Death of the Author’ and Feminist Criticism

With the ‘Author-God’ slain, the implications in terms of expanding the pre-existing if ever-shifting literary canon are profound; as Sarah Wilson writes, ‘without an “author” proper, a centralized textual meaning, or metaphysics of essentiality, texts achieve a new power to be

endlessly interpreted and considered' (1). Beyond the possibilities for interpretation, with the death of the author comes the end of what many feminists have referred to as a 'patriarchal tyranny', one that dictates and dominates not simply the text itself, but whose presence has a profound impact on a text's reception; autonomy and anonymity mean—theoretically at least (as Foucault would have it)—that whoever is 'speaking' is irrelevant. And as has been seized upon by feminists, it is 'the Author, canonized, anthologized, and institutionalized, who excludes the less-known works of women and minorities from the canon, and who by his authority justifies the exclusion' (Miller, 'Changing' 104).

Thus the manner in which a number of feminist theorists have embraced the death of the author concept as first offered up by Barthes should come as no surprise. Chief among them is Toril Moi, who has called for a rejection of not simply 'the patriarchal ideology implied in the paternal metaphor' that saw 'the author as God the Father of the text', but who has also urged for an end to 'the *critical practice* it leads to'—one that 'relies on the author as the transcendental signified of his or her text'; it is a patriarchal critic for whom 'the author is the source, origin and meaning of the text', and to be free of 'this patriarchal practice of *authority*', one must 'proclaim with Roland Barthes the death of the author' (*Sexual/Textual* 62-63).

But not all feminists have agreed. The very anonymity offered by the death of the author has been viewed by some feminist critics as yet another means of invalidating and repressing an authorial identity vital to claiming a subjectivity too long denied. Even before Toril Moi attacked Elaine Showalter's author-focused, 'humanist' reading of Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own* in *Sexual/Textual Politics*, feminist critics were squaring off along a continental/theoretical divide, with the poststructuralist French-feminist theorists championing all that was deconstructed, de-centered, autonomous, anonymous and authorless, and the non-poststructuralist, gynocritical,

Anglo-American feminists steadfastly resisting (for women authors, at least) the loss of self, identity and subjectivity that poststructuralism and submission to the death of the author concept required.

Miller versus Kamuf and the Gendered Signature Debate

This split amongst feminist critics, which would resonate for decades, was played out in a confrontation on the pages of a 1982 issue of *Diacritics*, between Nancy K. Miller and Peggy Kamuf. Rita Felski sums up the frequently cited debate quite simply: ‘Miller insisted that it always matters whether a work is produced by a man or woman; Kamuf felt that feminists should actively question the norms of gender rather than help to shore up rigid distinctions between male and female authors’ (59). In other words, it was a debate about signatures; in her piece, ‘Replacing Feminist Criticism’, Kamuf argues that assigning a gendered signature to a text limits its meaning and play as a signifier, while Miller takes a correctionist stance and argues that ‘it matters who writes and *signs* as a woman’, and that ‘not to do so will reauthorize our oblivion’ (‘Text’s Heroine’ 49). According to Miller, ‘removal of the Author has made no room for a revision—it has, through a variety of rhetorical moves, repressed and inhibited discussion of any writing identity’ (‘Changing’ 104). However, Cheryl Walker points out the double standard in Miller’s argument: while it is necessary—indeed imperative—that women (and other non-canonical/ marginal writers) stake their claim to authorship, as Miller would have it, male (or canonical/ hegemonic) writers cannot (557); ‘Miller is suspicious of applying the same version of author erasure to women writers since [their] relation to subjectivity formation has been different’ (556).

For Miller, the loss of subjective agency that comes with the death of the author ‘does not necessarily work for women and prematurely forecloses the question of identity for them’; historically, women have not shared the same ‘relation of identity to origin, institution, production, that men have had’, they have not ‘felt burdened by too much Self, Ego, Cogito, etc.’

(‘Changing’ 106). As she declares in ‘The Text’s Heroine’, for women, ‘the signature—by virtue of its power in the world of circulation—is *not* immaterial. Only those who have it can play with not having it’ (53).

In order to navigate the tricky space that acknowledges the usefulness of the poststructuralist assault on the author while also resisting the practice when it comes to women and marginalized writers, Miller shifts her focus to women as readers. Not only does she ask, as Liedeke Plate points out, ‘the transgressive “question of subjectivity” that has been rendered illegitimate by Barthes’s and Foucault’s “stories of textuality”’, but ‘she does so not by returning to “the woman behind the work (writing)”, but by locating, within writing itself, what she terms “a female critical subject”’ (‘I Come from’ 163).

In ‘Arachnologies: The Woman, the Text and the Critic’, Miller argues that the textual model is gendered; it ‘[chooses] the spiders *web* over the spider and . . . the threads of lace over the lacemaker’ (271). Instead, she calls for what she terms ‘arachnology’; ‘a critical positioning which reads *against* the weave of indifferentiation to discover the embodiment in writing of a gendered subjectivity’ (272)—one which, as Plate points out, promises ‘both to retrieve the mythological figure of Arachne and return the productive agent of the weaving to Barthes’s disoriginating web’ (‘I Come from’ 163). Miller’s approach repeats Barthes’s shift in emphasis from writer to reader—only her shift is from woman as reader to woman as critical subject within a text—a move that acts ‘at a deliberately oblique (textual) angle to intervention’ (‘Changing’ 111). As Plate argues, ‘we might say that what Miller presents us with is a feminist *sub-version*’ (‘I Come from’ 163). Miller sees it as a positionality ‘troped as subversion—a political intertextuality—[that] remains necessarily a form of negotiation within the dominant social text’ (‘Changing’ 111).

Peggy Kamuf’s response to Miller reflects her poststructuralist stance, as she addresses what she identifies to be the two primary strategies adopted by feminist critics: ‘On the one hand an

expansion of institutions to include at their center what has been historically excluded; on the other hand, the installing of a counter-institution based on feminine-centered cultural models' (45). Yet as Sarah Wilson argues, 'the issue with both these approaches is that they appear as superficial reworkings of an essentially patriarchal structure'; as such, in Kamuf's view, Miller's approach ultimately acts to preserve the paternal ideology it seeks to subvert. Kamuf also takes aim at the humanist aspects of Miller's argument; she asks, 'To the extent that feminist thought assumes the limits of humanism, it may be reproducing itself as but an extension of those limits and reinventing the institutional structures that it set out to dismantle' (46). Instead, she sees Barthes's concept of the death of the author as allowing for a plurality that as Wilson writes, 'actually frees women to experience their subjectivity as it is: fluid, individual, and, thus far, inadequately framed and explored' (4).

This brings the debate between Miller and Kamuf back to the issue of assigning a gendered signature to a text—one which forces the question, how does one define a 'female author'? As Sarah Wilson points out,

this difficulty with definition is paramount to debates on canonicity in general; if the canon is to be reconstructed, representation becomes a key concern. This prompts the question, to which populations do various writers (or scriptors) belong to or identify with? Distinctions between sex and gender become problematic, mixed ethnicity and self-identification are salient, and inclusion becomes increasingly difficult to determine. (4)

Whereas Kamuf's view is built on the idea that 'women's writing is writing signed by women'—a concept that is nonetheless fluid, as it is not limited to 'productions signed by women alone,

but...all productions that put the 'feminine' into play—the feminine then being a modality or process accessible to both men and women', Miller's is provisionally determined by biology—for her, what defines women's writing is a woman's signature ('Text's Heroine' 50). In refuting Kamuf's argument, Miller highlights what she refers to as 'the political fallout of...bodily identities', citing as an example Catherine Stimpson, who writes how 'male writers...can appropriate the feminine as a stance for the male through which to express receptive subordination before God' while others, such as Henry James, 'write about women, particularly lovely victims' who are 'self consciously empathetic' and 'speak of and for the feminine' (Stimpson 88-87; Miller 'Text's Heroine' 51). Yet Miller points to how limited the male appropriation of the 'feminine' in writing is—and that it 'has everything to do with the ways in which the signature of women has functioned historically: in terms of the body, the sexual ideologies that define it; in terms of civil status, the legal restrictions that construct it' ('Text's Heroine' 51).

For all that she asserts the imperative of signing as a woman, Miller's approach also represents an attempt to operate from both within and outside the poststructuralist framework; her concept of a 'political intertextuality', is a positionality that exists as 'a form of negotiation within the dominant social text' ('Changing' 111). This is manifest, as Susan Stanford Friedman points out, in that even though Miller seeks to '[recoup] the concepts of agency, identity, subjectivity, and the "author" for feminist criticism', she nonetheless 'in theory and practice retains a poststructuralist emphasis on textuality' (470).

A New Concept of Authorship

Following on Miller, other feminist literary theorists have exercised ways of alternately working from, within or alongside the dominant poststructuralist framework; for example, in 'Feminist Literary Criticism and the Author' Cheryl Walker states her purpose as being to 'to

reopen the never fully closed question of whether it is advisable to speak of the author, or what Foucault calls “the author function” (553). As she proceeds to do so, she takes great care when discussing the experiences of women to use the qualifier ‘feminine’ as opposed to ‘female’, which as Sarah Wilson suggests, reflects the considerable influence poststructuralist thought has wielded upon feminist critical theory—even Susan Stanford Friedman, she continues, ‘is similarly suspicious of overtly humanist definitions of “woman” as potentially prioritizing certain feminist agendas over others’ (5). Friedman acknowledges there can never be a ‘pure’ form of gender, mediated as it is by a range of categories such as race, class, religion, sexual orientation, but as Wilson highlights, the issue of ‘what constitutes “woman,” including the problematic of invoking a universal “us” of women, indicates the larger issue . . . how best to coherently approach feminism, poststructuralism and the canon’ (5).

Walker argues for ‘a new concept of authorship that does not naively assert that the writer is an originating genius, creating aesthetic objects outside of history’, and also one that ‘does not diminish the importance of difference and agency in the responses of women writers to historical formations’ (560). Disturbed by what she considers the ‘antifeminist implications in Moi’s insistence that we joyfully proclaim the death of the author’, Walker aligns herself more closely with Miller, arguing that ignoring the writer ‘runs the risk of losing many stories important to our history’; in her view, the brand of ‘radical freedom’ Moi advocates ‘may in the end leave us without the tools necessary to consider the way biography and fiction are in dialogue with one another and provide a critique of patriarchy as well as, in some cases, models of resistance’ (560).

However, while she highlights the importance of the dialogue between text and biography, she does not see the work as entirely representative of the author as an individual; women’s writing might be read as ‘statements about actual women’s experiences in history’, but she urges that one must be wary of ‘sliding over the contradictoriness and opacity of such works as information about

the writer's psyche' (564-565). As Sarah Wilson observes, Walker views the author as 'one among many traces present in a text, an idea that incorporates Barthes's language while maintaining the importance of the female claim to identity' (6). Wilson describes Walker's theoretical stance as 'a situated poststructuralism', one which refuses to discount the author's influence on the text; Walker herself summarizes her view of authorship in five points co-opted from Marxist feminist critic Cora Kaplan: first, that literary texts have, rather than are, authors; second, that the fluid nature of subjectivity means authors are never complete subjective presences; third, that psychoanalysis and socio-political criticism, which explore an author's cultural engagement, are helpful but should not be considered on their own; fourth, that criticism should function to explore how ideology is manifest within a specific historical text or subjectivity, which is both social and psychic; and fifth, that the effects of Barthes's so-called hypostases—author, society, history, psyche—are neither unified nor totalizing, but rather it is through reading literature that one can gain the clearest understanding of the complexity of culture and psyche (566).

'My own brand of personal criticism', Walker writes, 'assumes that to erase a woman poet as the author of her poems in favor of an abstract indeterminacy is an act of oppression'; she closes with an observation that suggests the performative nature of gender: 'every version of the persona will be a mask of the author we cannot lightly remove' (571). As Sarah Wilson concludes, this 'allows for inexhaustible reading and writing experiences, as well as the perpetual re-construction of position in a text without inscribing the silence of the repressed in eliminating any form or remnant identity' (6).

Against Theory: Feminism, Poststructuralism and Identity Politics

If Walker, much like Nancy Miller, takes great care in defining her own theoretical path, striving to realize a discourse that acknowledges the woman as author without closing off

possibilities for textual interpretation that are as myriad and limitless as those promised when the author is assumed dead, others, such as Barbara Christian, have taken a far more revolutionary tack—one that blasts the very idea of a ‘text’. Indeed, her 1987 call to arms, ‘The Race for Theory’ questions the limits and usefulness of theory itself. According to Christian, an unchecked ‘race for theory’ has resulted in a ‘takeover [of] the literary world by Western philosophers from the old literary elite’ – just at the moment women, people of color, and other marginalized voices have started to find their way into the center (55).

On the question of authorship, her language leaves no doubt as to her position:

Now I am being told that philosophers are the ones who write literature, that authors are dead, irrelevant, mere vessels through which their narratives ooze, that they do not work nor have they the faintest idea what they are doing; rather they produce texts as disembodied as the angels. (56)

She also takes aim at what she sees as the ‘tendency towards monolithism’ in French feminist theory, which she accuses of limiting the definition of feminism and failing to ‘take into account the complexity of life—that women are of many races and ethnic backgrounds with different histories and cultures’ (59). Moreover, the French feminists’ emphasis on the female body as a means to a female language only serves to further the conception of woman as ‘Other’; ‘by positing the body as the source of everything French feminists return to the old myth that biology determines everything and ignore the fact that gender is a social rather than a biological construct’ (59-60).

Instead, Christian calls for feminist critics to question, ‘for whom are we doing what we are doing when we do literary criticism?’ For her, the answer is clear: ‘what I write and how I write is done in order to save my own life. And I mean that literally. Literature is a way of knowing...that

whatever I feel/know *is*' (61). For Christian, 'literary criticism is promotion as well as understanding', and her 'method', 'is not fixed, but relates to what I read and to the historical context of the writers I read *and* to the many critical activities in which I am engaged' (62).

Christian has not been alone in her harsh criticism of poststructuralist theory; others such as Thomas Kavanagh and Paul Smith have taken issue with the role poststructuralism has had in the creation of a hegemonic 'reigning elite', who, wielding a dense and exclusionary language, have created an atmosphere in which critics compete in performative displays of their own theoretical mastery that displace the very texts they are writing about (Kavanagh 10). However, Kavanagh's questions with regard to the limits of theory are motivated by his concerns with the master/disciple relationship fostered by the practice of theory; this relationship, Kavanagh warns 'serves to prolong and extend the progressively more self-enclosed and self-sustaining dialogue', one where '[the] real itself, that about which theory claims to speak, becomes at best irrelevant' (15).

On the other hand, Christian's issue is with the power takeover by the theoretical elite that has come at the very moment those from the margins have started finding their way towards the center. Thus Christian's primary concern is with canonicity; Kavanagh's is about setting limits to an enterprise that has overreached its bounds to dangerous effect ('Post/Post' 467-468).

The differentiating factor comes down to, in a sense, authorship; Christian's rejection of the dominant theoretical discourse (poststructuralism) is based on its impact on authorship—the manner in which it excludes, belittles, marginalizes those outside the center, who are without power. Whereas her concern with this vein of theory's more general ill—what motivates Kavanagh's argument, that it has descended into nothing more than a 'radical self-problematizing of language', which has lost sight of the 'real'—comes secondary.

Unlike Kavanagh, Paul Smith not only addresses the feminist discourse in his call for a new poststructuralist theory, but he cites it as holding the key to realizing a more 'responsible'

poststructuralism in the future—one that might recuperate ‘the human subject’. Specifically, he credits the opposition within feminist criticism—that between the ‘humanist’, non-poststructuralist gynocritics and the French ‘theoretical’ poststructuralists—as having advanced the concept of the-subject-as-agent. While Susan Stanford Friedman acknowledges the power of Smith’s critique of poststructuralism, she proceeds to use his argument to illustrate her own with regard to the dangers the recuperative project in poststructuralism poses for feminist criticism: that it reinforces a false binary, pitting the theoretical against the empirical or ‘humanist’, and conflates poststructuralism with all theory, which in turn delegitimizes all other frameworks; that it subtly dismisses what it appears to assimilate, and in doing so claims ‘true’ cultural radicalism; that the anti-humanist project of poststructuralism tends to base its critiques on little and inaccurate reading; and that it fails to acknowledge that many feminists never gave up the concepts poststructuralism now wants to recoup.

Indeed, of the humanists, Smith writes:

Promoting the positive valorization of women’s *experience*, they encourage an emphasis on the installation of a new and fairer balance: the point is to reweight the literary curricula so that women can find themselves represented there. The underlying assumptions about the nature of the human ‘subject’ here are at first sight depressingly familiar ones, relying upon a set of demonstrably humanist values and ideologies’
(135-36)

While Smith expresses his understanding of women’s need to claim an identity outside Otherness; and while he credits the political gains ‘humanist’ feminism has achieved; and while he sympathizes with ‘American’ feminists for the lashings they have suffered from the likes of Toril Moi; in the

end, as Friedman notes, 'he really cannot bring himself to identify a single worthwhile idea in "humanist" feminism' ('Post/Post' 477-478).

However, as Friedman also emphasizes, 'It would be misleading to suggest that Smith's repetition of the hegemonic claims of poststructuralism is idiosyncratically his or even that his privileging of European theory reflects his status as a man discussing feminism'; more likely the opposite is true:

He has accurately reproduced the accent with which poststructuralists in general frequently dismiss the work they associate with 'humanism' . . . Words like *humanist*, *essentialist*, *unsophisticated*, *naïve*, *simple*, *pragmatic*, *empirical*, *experience-based* or *expressive* are frequently used as descriptors by poststructuralists for non-poststructuralist work. But such terms have long ago lost any descriptive meaning . . . Instead, like gang insignia . . . they function covertly to establish the critic's place inside the poststructuralist club. ('Post/Post' 478)

This poststructuralist 'accent', the hegemonic claims that dictate so much of Smith's critique, particularly of feminism, stem directly from—and bring the argument right back to—Barthes. The impact of his ideas upon critical discourse, especially the death of the author concept, has fed the taboo placed on terms linked to experience, humanism, the self—a taboo that has remained at the heart of the conflict within feminist literary criticism.

Women's Claim to the Authority of Authorship

Christian's call to consider, 'For whom are we doing what we are doing when we do literary criticism?' pinpoints the issue at hand for feminist scholars—that of 'feminist engagement'—for as

Susan Stanford Friedman observes, ‘feminism in all its global manifestations is both under siege and on the rise’ (‘Post/Post’ 469). In other words, if, as Friedman suggests, feminist literary criticism is witnessing a ‘return of the repressed’—if the author is making a comeback, if agency is back on the table, and terms such as *self* and *experience* are now visible on the horizon—one must consider where and in what capacity academic feminists might be politically engaged; one must consider the politics inherent in how knowledge is formed and spread—and in this vein, as Friedman has emphasized, one must account for the fact that ‘women are themselves multicontexted’, and that ‘gender can never be experienced in “pure” form’, but is always mediated through other categories like race, ethnicity, religion, class, national origin, sexual preference, abledness, and historical era’; for it is this multiplicity that has derailed versions of the monolithic theory so often accused of favoring one kind of woman or feminist agenda over all others (‘Post/Post’ 471).

What has emerged is a more ‘humanistic’ vein of criticism—that which retains the ‘subject’, ‘self’ and ‘author’ as concepts, and effects a negotiation rather than rehabilitation or recuperation. Nancy Miller, Cora Kaplan, Rachel Blau DuPlessis, Barbara Yeager, Alicia Ostriker and Hazel Carby, to name just a few, have sought to effect just such a negotiation in their work; in other words, drawing upon both poststructuralist strategies and concepts, and revisionist incarnations of concepts such as ‘author’, ‘self’ and ‘agency’.

The key, as Friedman points out, is that this type of theorizing hinges on deconstructing the history/theory binary; ‘[it] involves a commitment to self-consciously historicizing theory and theorizing history’ (‘Post/Post’ 482). Just as a historian, in searching for ‘the’ story, must accept there are multiple stories, each shaped by the hermeneutics of its own distinct critic-as-narrator, it is also important to understand the historical conditions out of which a given theory has emerged, as well as the possibilities for using it in other frameworks—for example, using deconstruction in a

reading for a historical analysis; in the simplest terms, historicizing theory means accepting that a theory is just a theory—not a fact (Friedman, ‘Post/Post’ 483-486).

Certainly, the blurring of the theory/history binary has profound implications for critical discourse in general, but it bears especially on feminist criticism, where aspects such as history, identity and subjectivity have always been issues of contention. Looking back on feminist literary criticism as it has evolved, one can identify this historicizing of theory and theorizing of history in the work of non-poststructuralists from Barbara Christian and Elaine Showalter, to Nancy Miller, Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar; all of whom, despite strong resistance on an institutional and ideological level, refused to buy in to the claim that ‘women’s past writing could inscribe only their Otherness within phallogocentric discourse’ (Friedman, ‘Post/Post’ 480).

Now, more than thirty years on from Nancy Miller and Peggy Kamuf’s debate in *Diacritics* on the importance of authorship in feminist criticism, Claire Kahane points out that not only is ‘the author’ more alive than ever, but ‘women writers especially have claimed the authority of authorship both inside and outside the academy in no uncertain terms’ (121). While feminist critics have by no means reconciled their theoretical differences or seen women and other marginalized writers adequately represented in a revised canon, at least one thing is clear: feminist adoptions of the death of the author/subject have not led to the death of feminism as an ethical, social, and political movement, as suggested by Burke. Rather, the question of authorship has provided the space—an area of disagreement not just conducive but necessary—to sustain and expand feminist critical theory.

In relation to fidelity criticism, which is examined in the section that follows, the arguments surrounding authorship and issues of fidelity hinge on a similar point of contention amongst critics, one that as with the feminists, forces a rift along the poststructural divide. In the same way that death of the author criticism questions the relationship between author and text, so too does

fidelity criticism challenge that between an ‘original’ work and the resulting adaptation; in other words, both address the issue of whether a work exists separate from its author or antecedent – which in turn, speaks to the idea of modernism itself – that a work of art be self-contained, and considered autonomous of any external referents (an aspect that is explored in Chapter Three).

Following on the above discussion of the death of the author concept and its impact on feminist criticism, an in-depth consideration of fidelity – or perhaps, ‘the case for (in)fidelity’ as argued by Thomas Leitch and others – is essential towards conceiving a feminist approach to adaptation.

II. Fidelity: Or, the Case for (In)Fidelity

The backlash against fidelity criticism in adaptation studies is much like the one launched in the last few decades against domestic realism as a viable form in American theatre (or the rift that has split feminist theatremakers, with regard to whether it is possible for realist theatre to also be feminist); in the case of domestic realism on the American stage and fidelity criticism, while both have served as the dominant paradigm in their respective milieus, both have also been attacked for being inadequate and outdated. And yet both persist.

Fidelity criticism, for all the objections to its ‘covert moralizing’ and that it makes for ‘boring criticism’ (Connor 1-2), is not a flawed mode, nor should it be done away with. The problem lies not with fidelity discourse itself, but in what J. D. Connor terms the ‘fidelity reflex’—‘the persistent call for it to end’ (5); moreover, as George Raitt points out, in rejecting fidelity, ‘one tends to throw out the baby with the bathwater’ (the ‘baby’ being a consideration of all the ‘visual and verbal changes that happen when a literary work is adapted’) (47). The fault also lies in the failure to identify and put to practice other modes of criticism—whether they be factors

‘masked by fidelity’ as Raitt suggests (47), or simply a failure to look beyond comparative textual studies and consider adaptation in terms of its material/economic, social/cultural and reader/viewer functions. What is called for is more of a front and back-end approach; where scholarship until recently has concentrated on the ‘back-end’ or formative aspects related to the *creation* of an adaptation, what has been left relatively unexplored are factors related to ‘the front end’—i.e. what the final product as it resonates with an audience, a culture, a society or within a given material/economic climate might tell us. Used together, these approaches promise not only to inform one another, but also to overlap, creating a hybrid line of investigation that ‘adapts’ to the adapted work it seeks to interpret.

The emphasis on fidelity criticism in adaptation studies reflects the underlying question faced by researchers and practitioners of adaptation from one medium to another: How important is the fidelity of an adaptation to its source? Under the ‘old’ paradigm of fidelity-based criticism, certainly fidelity to the source is assumed to be paramount. However, with the reaction against fidelity criticism, the questions have changed and stances differed, from those who maintain the importance of fidelity—albeit on varying levels, from literal to traditional to radical—to those who reject it entirely such that the very practice of adaptation has been called futile and pointless.

In order to understand why fidelity criticism in conjunction with newer lines of enquiry is still vital to adaptation studies, this section touches on both its origins and why it has continued to dominate—and in doing so, focuses on where the backlash against fidelity has been flawed or simply gone too far. This section also looks at some of the alternative modes that are only now beginning to emerge, and considers how they might be used to form a process of investigation that adapts to best evaluate a given adaptation. Finally, this section considers issues of fidelity specifically in relation to authorship and feminist criticism, laying the groundwork for the final section of this chapter, which seeks to identify the components of a feminist theory of adaptation.

Fidelity Criticism: Origins and Backlash Against

George Bluestone's *Novels into Film* (1957) is widely considered to be the first serious study of adaptation as applied to 'novels into film'. Bluestone takes what Sarah Cardwell refers to as a 'medium-specific' approach that posits the inherent differences between mediums as so at odds as to make achieving fidelity impossible (43). According to his view, as Rochelle Anne Hurst argues, this in turn '[warrants] doing away with adaptation altogether' (82). By operating on the basis that fidelity is the ultimate goal of adaptation, Hurst points out that Bluestone not only forefronts a binary relationship between the original and adapted work, but also assumes an insurmountable superiority of the original over the adaptation, such that adaptation becomes something 'distorted and deviant', which 'fails to achieve the very thing it sets out to do' (82).

Leading scholars in the field including Robert Stam, Brian McFarlane, Kamilla Elliot and Thomas Leitch are among those who have consistently lamented fidelity's hold; as Simone Murray states, the frustrations of these 'insider critics' stem from 'the discipline's production of a seemingly endless stream of comparative case-studies', which 'has since ossified into an almost unquestioned methodological orthodoxy within the field' ('Materializing' 4). In seeking to work around it, many of these same critics have instead served to further entrench what Hurst views as a 'scholarly obsession with [fidelity]'; of Brian McFarlane's *Novel to Film* she points out that while 'McFarlane contends that the quest for fidelity is fruitless', his emphasis on the 'transferability' of certain 'narrative functions' that exist in addition to those that are medium-specific undermine 'his seemingly dissenting take on fidelity' (196).

The critical focus on fidelity stems from something more basic; the impulse to compare an adaptation to the original is a natural reaction—and one that 'consistently [generates] passionate yet predictable responses from audiences as to the degree of their fidelity to their respective literary

origins' (Hurst 78). What has followed from contemporary adaptation theorists—'despite genuine attempts to curtail the fixation'—has been labeled by some as nothing more than 'sophisticated language, disguised by academic jargon'; however, it has been asserted by these same critics that 'the existence of a scholarly campaign to challenge this mode of assessment suggests that the opposite is true – that fidelity criticism *is* inherently flawed' (Hurst 78). Yet one might contend that this argument is in itself flawed, insofar as the scholarly campaign to discredit fidelity-based criticism stems from a frustration with the stymied state of adaptation studies itself; as Simone Murray points out, despite the considerable enthusiasm for fidelity-based criticism when it emerged in the late 50s, critics have been slow to come up with alternative approaches in the ensuing decades beyond seeking to get around it by means of a poststructuralist approach that relies heavily on deconstruction, narratology and structuralism in order to upend the binary framework which favors the original ('Materializing' 6).

Film critic Philip Lopate expresses these sentiments when he asks, 'might there still not be something unstoppably human in our hope that beloved novels be rendered faithfully on-screen, or at least not distorted beyond recognition?' (qtd. in Kranz and Mellerski, 'Introduction' 4). While he praises the scholarly challenges to 'the old literary-cinematic dichotomy' he maintains that fidelity should not be discarded and expresses his disappointment that challenging fidelity by 'putting everything through the theoretical strainer of Barthes, Foucault, Derrida, Bakhtin, and Genette' in order to liberate adaptation studies 'from the onus of fidelity' only serves to 'chain' it 'to the wagons of dialogism and intertextuality' (qtd. Kranz and Mellerski 'Introduction' 4).

What is perhaps most provocative with regard to the influence of 'dialogism and intertextuality' is Hurst's theory of adaptation as an 'undecidable'; an 'undecidable' as defined by Derrida being:

‘false’ verbal properties [...] that can no longer be included within philosophical (binary) opposition, but which, however, *inhabit* philosophical opposition, resisting and disorganizing it, *without* ever constituting a third term, without ever leaving room for a solution in the form of speculative dialectics.’ (qtd. in Hurst 93)

As such, an adaptation is not part of either side of the binary, but occupies *both* sides. Like Plato’s *pharmakon*, it is ‘neither remedy or poison, neither good nor evil’; in other words, an adaptation might be viewed as ‘a hybrid, an amalgam of media’ (Hurst 93-94).

Film critic Colin MacCabe touches on something similar to this in his discussion of the film theorist Andre Bazin’s concept of adaptation as ‘two media making a whole’ rather than ‘one medium translating another’ (4). Bazin, McCabe writes, argued that ‘what was at stake was not a copy of one medium by another, or a substitution, but the production of a “new dimension” in which the source text is expanded and developed (4). Whether viewed as a ‘new dimension’ or ‘undecidable’, an adaptation is effectively freed from the bind that preferences the original. Emphasis is placed on adaptation’s capacity to ‘conflate and merge’ while at the same time establishing the adapted work’s independence from its source text (Hurst 95). As an undecidable, adaptation ‘bridges the gap’—and according to Hurst, ‘[calls] into question the discourse that finds its basis in [the] strict bifurcation [between original and adaptation]’ (95-96). Hurst uses this ‘strict bifurcation’ upon which she contends fidelity discourse is based as grounds for dismissing it entirely as an ‘unsuitable critical measure’ (96). However this judgment seems all too extreme, particularly when held up against the arguments of fidelity’s defenders.

In Defense of Fidelity

As Kranz and Mellerski point out in the 'Introduction' to their 2008 collection of essays *In/Fidelity*, a more recent and comprehensive study of the fidelity issue, the thrill of watching adaptations—be it film or theatre—'lies in witnessing how the personally remembered or culturally widespread understanding of those beloved artifacts is reproduced or translated in the new medium' (2). They point out that fidelity is 'an important issue in viewer response'; it triggers something innate and visceral: 'the human desire for security and immortality' (2). For this reason, adaptations dominate the film industry, and have taken over Broadway and the West End; their appeal is indisputable, and fidelity is at the heart of this appeal. Thus, to do away with fidelity-based criticism—to deny the value of fidelity in adaptation—would limit future scholarship in the field. What has held back the field of adaptation studies is the *obsession* with fidelity—an obsession that is not unwarranted, given its significance—but to do away with it altogether (assuming this is possible) would be extreme, unproductive and damaging.

Dudley Andrew hits on this in his essay 'Economies of Adaptation' in which he describes fidelity as 'the umbilical cord that nourishes the judgments of ordinary viewers as they comment on what are effectively aesthetic or moral values' (27). He attributes 'the leading academic trend [that] has ignored or disparaged [the] concern with fidelity' to a frustration with 'the vertical line that anchors [an adaptation] to its literary substrate' (27). The response has been a postmodern approach, that finds value in every adaptation for 'the way it vibrates the horizontal network of neighboring texts, none of them to be taken as "superior", not even the novel that may lend its name, plot and characters' (28). Andrew suggests that if 'the vertical line that anchors [an adaptation] to the bedrock of its source remains intact', the adapted work 'can draw away from the system, submerging an audience in a different sensibility and set of values' (32).

Andrew turns to Lawrence Venuti in expanding on this, citing Venuti's belief that the 'original is mediated by an "interpretant" (or ideological grid) while on the way to becoming a new or adapted text'—and it is this interpretant 'that governs the choices made in an adaptation' (32). As an example, he points out that 'theatre in its living form always involves directors and dramaturges, who embody the role of "interpretant"' (33).

Venuti argues that we should isolate the different 'interpretants' operating in the two moments of creation, both to appreciate their respective achievements and also to assess the propriety of the filmmaker's choices. But that assessment should be sensitive to cultural, not just semiotic, values and so would indeed involve a horizontal as well as vertical dimension... (Andrew 32).

The suggestion that taking into account both vertical and horizontal dimensions, as well as considering cultural—and material—values suggests that issues of fidelity are not incompatible with other modes of assessment, but might be used to form a hybrid line of investigation.

Alternative Modes

Critics have put forth a variety of alternative modes to fidelity-based criticism. Rochelle Anne Hurst highlights four possibilities, the first being 'reader response' or 'reception theory', taken from Joy Gould Boyum's *Double Exposure: Fiction into Film*. Boyum contends that 'a literary work has no mode of existence in itself' — that 'it comes into being only as a partner in a cooperative venture with a reader who inevitably brings to bear an entire constellation of past experiences, personal associations, cultural biases and aesthetic perceptions' (xi). Hurst uses this not simply to problematize fidelity, given 'its suggestion of the inherent instability of meaning'

(105), but asserts that it ‘effectively exposes the meaninglessness of fidelity’ (106). While she expresses frustration with Boyum’s ‘scholarly reluctance to abolish fidelity’, she herself admits that reader response, ‘when applied with absolute abandon, ultimately renders texts absent of meaning’ (106). This suggests that some degree of fidelity must be maintained.

The other models she offers include the intertextual model, which ‘problematizes the demand for fidelity by relegating an adaptation’s source text to the status of one of many competing intertexts’ (107). The ‘recognition of a multitude of texts’ is essentially recognition of the horizontal dimensions—which as Venuti argues, can be used in conjunction with a consideration of a text’s vertical dimension—one that is governed by fidelity. Her two remaining models also involve pivotal overlaps with fidelity—the ideological model, which considers the political implications of how a source text is adapted, and the feminist ‘revisioning’, in which canonical or patriarchal texts are reimagined, putting female characters and their experiences at the forefront. Both of these models benefit from comparative analysis, in which an assessment of the similarities and differences between adaptation and source contributes to an understanding of the political, ideological and cultural forces at play.

In taking apart fidelity, the answer might be as simple as Thomas Leitch’s suggestion that the way forward lies in ‘inverting the customary moral polarities that are attached to fidelity discourse’ (‘Fidelity Discourse’ 206). Rather than viewing ‘infidelity’ as a detractor—something deviant or false—it ought to be recognized for its potential to unlock all manner of ‘productive, newfound possibilities’ (‘Fidelity Discourse’ 207). In fact, fidelity and infidelity might not be so diametrically opposed; as George Raitt suggests, might fidelity and ‘difference’—the aspects that change when a work is adapted—really be ‘two sides of one coin?’ (47).

Sameness and difference are not binary opposites unless one can hold the criteria of comparison constant (which would appear to be impossible). So, for example, every orange is distinct and different from every other orange, even though they are the same kind of fruit and share the same distinctive taste, whereas an orange and an apple are the same on the criteria of satisfying hunger, but different on taste, eating characteristics, and nutritional content (and for this reason more likely to be regarded as 'equivalent' rather than the same). In the case of literature and film, the criteria of comparison are many and varied. Analysis of these concepts suggests that there will generally be multiple criteria of comparison so that sameness on one criterion will be consistent with difference on others. (Raitt, G. 54-55)

Comparative analysis that allows for both sameness *and* difference promises to be conducive to what Maureen Quinn calls for: investigating 'how the overall themes and intentions of both expressions of the story might shed light on the other' (7). Similarly, Kamilla Elliott urges a move away from seeing adaptation as a 'rivalry' between a novel and its (film) adaptation, but more as a means of viewing both through 'reciprocal looking glasses', allowing for 'an endless series of inversions and reversals' (209-212).

In a sense, the concept of sameness and difference as not opposites but 'two sides of the same coin' is like Leitch's suggestion of inverting the polarities—only Raitt has this a step further by doing away with privileging one or the other—in other words, attaching 'good' or bad', 'plus' or 'minus' to either infidelity or fidelity. Leitch hints at this when he states,

...if you find you can't go cold turkey on fidelity discourse, no matter what you do, here's one last suggestion: try treating fidelity as a specific but by no means privileged

possibility...In other words, take fidelity not as your evaluative criterion, but as your subject. ('Fidelity Discourse' 208)

When fidelity/infidelity are equalized, the focus shifts to their respective possibilities for creating a unique and transcendent entity that while born of the 'fidelity impulse', has been shaped by infidelity. This approach also highlights a major flaw of the ongoing fidelity debate; as J. D. Connor points out, the focus on whether an adaptation is faithful or not has allowed for questions of *quality* to be bypassed (2).

Looking at the dynamic between fidelity and infidelity from another angle, it bears returning to Venuti's theory regarding the horizontal/vertical possibilities—for 'infidelity' to occur, it requires some hint or shadow of the marriage that began the relationship; the vertical connection, no matter how faint, serves as the 'umbilical cord' between the source text and the adapted work, while the horizontal might be the realm of infidelity, allowing for a range of interpretations (or rather, 'interpretants') from the intertextual, to reader response to the political, economic, ideological or feminist.

Leitch's other suggestions for new modes of criticism could in fact be seen to overlap with or extend these fidelity/infidelity-based paradigms; for example, he puts forward the idea of using economic models that look at how an adaptation fulfills the material goals of those who created it, as well as how it meets the needs of its consumers/audience ('Fidelity Discourse' 207). Simone Murray also takes on the issue, calling for 'research that would provide the necessary production-oriented perspective on adaptation to complement existing approaches' ('Materializing' 14). The focus of this work would be to explore 'how conceptualizing the industrial substructures of adaptation provides new understandings of why texts take the shape they do and how they influence or respond to audience evaluation' (14). Certainly issues of fidelity/infidelity would have profound

implications in such research – for example, in regard to Hutcheon’s idea of a ‘knowing’ audience familiar with a source text and their expectations of/response to an adaptation (*A Theory* 120-128); with regard to the economic impact as far as adaptation fuelling book sales; and in terms of the possibility for larger book deals when film/theatre adaptations are anticipated (Murray 9).

To sum up the fidelity issue, David Kranz offers a clear breakdown when he argues that ‘fidelity criticism is *not*, as Stam and others would have it, a superficial and untheorized privileging of the literary over the filmic for reasons of the original/copy binary (in other words, an unconscious favoritism for the literary)’; to attack fidelity thus, theorists in taking after Derrida ‘demonize past practice by offering a false dichotomy in which the only options are a benighted set of essentialistic and moralistic fidelity critics on one side and enlightened French and Bakhtinian folks on the other’ (‘The Golden Continuum’ 202). As he concludes, the comparative textual method that makes up the foundation of fidelity criticism ‘is superior to plain old formalism in that it shows by clear contrasts what critics operating solely within a text must determine with much less certainty from various formal elements alone’ (Kranz, ‘The Golden Continuum’ 203).

Ultimately, as Walter Metz points out, ‘Faithful adaptations just as much as deconstructive ones hold interpretive secrets’ (212). Fidelity *and* infidelity are vital components to both the theory and practice of adaptation; moreover, seeking for new critical models and methodologies with a view to the abandonment of fidelity discourse has come at a great price—limiting or ignoring the possibilities for its use with other paradigms, and thus closing the door on new insights to the ‘interpretive secrets’ of the field in general. Not only is it possible for fidelity discourse to engage with other dialectics, but also reconceptualized as fidelity/*infidelity* discourse, it allows for an approach that in its fluidity and hybrid form promises to be most ideally suited to addressing the present burgeoning phenomenon of adaptation across a vast array of media.

Authorship, Fidelity and Feminist Adaptation: Conversation and Collaboration

Drawing from a consideration of authorship and fidelity in the context of a feminist approach to adaptation, Shelley Cobb's model of adaptation as a conversation, one that 'as applied to women's adaptation implies collaboration', is especially relevant to my own argument in Chapter Four, which explores the intimate connection modernist women's autobiographical narratives foster between author/narrator and reader/adaptor, one that in turn allows for an adaptation process that might be seen as a conversation and collaboration.

Cobb's focus is the representation of the woman author on screen in female-made adaptations; in other words, echoing Nancy Miller, she is interested in narratives that 'bear the signature of a woman', and as such, 'negotiate the feminist concerns of subjectivity, narrative, fantasy and desire, space and time, and, most importantly, agency through the figure of the woman author' (4). This approach is also significant, given my adaptation centers on the 'the figure of the woman author', effectively foregrounding the idea of female authorship. Citing Kaja Silverman's *The Acoustic Mirror: The Female Voice*, Cobb argues that in relation to women's film authorship, 'The crucial project with respect to the female voice is to find a place from which it can speak and be heard' (qtd. 16).

As a metaphor for adaptation, conversation invokes the Bakhtinian concept of dialogism; it is 'a model that privileges a multiplicity of voice in and between texts and theorizes the necessity of that multiplicity for the meaning-making of texts' (Cobb 10). As Cobb writes, 'dialogism promotes ways of 'restoring voice to the silenced', which in turn 'is akin to the interests of feminist theory and practice'; in other words, 'a feminist view of dialogism would also be interested in listening to those textual voices marginalized by virtue of their gender, sexuality, class and race' (11).

The implications of this approach to authorship and adaptation are also significant with regard to fidelity: viewing adaptation as a conversation, in which author and adaptor engage in a

collaboration, ‘removes authorship from fidelity discourses and its inevitable hierarchy’; in other words, it is a model that ‘sidesteps [the] power struggles between and amongst all the participants’ (14). Conversation ‘also destabilizes the binaries of adaptation that centre on the materiality of the two texts (literature/film, word/image, verbal/visual) by making room for other participants beyond the two texts’; as both a process and product, the adaptation ‘converses with both the novel’s and the film’s historical, cultural, and aesthetic contexts’ (11). In other words, adaptation approached as a conversation – in the context of female-made adaptations that concern the representation of the woman author on screen – allows for a process akin to a creative dialogue between women creatives. These aspects are not only relevant, but foregrounded in my own adaptation, which takes up this idea, literally; Margery Latimer the author of the novel *This Is My Body* is not only a character in the play, but throughout the play she engages in conversation with Molly, a playwright who is adapting her novel.

Returning to Seán Burke; he suggests ‘It would scarcely be an exaggeration to say that the struggles of feminism have been primarily a struggle for authorship’ (*Authorship* 145). And as the first section of this chapter argues, death of the author criticism and the question of authorship have indeed had a profound impact on feminist literary criticism, and consumed a great deal of debate amongst feminist theorists. However, Cobb contends Burke’s suggestion ‘only makes sense if we think of authorship as a metaphor for agency and the struggle for female agency as the struggle to authorize oneself while being a woman’; as she points out, this is problematic for women in today’s culture, where successful subjectivity for women tends to be constructed as either ‘neo-traditional femininity or empowered sexualization’ (15). Yet as Cobb points out, ‘the woman author has more to define herself than her relationships or her body. She has something she owns: her story’ (15).

The section that follows considers the role of fidelity and the influence of feminist criticism on feminist stage adaptation practice; the function of fidelity in effecting a ‘feminist reading’ of an

adapted text or performance is a powerful one that might be carried out through a variety of strategies. The methods identified in this section are explored in my own analysis of my adaptation of Margery Latimer's *This Is My Body* in Chapter Five.

III. Feminist Theatre and Adaptation

Feminist theory, particularly as related to the death of the author concept and issues of fidelity, has had a profound impact on both feminist theatre and approaches to feminist stage adaptation; conversely, as Esther Beth Sullivan writes, 'the stage – with its potential to literally visualize bodies and the effects of gender ideology' – '[offers] a unique context within which feminist directors have theorized and foregrounded oppression' (13).

Within feminist theatre, there are a great many debates; a condensed overview of the primary issues surrounding liberal (or bourgeois) feminist theatre, the cultural (or radical) approach, and materialist feminist theatre strategies inform the process of feminist stage adaptation as related to my own approach, which is the focus of this section.

Objections to the liberal feminist approach reflect one of the main divides in feminist theatre, as well as the backlash against realism and its usefulness to the feminist project, which has a clear through-line to the debate between Showalter and Moi. As Elaine Aston writes, liberal feminists 'were prepared to argue for a greater representation of women in the theatrical "malestream", a position that was countered by those who saw the realist tradition as furthering the objectification of women' – for example, the method-based acting technique taught by Konstantin Stanislavski that encourages actresses to identify with the oppression of their female characters (*Feminist Theatre* 7). According to Sue-Ellen Case, 'the psychological construction of character, using techniques adopted by Stanislavski, place the female actor within the range of systems that

have oppressed [women's] very representation on stage' (*Feminism and Theatre* 122; Aston, *Feminist Theatre* 7).

For example, in 'Realism, Narrative and the Feminist Playwright', Jeanie Forte considers Marsha Norman's *night Mother* – a liberal feminist text that adopts the popular form of domestic realism and has seen considerable success in the 'malestream' (21). In terms of its relationship to the feminist agenda, Forte points out the play 'was touted by some critics as a feminist investigation of the hopelessness and degradation of women's lives in patriarchal society'; yet ultimately, she argues, it 'reinscribes the dominant ideology in its realist form' (22). The play's realism functions to 'maintain that illusion of reader-as-subject who shares with the absent narrator the position of knowingness and ultimate understanding'; by nature of being 'a coherent, unified text that renders up its pleasure in the satisfaction of catharsis', it offers up 'the illusion of change without really changing anything' (22). Indeed, as Forte notes, there has been considerable debate in feminist criticism as to whether it is even possible for a realist play to also be a feminist play.

Instead, feminists have sought to upend 'realism's relentless plotting toward the white, middle-class, male privilege the history of dramatic texts maintained' (Jill Dolan qtd. in Sullivan 16). Rather than the traditional, realist structures of 'women-belonging-to-men', women dramatists have looked to new theatrical forms and styles of performance with which to explore their themes, subjects and experiences. 'It was not so much a question of finding new forms, but of *re-working* old or established forms and styles, in the interests of feminist dramatic and stage practice/s' (Aston, *Feminist Theatre* 7).

For radical feminists, this has meant a focus on the body; given their view of the patriarchy as to blame for inequality between men and women, and emphasis on women's experiences, radical feminist theatremakers have sought to reclaim the female body. Unlike the liberal feminist approach, which has its parallels in terms of a theoretical model to the more humanist, Anglo-

American gynocritical model, the radical/cultural model is more closely identified with the French feminist model represented by Hélène Cixous and Julia Kristeva – one where ‘subjectivity is recognized as problematic for women, who are required to participate linguistically, socially, culturally, etc., in a system that constructs them as marginal and alien’ (Aston, *Feminist Theatre* 9). Indeed, Cixous’s call for the woman ‘to write herself’ such that the body serves as the site and practice of *écriture féminine* has had enormous appeal to radical feminist theatremakers (Aston, *Feminist Theatre* 10).

However, many share Jill Dolan’s argument, that what this approach offers is ‘a superficial representation of gender identity’, one that is still ‘defined by the ideology of sexual difference, an ideological system that benefits women as social subjects not at all’ (99). Moreover, as Aston points out, ‘re-viewing women’s experiences rooted/routed in and through the body was not enough, as this did not pay attention to the material conditions that produce and determine gender, class, race or sexuality’ (*Feminist Theatre* 11).

Their essentialist position has drawn criticism to a degree similar to that directed at liberal feminist theatre; moreover, both approaches have been faulted for ultimately reinforcing the dominant ideology. Instead, many feminist theatremakers have adopted a materialist approach, which sees gender as a social construct and recognizes not only ‘the invisible and unpaid labor of women engaged in childcare, cooking and cleaning’, but also the issues that separate various groups of women (Wilmer 162). Materialist feminism seeks to account for the idea that gender ‘is produced by representational processes that inscribe the ideology of gender through both psychoanalytic and material means of production’; as such, the goal of the materialist feminist theatre project is ‘to disrupt the narrative of gender ideology, to denaturalize gender as representation, and to demystify the workings of the genderized representational apparatus itself’ (Dolan 101). To accomplish this, Brechtian staging techniques have offered an ideal means for the

materialist project, particularly in how such an approach allows for what Aston describes as an ‘intervention in the apparatus of representation through the alienation of the gender sign system’ (*Feminist Theatre* 11).

The usefulness of Brechtian staging tactics to the materialist approach informs my own approach to women’s literary modernism – an aspect that is discussed in detail in Chapter Five – in terms of how such tactics foreground the gap between ‘women’ and ‘woman’. Drawn from Teresa de Lauretis’s work around systems of representation, and the manner in which such systems limit and oppress women, ‘woman’ refers to ‘a fictional construct, a distillate from diverse but congruent discourses dominant in Western cultures’, while ‘women’ refers to ‘the real historical beings who cannot as yet be defined outside of those discursive formations, but whose material existence is nonetheless certain’ (*Alice Doesn’t* 5; Aston, *Feminist Theatre* 12). As Aston points out, materialist feminist performers, in their efforts to ‘make visible the “gap” between the “real” and the representational’ – in other words, between ‘women’ as historical beings, and ‘woman’ the fictional construct – have found Brecht’s political theatre model to be particularly well suited to their goals (12).

The intervention that materialist feminist practice allows for in systems of representation – an intervention that is arguably more radical than either the liberal or cultural feminist approaches – makes it particularly powerful in terms of realizing feminist political objectives (Aston, *Feminist Theatre* 11). It is also ‘the domain in which a feminist practice has extensively collaborated with theory’ – one that combines a feminist revisioning of a Brechtian-based practice with its own materialist-feminist theorization of representation (Aston, *Feminist Theatre* 12).

All three of these feminist approaches – liberal, cultural/radical and materialist – illustrate the range of challenges and strategies to effecting feminist theatre, which carry over to feminist adaptation. What these differing approaches also make clear is that there is ‘no one way of making

feminist theatre, or making theatre feminist'; nor is there any 'predetermined set of rules' (Aston, *Feminist Theatre* 17-18). However, Aston does put forward one commonality in terms of function consistent across the spectrum of feminisms—the capacity to create a 'sphere of disturbance', a term she takes from Simone Benmussa, who defines her practice as one 'that "steals" or draws on whatever is necessary, from whatever is needed, to oppose categorization...to activate a sphere of doing for the purpose of "undoing"' (qtd. in Aston, *Feminist Theatre* 18).

That which feminist theatre practice seeks to disturb are our systems of representation that refuse women the possibility of representing themselves; refuses them agency, subjectivity, identity and so on. (Aston, *Feminist Theatre* 18)

The idea of disturbing systems of representation, of handing over agency and subjectivity to women, is an aspect that also drives the feminist adaptation process. Indeed – stating the obvious – conceiving a feminist adaptation involves many of the same considerations and processes as conceiving an 'original' feminist work of theatre.

Feminist Approaches to Stage Adaptation

In *Revising Narratives: Feminist Adaptation Strategies on Stage and Screen*, Lisa Jeanne Weckerle writes that at the most basic level, an adaptation is a reader's interpretation of a text; thus, when a text is read through the lens of feminist criticism, she argues, the resultant adaptation will be a feminist one (3). However, the varying forms of feminism make a strict definition of 'feminist adaptation' elusive if not impossible; moreover, an adaptation considered 'feminist' by one camp, might not be viewed as such by another (for example, as discussed, a liberal feminist adaptation

geared to thrive in the 'malestream' might be viewed as anti or simply not-feminist by radical or material feminist practitioners for how it conforms to a patriarchal model).

Nonetheless, Weckerle's approach to adaptation as a form of literary interpretation allows for considerable insight in terms of what makes an adaptation feminist – for example, in this model, the goal of the feminist adapter would involve creating a text that directs an audience towards a feminist reading of the original (21). This approach also helps to illuminate the tremendous potential of adaptation to open up and explore the spaces in a text, such that feminism might be 'infused' in the adapted version (Weckerle 5). This holds for both texts that already have a feminist message, as well as those that might possess a misogynistic or otherwise anti-feminist slant; in the former, the feminism might be foregrounded, or perhaps even recontextualized, while in the latter, the oppressive or anti-feminist aspects might be approached in a manner that exposes and/or challenges them.

Weckerle focuses on several key aspects of the adaptation process: the performance choices and theatrical techniques a feminist adapter might employ to foster a feminist 'reading' of the original text; the role of female subjectivity; how the disappearance of narrative affects the feminist perspective of a stage adaptation; and how issues of fidelity are manifest (8). She explores these aspects in the context of five strategies for feminist adaptation: consciousness-raising, revisioning, subverting gender roles, representing female subjectivity and retaining feminist critique. Although by no means the only strategies, for the purposes of this dissertation they serve as a useful framework through which to consider feminist adaptation, particularly in terms of how authorship and fidelity function.

The first strategy, consciousness-raising, follows on the principles of the women's consciousness-raising groups of the 70's that emphasized women's experiences in order to critique patriarchal culture (Weckerle 68). By nature of its emphasis on 'real women' and 'real stories',

consciousness-raising is perhaps most closely-aligned with the radical/cultural mode of feminist theatre – Jill Dolan writes that cultural feminists ‘adopted consciousness-raising’s modus operandi as its form’ – although it can function in other modes as well (86). As a strategy for feminist adaptation, consciousness-raising can be traced as early as the suffrage movement, which saw women playwrights and novelists adapting pieces to the stage that sought to make public their experiences as women and activists. Elizabeth Robins adapted her own novel, *Votes for Women*, incorporating verbatim scenes of actual suffrage demonstrations, effectively re-creating the experience, which in turn had the potential to incite in an audience the same activism that fuelled the historical event depicted onstage (Farfan 50). Indeed, consciousness-raising as a goal for theatre adaptation – whether feminist or otherwise politically driven – can act as a battle cry; as Weckerle writes, ‘adaptations that address specific problems are generally most successful in prompting the audience to take action’ (71).

Revisioning is a strategy that has particular significance in terms of fidelity, for how it functions as means of subverting the canon; it allows for ‘the overthrow of plays that favor male characters, male narratives, male bonding [and] male views of women’ (Weckerle 73). As such, revisioning challenges a fidelity-based approach to adaptation, and addresses its flaws in terms of fidelity’s tendency to preserve and reinforce the patriarchal constructs of the original. To effect a feminist revision of an existing or source narrative – be it an historical event, myth or fairy-tale – is to ‘rewrite women back into history’ and ‘disempower texts that perpetuate subordination of women’ (Weckerle 74). As Rochelle Anne Hurst notes, ‘women obviously cannot rewrite literary works so that they become ours by virtue of reflecting our reality’, however, by revisioning them, ‘we can accurately name the reality they do reflect’; and in doing so, the source text or narrative ‘will no longer be read as they have been read and thus will lose their power to bind us unknowingly to their designs’ (109).

This practice of ‘borrowing, revising [and] recontextualizing’ is nothing new, as Nancy Walker points out; it spans history, from works such as *Paradise Lost* to Shakespeare (1). And yet as ‘revisioners’, she argues, there is a distinction between the work of men and women, which in turn informs our understanding of feminist adaptation; because ‘women’s relation to language, literature, education, and cultural traditions has been made problematic and complex by centuries of unequal access to power and agency within these systems’, she writes that ‘male and female writers have not participated in this appropriative and revisionary process in the same ways or for the same reasons’ (2).

If a ‘disobedient’ reading, as Walker calls it, is ‘a reading that resists sexist and racist formulations and that results in a new text that attempts to overturn these formulations while remaining sufficiently referential to the original to make clear its point of origin’, a ‘disobedient’ writer might be one who effects the same on the page (2). A feminist adaptation starts with a disobedient reading of a patriarchal source text towards a ‘disobedient, deliberate reconstitution of a genre to accord with women’s experience and vision (4). Such disobedience might include ‘emphasizing conventionally marginal characters and themes’ to effectively ‘re-center the value structure of the narrative’ (Walker, N. 6). As Rochelle Anne Hurst points out,

Women can and have quite literally rewritten literary works, correcting, improving and bettering patriarchally-invested stories in accordance with the varied axioms of feminism. Feminist literary revision is, intriguingly, a site wherein art and criticism collide. It is, as Adrienne Rich famously put it, ‘the act of looking back, of seeing with fresh eyes, of entering an old text from a new critical direction.’ (18)

Hurst cites Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea*, 'a post-colonial alternative to Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*', in which Rhys revises the original as told from the perspective of Rochester's first wife Bertha Mason, who has gone mad and remains locked away at Rochester's Thornwood estate (110). Charlotte Brontë's original casts a subtle, oppressive shadow over Rhys's revision, which has the effect of creating dual narratives, the original and its revised version; this points out an aspect vital to revision – the new version must retain enough detail from the original such that the reader can recognize it as a revision (Hurst 89). In other words, the adapter 'works with what is already there, deconstructing and decoding, attending to symbology and suggestion, to a text's latent features'; the revisioning takes place by means of 'giving voice to the silenced, padding holes and filling gaps, working with clues, favoring and bringing to light a reading that is critically unauthorized' (Hurst 110-111). The result is a process that demonstrates how adaptation can function to open up the spaces in a source text – and then proceed to infuse them with feminism; in Rhys's adaptation, the silenced voice in Brontë's original, that of Bertha Mason, is foregrounded – indeed, Rhys makes her the subject and (in Part I of the novel), the narrator.

The third strategy, subverting gender roles, is an aspect that as illustrated earlier has benefited from the employment of Brechtian alienation tactics. Because gender roles and the constant identification with one's sex can function to reinforce the oppression of women, a feminist adaptation might see various forms of gender subversion, from drag to androgyny (like that advocated by Virginia Woolf). Judith Butler argues that 'gender should be rendered fatally ambiguous precisely because it is always a sign of subordination for women' (xiv). She also points out its 'performativity', in that gender only exists in terms of how it is 'expressed' (34); thus as Hurst argues, Butler's theory 'works to destabilize the man/woman binary by exposing as contrived the supposedly natural differences between the sexes' (15). As such, drag plays a significant function when it comes to subverting gender roles, particularly in the context of a

feminist adaptation; it is not ‘an imitation or a copy of some prior and true gender’, but rather ‘enacts the very structure of impersonation by which any gender is assumed’ (Hurst 16).

The fourth strategy, representing female subjectivity, addresses the objectification of women, and in ‘portraying women as speaking subjects’ as Weckerle points out, ‘is a potentially political act’ (84). Representing women in the subject position ‘resists the tendency of adaptation to transform complex characters into universal stereotyped representations of women’; strengthening or even highlighting the authority of female characters can also function as a means of keeping feminist politics intact (Weckerle 84). The creation of multiple subjectivities, where several actors play a single character, is another recurring technique in feminist adaptations, which as Weckerle writes, is ‘especially useful in deconstructing versions of female characters present in patriarchal texts’ (88-89).

This is an aspect that is also addressed by Ryan Claycomb, who explores the narrative tactics and theatrical approaches to bringing women’s biographies and autobiographies to the feminist stage; and specifically, how splintering subjectivity serves to work against the problematic aspects of presenting a singular female subject. He cites the arguments of Leigh Gilmore, Martine Brownley and Allison Kimmich, among others, regarding the effect ‘the monolithic, univocal presentation of self’ – a self that is traditionally male, and which ‘assigns the male voice the privilege of ordering experience according to his own values’ –has when applied to women; ‘this individualistic formation of the coherent self has traditionally failed to center the woman as empowered subject but rather has positioned her as an object of observation’ (3).

Woman as subject also brings up issues of narrative, and particularly narrator as subject—for example, one who ‘speaks directly to the audience, controls the scene changes, [is] visually present the whole time, interacts with the characters, [and serves as the] lens through which the audience views the story’ (Weckerle 90). A narrator acts as a mediator between the audience and story she is

telling; she controls what is revealed and what is not; she has the power to stop the action and offer her interpretation of events to the audience; as such, the audience sees the story through her perspective, rather than simply watching as a spectator (Weckerle 89). Quite simply, female subjectivity can be a powerful tool for promoting a greater understanding of the female experience.

The final strategy, retaining feminist critique, examines how adaptation can obscure or erase the feminism of the original text; cuts, compression and changes in subjectivity can remove a piece's feminism altogether. Weckerle argues not that compression/exclusion are non-feminist, but rather that 'what is left out often reshapes the perception of the woman'; 'changes in characterization can transform a potentially feminist text into a closed and reifying one' (96).

What tends to get adapted is not the stylistic essence of the text or its spirit but the linear narrative within the text. I would suggest that the feminist impulse of a text is often intertwined with the spirit and style of the text. (Weckerle 96)

As such, the strategy of retaining feminist critique is directly related to issues of fidelity, given the importance of retaining aspects beyond the linear narrative; the goal being an adaptation that remains 'truer' to the original, one that retains more than key details and plot, but also the 'stylistic essence'. Conversely, a feminist adaptation of a source text that lacks a feminist critique, would call for revisioning – where enough details of the original are left for identification, but the stylistic essence is transformed such that feminism is infused in the revision.

All of these strategies, while by no means exhaustive, offer constructive guidelines for approaching feminist stage adaptation— something that is explored further in practice, and as specifically related to adapting women's literary modernism, in my analysis of my own adaptation of Margery Latimer's *This Is My Body*.

Conclusion

In the same way that feminist literary criticism – itself shaped by the debate over authorship – has influenced feminist theatre practice, so too do the theoretical debates over authorship and fidelity offer much to inform feminist adaptation strategies. The way forward proposed by both feminist and fidelity theorists respectively – lines of inquiry that call for a ‘hybrid’ approach, one that blurs binaries, advocates for ‘two-way traffic’, looks to ‘a new dimension’, or ‘bridges the gap’ – are also reflected in feminist theatre practice and adaptation. Indeed, one can trace a through-line that not only links the ideological split that has consumed feminist criticism surrounding the authorship debate with the backlash against fidelity criticism, but also doing so opens up and exposes many of the key challenges and strategies in effecting a feminist adaptation/staging feminism.

As Susan Stanford Friedman has argued with regard to the authorship debate in feminist criticism, gender is always mediated, shaped by aspects including race, ethnicity, religion, class, nationality, sexual preference, abledness etc.; as such, women themselves are ‘multicontexted’ – which has stood in the way of a monolithic, essentialist approach to theory that favors one kind of woman or political agenda over another. As carried over to approaching feminist stage adaptation, this argument is reflected in the attacks on cultural and radical feminist approaches to theatre for their essentialism that reinforces the dominant ideology and fails to account for the ‘multicontexted’ aspect of women. In this regard, the Brechtian tactics taken up by the materialists not only offer a means of transcending the binary opposition of sexual difference, and challenging the socio-economic power apparatus that impacts class, race, gender and sexual orientation, but also they reflect back on feminist criticism – and feminism itself – as questions of language and visual representation are addressed through the medium of the performing body.

What is especially relevant to my own approach, is the link between the call by Friedman, Walker and others for a hybrid line of inquiry that accounts for both ‘women’ and ‘woman’, and the manner in which the metatheatrical aspects of a Brechtian approach make visible the ‘gap’ between the representational and the ‘real’. Also central to my approach is the related strategy of splintering subjectivity, as highlighted by Weckerle and Claycomb. Perhaps most important, is Cobb’s theory of adaptation as a conversation, and in turn, a collaboration. My analysis of my own adaptation in Chapter Five looks at how these approaches contribute to reconceptualizing a woman’s place in history, as well as commenting on the present.

However, before considering adaptation specifically in the context of modernist women’s autobiographical narratives – and my own adaptation – a closer look at the intersection between modernism and adaptation is necessary. Modernist literature poses a particular challenge in terms of adaptation, not only because of the experimental and interior qualities that are its hallmarks, but also because the relationship between modernism and theatre from an ideological standpoint is complex. Indeed, it is a relationship that informs the tension that makes modernist theatre – and the adaptation of modernist literature – uniquely demanding and exciting.

CHAPTER THREE

The Intersection of Modernism & Adaptation:

Adapting the Modernist Novel to the Stage

Tching prayed on the mountain and

wrote MAKE IT NEW

on his bathtub

Day by day make it new

cut the underbrush,

pile the logs

keep it growing. (Pound 274-5)

In ‘Canto LIII’, Ezra Pound coins what would become the modernist slogan, ‘Make it New!’ calling on artists to clear away ‘the underbrush of the recent past in order to seek out the older, taller trees that can serve as a foundation for new poetic structures’ (Pressman 1). In other words, rather than wiping out everything and starting from nothing, the call to ‘make it new’ is quite the opposite—it is about nurturing a connection with the root source, so that new forms might grow from it, giving the source or essence new dimensions and meaning. It is ‘an act of recovery and renovation, not an assertion of novelty’ (Pressman 4). As this chapter sets out to illustrate, the stanza eloquently reflects the intersection between modernism and adaptation.

In terms of my approach to adapting Margery Latimer’s *This Is My Body*, an investigation of this intersection points up many of the strategies utilized by artists in adapting modernist texts

across a variety of media; it also informs many of the challenges to the process from a historical perspective, and offers insights with regard to intermediality, in terms of how certain mediums such as radio and experimental film have lent themselves to the adaptation of modernist literature. In addition, the tension generated by the ideological conflict between modernism and theatricality offers up an approach in terms of staging that employs metatheatre and foregrounds the constructedness of the play; an aspect that serves as the foundation of my own adaptation.

Overshadowing the realization of modernist texts on the stage, is a long history of animosity against the theatre and nearly everything associated with it: what Jonas Barish identifies as an ‘antitheatrical prejudice’, of which the ideologues of modernism were fierce proponents. Indeed, critics and theorists from across various disciplines, including Michael Fried, Friedrich Nietzsche and Walter Benjamin have sought to define modernism expressly by pitting it against theatre (Puchner, *Stage 2*). According to these thinkers, modernism’s essential aspect is an autonomous and ‘pure transcendent presence’ that is impossible to realize in the theatre for its contingency on an audience, its inability to be free of all mediation, and its very makeup, comprised of multiple art practices (Power 12). And yet, the modernist period produced many of the most influential dramatists in history, from Henrik Ibsen to Bertolt Brecht.

While theorists including Martin Puchner and Alan Ackerman have argued that it is precisely because of the tension between modernism and theatre that the work of these artists is so layered, complex and profound—and has lasted – this chapter argues that it is for this same reason that adapting modernist literature to the stage holds great potential for throwing into stark relief issues of fidelity, theatricality, presence and the representation of reality, revealing new possibilities and variations and informing the process of adaptation as a whole.

Part One looks at adaptation during the rise of modernism, particularly in light of Richard Hand’s assertion that adaptation became an ‘obsession’ during the period, in order to trace what is

in fact a fractious relationship, brought on by modernist literature's uncompromising resistance to adaptation.

Part Two looks at modernism's 'war' against theatre, and what it reveals about the significance and function of presence: that presence is arguably at the heart of the conflict between theatre and modernism. To this end, Michael Fried's influential essay 'Art and Objecthood' and the theoretical debate it sparked with regard to modernism and the theatre, as well as Cormac Power's critique of theories of presence in the theatre, are given considerable attention.

Part Three explores how modernist dramatists have responded in their work to an ideology that has sought to deny their practice, and how this work might inform contemporary stage adaptations of modernist literature. This section argues that the process of adapting modernist literature to the stage has unique possibilities for revealing new layers and variations of fidelity, presence, and the representation of reality. It also argues that the modernist or imagistic approach to staging classic plays championed by Nancy Kindelan and Robert Brustein, among others, when applied to adapting modernist literature to the stage is not only a natural fit, but offers exciting possibilities.

I. Modernism and Adaptation

Frederic Jameson approaches modernism as a narrative category, rather than 'a concept, philosophical or otherwise' (40); a view that is useful in charting what has remained a constant of the modernist 'narrative' through all the various mediums in which it has been expressed: the spirit of revolt against tradition. However, there is one notable exception in terms of the traditions modernist narratives have sought to upend: as Richard Hand points out, throughout the rise of modernism, adaptation may very well have been 'the one traditional practice that [continued]

unabated' ('Adaptation' 54). Indeed, Hand goes so far as to suggest that 'in the Epoch of Modernism, adaptation [became] an obsession' ('Adaptation' 54). This may be so, particularly as the period marks the birth of film and radio technology, and in turn, an increased demand for adaptable material; however the adaptation of modernist literature poses significant challenges—some shared across mediums, others unique to a particular form. Modernist literature lends itself naturally to radio, and while generally too abstract and confusing for Hollywood, it has seduced some of the greatest European and experimental filmmakers and triumphed in their hands. Adapting modernist literature for the theatre, however, is perhaps the most overlooked and complicated arena of them all.

If, as Richard Hand suggests, adaptation was wholeheartedly embraced during the 'Epoch of Modernism', modernist literature, on the other hand, largely suffered from adaptation's embrace. For all that the call to 'Make it New!' encouraged writers to revolt against traditions and find new forms, the narratives born of modernism—often fractured, abstract and unwieldy—posed an intimidating prospect for further re-visioning as adapted works.

However, throughout the 1910s and 1920s, the relationship between literary modernism and adaptation—specifically for film—appeared to hold great promise:

Modernist writers were fascinated with visual media; German theorist Walter Benjamin proclaimed film the definitive modern form; and the modernist magazine *Close Up* (1927-33) was forging aesthetic links between film and literary culture 'from the angles of art, experiment, and possibility'. (Halliwell 90)

Because film was a new form that came of age during roughly the same period as the explosion in modernist literary experimentation, it makes sense the two would influence each other in a manner

that explored new dimensions of both, while also pushing the boundaries of the modernist narrative itself. For example, writers such as late modernist Graham Greene began to employ such film techniques as flashbacks and experiments in point of view (Hand 'Adaptation' 61), while cross-cutting and montage featured heavily in American modernist Jon Dos Passos' *U.S.A.* trilogy (Halliwell 97). The point of intersection for modernist film and modernist literature was, not surprisingly, located in their handling of space and time—distinctively modernist concerns; experimentation in these areas allowed for the overthrow of traditional narrative practices, such as linear plots, a single point of view, a reliable narrator and clearly defined, easily recognizable characters.

Even as literary and cinematic modernism talked back to one another, actual film adaptations of modernist novels were relatively few—whether modernist or mainstream. Ironically, their stylistic aspects, which were often adopted by and/or shared with modernist filmmakers, were also what made the modernist novels' narratives as a whole difficult to adapt—they were, as Deborah Parsons writes, 'radical [in form], subjectively real and aesthetically autonomous', set in worlds at once 'fragmented, multiple and limitless' (3). Not only did they not conform to the kind of 'slick product' traditionally sought by commercial film producers, but the 'disdain of bourgeois culture' that resonated from their pages was at odds with 'the liberal ideology... usually upheld in commercial film' (Halliwell 90-91). In addition to simplifying storylines as tends to be common practice in novel to film adaptations, modernism adapted often meant abstract, mythical or surreal aspects were cut, while unappealing or psychologically complex characters were fashioned into heroes; the overall effect being that the power of the original prose narrative was lost, and the author's vision along with it. Given their complexity, most filmmakers simply opted for more 'adaptable' novels, such as realist or genre-based fiction (Halliwell 91).

Conversely, the very aspects that made modernist novels incompatible as prospects for mainstream film adaptation, allowed modernist films to achieve mainstream success in their manifestation as Gothic horror films – these include such well-known classics as the Edison Company’s 1910 adaptation of Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein*, Murnau’s *Nosferatu* (1922) adapted from Bram Stoker’s *Dracula*, and Robert Weine’s *Das Cabinet des Dr. Caligari* (1920), which was not a strict adaptation per se, but drawn from a well-known German folk tale. The uncanny narratives that distinguish these films highlight the affinity between expressionism and modernism, for their rejection of tradition and realism; a synergy that saw cinematic modernism flourish in the expressionistic horror realm – and also offers one strategy for adapting literary modernism (Hand ‘Adaptation’ 62). The critical and commercial success of cinematic modernism in the guise of Gothic horror films proved that ambiguous narratives and characters are not only adaptable, but also that realised in the right genre, such aspects can be profoundly exciting for viewers.

Of the various possible forms for adaptation, however, radio proved to be an arena where literary modernism came into its own. Often overlooked, modernist radio dramas flourished alongside the children’s stories, stage plays and extracts from Shakespeare broadcast after the technology was introduced in the 1920’s (Hand ‘Adaptation’ 65). Examples include Arch Oboler’s adaptation of Dalton Trumbo’s 1938 anti-war novel, *Johnny Got His Gun*, which unfolds in a stream-of-consciousness first-person narrative, as a soldier lies paralyzed in a hospital bed, struggling to come to terms with the reality that he has lost not just his face, but all of his limbs. Through elaborate soundscapes and James Cagney’s inspired voiceover performance as the soldier, the adaptation reflects the possibilities for radio, with its capacity for unsettling intimacy, as an adaptive medium for literary modernism (Hand ‘Adaptation’ 66).

Perhaps the best example of radio modernism is Orson Welles’ adaptation of H. G. Wells’ *War of the Worlds*. Although Wells’ status as a ‘modernist’ might be contested – Virginia Woolf

cited his work ‘as a standard against which she and other contemporary novelists were rebelling’ – in fact, ‘many characteristics of his fiction – its genre-bending, its incorporation of the discourses of science, its prophetic voice – help define what we understand as modernism’ (Domestico and Lewis n.p.). Broadcast on October 30th 1938, *War of the Worlds* was presented as a ‘breaking news’ story, alerting the public to a Martian invasion. Welles made the most of radio devices such as commercial breaks, musical fillers and ‘live’ on-site reporting to trigger an audience response of sheer panic (Paletz 220). Gabriel Paletz argues Welles’s attraction to thrillers was fuelled by his ‘connection to a cultural moment in the USA from 1936 to 1942’ – in other words, late modernism; thus, in the same way that cinematic modernism found both critical and commercial success in the suspense/horror genre, so too did Welles see the thriller genre as an ideal match for the surreal aesthetic of modernism, which opened it up to the masses (218).

The broadcast medium suited the narratives of modernist novels in a way that visual media could not; aspects such as stream of consciousness, internal monologues, and the fragmented, multiple worlds Deborah Parsons describes function most powerfully when the listener is given the freedom to explore them in his or her own imagination. Trying to present such ‘realities’—or ‘unrealities’—visually, risks taming them; what remains unseen is often most terrifying or vivid in the mind’s eye. Moreover, the technical possibilities for radio in terms of creating diverse soundscapes, and in turn, layered psychological worlds, makes it easier for listeners to be transported instantly to various locations, points in time, and moods. Adapted for broadcast, modernist novels could be presented with minimal adjustments—yet the subtle ways they were adapted had a profound impact on the overall experience. Although released from the page, the author’s vision and the essence of the story remained intact; the adaptation simply added new dimensions.

If radio served literary modernism to a degree that film tended to strip it of all that made it 'modern' – with the exception of experimental and avant-garde projects – forays onto the stage revealed new depths to literary modernism's opposition to adaptation. In fact, the practice of adapting novels to the stage had long been popular; between 1838 and 1850 Dickens' *Oliver Twist* was staged more than 40 times, in nearly as many different adaptations ('*Oliver Twist*'). Novelists whose careers stretched into the modernist period, including Henry James and Thomas Hardy, reveal the attitudes of many writer-turned-dramatists with regard to adaptation, Hardy seeing it as 'really only an ingenious piece of carpentry' and James likening a stage play to 'a box of fixed dimensions and inelastic material, into which a mass of precious things are to be packed away' (qtd. in Hand, 'Adaptation' 57-58). Yet this technical approach failed them both; many of the obstacles to adapting their pre-modern novels would only be exacerbated in the modernist form – for example, vague and unsatisfying endings, complex characters and narratives that span decades and jump back and forth in time. The catastrophic results of the Formalist approach to playwriting of James et al hinted at even greater problems to come when literary modernism took the fore, and the 'unabated obsession' with adaptation would inevitably see attempts to bring them to the stage.

The fact that examples of stage adaptations of modernist novels during the height of the modernist period are largely absent from what has been written about modernism, theatre and adaptation, suggests literary modernism and theatre were not only at odds, but that such adaptations were rarely undertaken. In an era consumed with film and exploring new technology that also included radio, the advent of adapting literary modernism to the stage appears to have been excluded to a degree that matches the historical neglect of theatre itself in the modernist canon.

However, Joseph Conrad's experiences adapting several of his novels, which were not only produced in experimental theatres, but saw their way to the West End, are revealing. While not a

modernist novel per se, Conrad's struggles with his stage adaptation of *The Secret Agent* are nonetheless representative of all that made literary modernism so challenging to adapt; as Pericles Lewis explains, it is a novel that 'explicitly thematizes the transformation of time that Conrad and other modernist novelists explore by departing from strict chronology, making extensive use of flashbacks and foreshadowing, and demonstrating the disjuncture between private and public time' (31).

Not only does he find the process 'eviscerating', but Conrad recounts how in stripping the descriptive internal narrative of the novel, all he is left with is a 'horrible and sordid tale', one he was never aware of until he 'came to grips with it in the process of dramatization':

In the book the tale, whatever its character, was at any rate not treated sordidly; neither in tone, nor in diction, nor yet in suggested images. The peculiar light of my mental insight and of my humane feeling (for I have *that* too) gave the narrative a sort of grim dignity. But on the stage it falls off. Every rag of the drapery drops to the ground. It is a terribly searching thing – I mean the stage. (520)

Of the widely-anticipated West End production that was hoped would thrive amidst a fervor for the thriller genre that had consumed the theatre-going public, the play had a lukewarm reception, which precipitated a short run; one reviewer suggested it was too sophisticated for London audiences brought up on 'dishonest pap' – indeed, as Hand suggests, it likely 'would have been much more at home in the repertoire of German expressionist drama' (*Conrad* 94).

Thus, similar to film, literary modernism on stage was either stripped-down and tidied-up so it might resemble the 'dishonest pap' that so pleased the masses, or adapted with the intention of realizing the modernist themes of dislocation and alienation—a choice that tended to relegate them

to experimental venues or more adventurous European companies. However, literary modernism's resistance to being adapted for the stage was complicated by another, more ominous factor—namely modernism's rejection of the theatre itself. Indeed, modernism and theatre are opposed on a level that modernism and other mediums such as film and radio are not.

The roots of this opposition, and how it has manifest in the work of modernist theatre artists, is the focus of the next section.

II. Modernism and Theatre

As Christopher Innes points out, given the contentious relationship between modernism and theatre, it is not unusual for drama to be completely left out of critical studies of modernism (128). Kirsten Shepherd-Barr argues that the problem lies not with how theatre history has been documented, but with 'the entrenched tendencies of modernist historiography – a historiography that has barely allowed for the significance of theatrical performances'; in other words, modernism has traditionally been defined in the context of literature, poetry, music and the visual arts, while theatrical performance (save for the occasional dramatic text) has tended to be overlooked ('Modernism' 59).

The reasons for this can be seen in both historical and ideological contexts. Historically, as Innes points out, the development of modernist theatre cannot be fit to a specific time period in the same way that the development of literary modernism tends to be pinned to the period between the First and Second World Wars (128). For example, in arguing for Ibsen's role as a pioneer in theatrical modernism, Toril Moi holds up his least read and performed play, *Emperor and Galilean*, written in 1873, as 'not just a full-scale analysis of modernity in Europe', but also an exploration of the very essence of theatre that in turn lends a greater understanding of its possibilities ('Henrik

Ibsen' 188). Others date the emergence of theatrical modernism back not to Ibsen, but to the Dada movement that began in 1916 (Shepherd-Barr, 'Modernism' 59).

If the broader, less clearly defined historical timeframe of modernist theatre has contributed to theatre's neglect from discussions of modernism, so too has the tendency to equate literary modernism with the likes of T.S. Eliot, James Joyce and Ezra Pound – a phenomenon that also highlights the Anglo-American emphasis of such studies; twentieth-century drama, on the other hand, has known a much more widely-ranging European influence, which along with the considerable diversity of the work, has also likely served to obscure theatrical performance from examinations of modernist art and literature (Innes 128).

From an ideological standpoint, theatre has faced a formidable adversary in a modernist ideology that considered theatre, in the words of Ezra Pound, an 'asinine...gross, coarse form of art' (Pound, *Letters* 46). The modernist disdain for theatre, and indeed, all forms of theatricality, can be seen as part of a larger, historical continuum – the antitheatrical prejudice identified by Jonas Barish; 'a prejudice against the theatre that goes back as far in European history as theatre itself can be traced' (1). Identifying this phenomenon from its Platonic foundation, Barish describes how the poet was viewed as 'a sophist, a maker of counterfeits that look like the truth'; imitation was no more than the bringing into being of an 'inferior world'—similarly, painters were accused of 'slavish mimicry' (6). As for actors and the theatre itself, the portrayal of 'base characters' ultimately served to condone their despicable behavior and could only 'lead to anarchy' (Barish 22).

Returning to the modernist ideology, this antitheatrical prejudice resonates in the ideas of modernism's leading thinkers; Nietzsche saw it as a 'deplorable' influence on the other arts that threatened to impose its 'rule' in the form of a 'theatrocracy'; like Brecht and Adorno, he placed much of the blame on Wagner and specifically, the sway of his 'scenic or gestural music' (Puchner, *Stage* 3).

Adorno included Stravinsky in his critique of gestural music, which he faulted as ‘a primitive form of mimesis’ that he likened to the gestures of ‘android apes’, an observation that reflects the undercurrent of disgust towards actors he shared with Nietzsche—‘the apes and clowns [standing] for an atavistic form of the debased actor’ (Puchner, *Stage 4*). Along with Michael Fried and Walter Benjamin, Adorno and Nietzsche served as the self-appointed gatekeepers of modernism, who uniformly rejected theatre.

The Implications of Michael Fried’s ‘Art and Objecthood’

Puchner points out that Michael Fried, nearly a century later, reiterates Nietzsche’s stance ‘sometimes verbatim’ as he ‘considers the theatre, or theatricality, to be the enemy of art *tout court*’; what makes it so insidious is its poisoning of the other arts (*Stage 3*). Nowhere does he make this clearer than in his influential essay ‘Art and Objecthood’ (1967), in which he also goes a long way towards illustrating the underlying aesthetic beliefs that have fuelled the modernist antagonism towards theatre.

Writing in response to essays by Donald Judd (‘Specific Objects’, 1965) and Robert Morris (‘Votes on Sculpture’ and ‘Notes on Sculpture’, 1965), Fried argues against minimalist – or what he calls ‘literalist’ art – for its concern with ‘objecthood’; specifically, he attacks the minimalists for celebrating ‘objects’, the material components that traditionally comprise a work of art, and which Fried believes modern art is meant to transcend. Fried is adamant that modern art should exist autonomously, contingent upon nothing, the only relationship with the viewer being an artwork’s capacity to effect an instantaneous, transcendent – even spiritual – sense of what it is. The very nature of its objecthood renders minimalist art incapable of such transcendence and autonomy. By engaging with the viewer as such, according to Fried, minimalist art is in fact a form of theatre:

What is it about objecthood as projected and hypostatized by the literalists that makes it, if only from the perspective of recent modernist painting, antithetical to art?

...The answer I want to propose is this: the literalist espousal of objecthood amounts to nothing other than a plea for a new genre of theatre; and theatre is now the negation of art.

Literalist sensibility is theatrical because, to begin with, it is concerned with the actual circumstances in which the beholder encounters the literalist work. Morris makes this explicit. Whereas in previous art ‘what is to be had from the work is located strictly within [it],’ the experience of literalist art is of an object in a situation—one that, virtually by definition, *includes the beholder*. (153)

Fried’s criticism is influenced by the ideas of Denis Diderot, who first condemned the idea of the ‘theatrical’ in the arts, equating it with the ‘mannered’ – a certain falseness akin to the difference between ‘a man presenting himself in company and a man being observed’ (qtd. in Phipps 576). He saw the ‘mannered’ or ‘theatrical’ in the arts as verging on the immoral, a ‘vice of regulated society’ (qtd. in Phipps 576). Counter to ‘theatricality’ is his idea of ‘absorption’, something Fried would also expand upon in *Absorption and Theatricality* (1980) to emphasize the importance of the relationship between a work of art and its beholder. A ‘mannered’ or ‘theatrical’ painting might consist of figures in easily recognizable poses of heroism or suffering; an ‘absorbed’ subject somehow transcends any clichés or falseness through such a complete focus on their activity that all self-consciousness is lost. Of course, as Robert Phipps points out, the idea that a painting could be either true to life or false in the same way that a person might be considered genuine or fake implies ‘that a painting can seem to proclaim a “commitment” to painting itself, to being a painting, but then be “less than fully committed”’ – and yet Diderot appears to be proposing as

much; Pippen argues Diderot's claim is in fact not so peculiar, given that most new movements in the arts are borne on the claim that the traditions and styles of the old schools are phony and contrived (576).

Fried's opposition to what he perceives as the biggest threat to modern art – the theatre – mirrors Diderot's reaction against the corrupting influence of a mannered society on art in his time. And in this same vein, modernism was a response to what were perceived to be the 'phony', 'mannered' or 'theatrical' traditions of its time. Yet as Pippen states, ultimately, 'paintings *are* in some obvious sense theatrical objects, made in order to be displayed and beheld by others and presumably organized and executed with this attribute always in mind' (578-579). While both Diderot and Fried believe it is of utmost importance that painters shun theatricality, Pippen makes the point that, 'how would one distinguish an attempt to avoid theatricality with an attempt to avoid sociality altogether, with an indulgence in self-absorption or narcissism?' (580).

If the avoidance of all theatricality was such an insurmountable goal for painters, as Pippen suggests, it throws into question the use of 'theatricality' as a watermark in gauging the 'phoniness' of a given art form, be it minimalist art or the theatre itself. For Fried, the essence of 'theatricality' is rooted in the object/viewer relationship; returning to Judd and Morris, it is no wonder Fried reacted so strongly against their work, in which the object/viewer relationship was the 'artwork' itself (Power 97). In other words, according to Fried, minimalist art has a 'stage presence' – like theatre, it not only requires an audience, but it demands something of them:

For the theatre has an audience – it exists for one – in a way the other arts do not; in fact, this more than anything else is what modernist sensibility finds intolerable in theatre generally. Here it should be remarked that literalist art, too, possesses an audience. (163)

Fried's other problems with literalist art that have relevance as far as the schism between modernism and theatre, include the 'hollowness' and anthropomorphism of literalist art objects. Their very humanness and physical, material presence before the viewer is unsettling on one level because in fact they are not human – they are inanimate bodies; yet as provocative objects they exude a certain theatricality. And the disdain in which they are held by modernist critics – for their showiness, for the buzz they generate, for their demands on an audience – resonates with the pervasive trend of hostility towards actors engendered by the larger, centuries-old antitheatrical prejudice, that can be traced all the way back to Plato:

Thespis, who gave his name to the art of acting, was called a liar by Solon because he was pretending to be someone else, and one would not be overstating the case by very much to say that hostility to impersonation forms one of the cornerstones of Plato's *Republic*. (Barish 1-2)

For Fried, 'the experience of *encountering*' a literalist art object is like 'encountering a fellow human being', and this makes it impossible to experience the pure transcendent presence art must realize if it is to be truly 'modern' (Power 99). '[The] experience of coming upon literalist objects unexpectedly...can be strongly, if momentarily disquieting...' (Fried 155). The sculptures themselves also appeared to be 'aware' of the audience, such that they 'lose their self-sufficient unity and integrity, in the process of which they start to resemble vain human actors pandering to an audience' (Puchner, *Stage* 3).

Beyond Fried: Cormac Power's Theories of Presence

Implicit in the object/viewer relationship as condemned by Fried is the 'presence' of an object; in other words, if an artwork demands an audience – indeed, if, as Power points out, the very 'situation' of object and viewer *is* the work of art – it has 'presence'. And presence, according to Fried, is the 'enemy' of art; counter to presence, is the concept of 'presentness', which Fried asserts is not only what allows a work of art to '*at every moment be wholly manifest*', but also by nature of its presentness and 'instantaneousness' can 'defeat theatre' (167). Fried defines presentness and instantaneousness as that quality, which allows the experience of a work of art to persist in time, to be of indefinite duration – it is a presentness or instantaneousness that is continuous, that is in a state of perpetual creation; conversely, Fried points out that literalist art is preoccupied with the duration of the experience – which is paradigmatically theatrical – theatre not only confronts the beholder, but also addresses a sense of temporality – 'of time both passing and to come' (167).

Power identifies this mode of presence as the 'auratic mode' or 'having present' (11). In terms of artistic modernism, he points out that 'aura is prioritized when autonomy and essence of the medium become prime criteria for aesthetic achievement' (12). Aura in modern art, beyond Fried's concept of 'presentness', has frequently been associated with the metaphysical; for example, Kandinsky felt that only by delving into the 'spirituality' or 'essence of each medium' could an artist hope to realize 'aesthetic autonomy' in their work – the very purpose of art (Power 50). The auratic quality in painting is capable as well of '[producing] an uninvited sensation of wonder' (Power 49).

However, the auratic quality as championed by modern art differs from auratic presence in the theatre; indeed, Power seeks to unravel the conflicted relationship between each of these manifestations of aura: the first being the 'modernist quest for an autonomous theatrical aura beyond representation, based on notions of transcendence and self-presence' and the second, the

idea of aura as ‘created *through* the act of representation, based on an understanding of the actor’s craft and the cultivation of “stage presence” (52-53). What sets these two strains apart is contingency: aura in terms of ‘stage presence’ is contingent on a variety of factors, such as an actor’s personal magnetism or reputation, or the notoriety or history of a given play or theatre; in this sense, it is not unlike what Fried finds fault with in minimalist art – a presence that impresses the viewer, confronts one with its size, hollowness or anthropomorphic qualities. Conversely, aura as aspired to in modern art ought to be autonomous and transcendent, bearing no contingency on an audience or viewer; it might be seen as a spiritual or metaphysical event occurring irrespective of its audience or milieu.

At this point, it is important to note the other modes of presence as set out by Power, in relation to these two strains of the auratic mode. The first is the ‘making present’, or ‘fictional’ mode, which looks at theatre’s capacity for bringing a fiction to life on stage. This mode confronts the issue of the dual ‘now’s – the ‘now’ of the drama on stage, versus the ‘now’ of the story being enacted, a dichotomy that reflects theatre’s function as the ‘negation of the real’, in the sense that:

The dramatic world is seen as a hypothetical construct by an audience ‘acquainted with the conventions of drama’; the drama is created through active hypothesizing by the audience who can clearly distinguish what is real from what is not. (Power 18)

Power argues that while an audience might never be ‘fooled into thinking that the chairs and tables onstage *are* actually those in a fiction’ there is a complicit agreement that these objects carry a ‘minus sign’ such that ‘their reality has been subtracted’ – an aspect he suggests demonstrates the means by which the denial of reality facilitates theatrical communication (18). However, it could also be argued that the chairs and tables carry a plus sign – that their reality has been heightened or

that they have gained a ‘fictional reality’ – they are both chairs and tables onstage, and chairs and tables in the fiction being presented onstage. Dan Rebellato discusses this phenomenon in reference to the Prague Structuralists of the 1930’s, and their slogan ‘everything on stage is a sign’; when an ordinary object such as a chair is placed on stage ‘it stops being a chair, it becomes an image of a chair, a representation of a chair, and it becomes symbolic, deictic, iconic of the kind of life that might be lived around that chair. It becomes a theatre-chair and its original function is suspended, but at a distance’ (‘Adler & Gibb’) In other words, it could be argued the original function is not lost or subtracted – perhaps the chair stops being a chair – but only because now it is *more* than a chair; it is ‘chair’ to the ‘stage’ power.

Nonetheless, with an object or person on stage, a conscious *denial* of reality – or *acceptance* of the presence of both the reality and the fiction(s) – is required. An aspect that obviously makes demands on a viewer’s imagination—albeit not in the manner of a written narrative, where the fictional world and its characters must be created in the mind of the reader (Power 19). On stage, the fictional world and characters are physically present for the spectator, and as ‘real things’, risk disappointing an audience familiar with the fiction beforehand, such as in the case of a Shakespeare play or an adaptation. Power cites Charles Lamb’s observation that ‘What we see upon the stage is a body and bodily action; what we are conscious of in reading is almost exclusively the mind and its movements’ (20). He goes on to cite Lamb’s lament that he found ‘the very idea of an actor portraying so universal a figure as King Lear “painful and disgusting”’ (61).

The fictional mode of presence is relevant not just for how it contrasts with and thus helps to further define the notion of auratic presence, particularly in terms of distinguishing between aura in the context of modernism versus aura in the context of theatre, but also it has implications as far as fidelity and adaptation. Aura in the context of modernism is contradictory to that of the theatre, in the sense that the former is ‘self-present’ and autonomous, an aspect often attributed to

metaphysics or shades of spirituality. Auratic presence in the theatre is not autonomous, but contingent on a variety of factors, from the actors, to the audience, to the bricks and mortar theatre itself. As Power states, 'Theatre's complexity as a medium makes the question of aesthetic integrity and autonomy seem somewhat problematic' (53). If aura in the modernist context is precisely what gives an artwork its autonomy, aura in the theatre is its exact opposite; auratic presence in the theatre is derived from its very contingency on outside factors.

Fictional presence is a vital aspect of both adaptation and fidelity, for the obvious fact that it involves the bringing of a fictional narrative to stage – the 'making' of that fiction, which in the 'making' implies multiple fictions, from the story being told to that which is presented to the audience by way of live actors onstage – to the fiction 'lived' by the characters within the play, and that of the actors as their characters. Much of what has been explored with regard to both fictional and auratic presence has brought up issues central to those of both fidelity and adaptation; for example, how the expectations of an audience already familiar with the fiction being staged shade the fictional and auratic presence; as with fidelity in adaptation, there is a certain thrill that comes with the recognition of similarities or differences to one's preconceived idea of a given story.

The literal presence of an audience – in parallel to Fried's notion of 'literalist' art – is what defines the third mode of presence in the theatre as set out by Power. Like the auratic mode, a closer look at the literal mode informs an understanding of the aesthetics of modernism and why it is so opposed to the theatre. The literal mode 'has marked a point of contest within debates surrounding notions of theatre and theatricality in the second half of the twentieth century' – specifically, it uncovers what is at the core of the negativity that has overshadowed theatre and theatricality ever since they first came into being (Power 88). As Jonas Barish points out, not only are terms such as '*theatrical, operatic, melodramatic, stagey, etc.*' used when the intention is 'to be hostile or belittling', but also terms such as '*acting, play acting, playing up to, putting on an act, putting*

on a performance, making a scene, making a spectacle of oneself, playing to the gallery, and so forth are generally used in a derogatory sense (1).

Most significantly, Power suggests that,

all of these terms refer to the undermining of presence; to pretend, to feign, to dissemble or to 'play act' are all ways of *representing* or exhibiting oneself rather than simply 'being' or *presenting* oneself. It is the perceived duplicity or "doubleness" of theatre that lies at the root of the prejudice [against theatre and theatricality]. (88)

It should also be noted that the bias against 'representing' as opposed to simply 'being' or 'presenting' – the representation of an object or fiction versus the object or fiction represented – parallels that of an adaptation in favor of its 'original'.

All three forms of presence (fictional, auratic, literal) reveal that the concept of 'presence', particularly as it relates to modernism and the means through which it was pitted against theatre and theatricality, is far from a singular entity; through its complexity, 'presence' has facilitated the intersection of theatre and modernism by acting as the focal point modernist theatre artists and critics have worked against or towards in seeking to adapt their vision in its purest, truest form, to the modernist aesthetic. The concept of 'presence' and its function with regard to 'theatricality' is also key to the modernist theatre paradox; for all that modernism sought to reject theatricality and the theatre itself, it ultimately served as 'a productive force responsible for the theatre's most glorious achievements' (Puchner, *Stage* 13). This aspect is explored in detail in the section that follows.

The Modernist Theatre Paradox

Theatre artists from Ibsen to Brecht and Beckett revolutionised drama – and the source of the current that electrifies their work can be traced to the violence at the heart of the modernist theatre paradox. Rather than ‘suffer from their modernist enemies and avant-garde enthusiasts’, they ‘internalized both their critique and their enthusiasm for the purpose of a far-reaching reform of the dramatic form and of theatrical representation’ (Puchner, *Stage* 12).

Nowhere was this most apparent than in the work of Bertolt Brecht, whose ‘epic theatre’, Martin Puchner claims, ‘has frequently been used to describe modernist theatre at large’; Puchner also argues that Brecht’s work is ‘not so much a reform of theatre as one *against* it’ (*Stage* 139). Others, including Yeats and Beckett, shared this resistance, although it was manifest in their work in different ways: Yeats through his embrace of symbolism, Beckett in what Puchner describes as his ‘crusade against actors’, and Brecht in his similar campaign against Wagner – all three effectively used their resistance to the theatre as the creative force that fuelled their work and allowed them to realise new possibilities and meanings for the form itself (*Stage* 19).

However, they were not the only ones whose response to modernism’s enmity transformed their work; the modernist theatre paradox shaped Henrik Ibsen’s work as well, but his approach was profoundly different from those such as Brecht and Beckett. Although he too rejected theatricality, it was bound up in his overriding mission to defeat idealism, as Toril Moi argues in her revaluation of him as a pioneer of European modernism, *Henrik Ibsen and the Birth of Modernism*. Moreover, the key features of his modernism were in stark contrast to the others: his was a turn to realism, which embraced not only the theatre as an art form, but also the power of words (Moi, *Henrik Ibsen* 9-10). Not surprisingly, he became Brecht’s ‘whipping boy’; ‘he was bourgeois, he was wordy, he had traditional plots, and his concerns were hopelessly passé’ (Moi, *Henrik Ibsen* 29). The scorn with which Ibsen was regarded by the ideologues of modernism helps explain why Ibsen’s

modernism has often been overlooked; indeed, his claim to modernism was effectively buried in the wake of the aggressive and confrontational theatre in the Brechtian vein.

Ibsen: Modernist Theatre as Anti-Idealist

Unlike Brecht, whose work was fuelled by his mistrust of the theatre, Ibsen stood by it; his modernism was the opposite of that which embraced an autonomization of language and all that went with it, namely, 'taboo on representation, hatred of realism [and]...preference for language preoccupied with the unsayable, the unrepresentable, impossibility of meaning' (Moi, *Henrik Ibsen* 21). Brecht's attack on theatre, and specifically Wagner, resonates with loathing, in contrast to Ibsen, whose approach celebrated theatre, even if he too loathed theatricality. The fundamental difference between them stems from their shared attitude towards theatricality — Brecht's animosity towards it was tied in with theatre as a whole; Ibsen's was tied in with idealism — and it was in his campaign to take down idealism that his modernism emerges.

As Toril Moi defines it, 'idealism', synonymous with 'aesthetic idealism', might be understood as 'the belief that the task of art is to uplift us, to point the way to the Ideal'; accordingly, was the belief in the oneness of beauty, truth and goodness (*Henrik Ibsen* 4). Anything that was not beautiful, good and true was demonized, an aspect of idealism that fell particularly hard on women, who were held to impossible standards much like the Victorian 'Angel in the House'. In fact, Moi asserts that Ibsen's greatest achievement was the manner in which his modernism exploded the idealist model of femininity, and did so without demonizing women (*Henrik Ibsen* 4). Marriage and a woman's place in society are central themes in his work, and linked to this is his belief in language, and how modern scepticism functions to defeat the power of words:

To Ibsen, love is bound up with faith in human language and expression, with our attempts to reveal ourselves to others, our wish to be known and understood by them and our wish to know and understand them. (Moi, *Henrik Ibsen* 13)

In their attacks on Ibsen, the aesthetics of Brecht and others are in tune with what Frederick Jameson would term the ‘ideology of modernism’ – the set of aesthetics that came to prominence after the Second World War, which were dedicated to justifying the autonomy of art (162). As Moi points out, the ‘autonomy of the aesthetic’ is open to two interpretations: that art should exist independent of social, political, and religious influences, or, that the subject matter of art should be art, rather than any attempt to reflect or represent reality (*Henrik Ibsen* 20). Inherent in the second interpretation is a ‘culture phobia’ that manifest as ‘an obsession with the fundamental failure of language, and a strong disdain for realism’; in other words, contempt for ‘a writer’s naïve faith in the power of language to represent reality’ (Moi, *Henrik Ibsen* 20).

Thus a certain reactivity to Ibsen’s realism set Brecht and his fellow ideologues against him, overshadowing much of what Ibsen was doing; and what he was doing, in fact, was turning theatre against itself, just as they were – only his medium was realism. In other words, their means of attack were different. Ibsen’s was a theatre of the text, rooted in the literal, not of the body - he sought to present a slice of life onstage. Whereas Brecht foregrounds the medium to emphasize that theatre is theatre, Ibsen *uses realism* to foreground the medium and emphasize that theatre is theatre. However, as Moi points out, dismissed for his realism, Ibsen’s modernism was long overlooked.

Modernist Theatre as a Revolt Against Traditional Form

If Ibsen’s modernism was obscured for the manner in which he utilized realism, language and theatricality, which in turn so offended his successors – namely Brecht, Artaud, Beckett and others

– what forms, in contrast, did the modernist theatre of these successors take? Many, from Yeats to Brecht and Artaud looked to Asian models that adopted dance and movement in their quest to realize a pure theatre that existed outside of any social context; embracing these stylized models on the Western stage was a radical act in its own right – not only did it allow them to reject Western culture, it constituted a rejection of theatre itself (Innes 132-133).

Artaud, in particular, was driven by the desire to link the physical and metaphysical worlds and sought to do this by emphasizing the significance of *mise-en-scene* to create a ritualized theatre, something he explored in his obsession with Balinese dancers (Kindelan 41). His vision of a pure theatre, or ‘Theatre of Cruelty’, sought to break free from all that was limiting and repressive in Western theatre, of which he believed language was the main culprit, in order to get closer to unravelling life’s mysteries, revitalizing the human spirit, and setting humanity free from the world’s horrors (Kindelan 42). To do this, he called for an immersive theatre, which did away with the divide between stage and auditorium and placed the audience at the centre of the action; he envisioned a ‘theatre that would be experienced purely on its own terms, not in reference to its own reality’ (Power 67).

In the move towards an autonomy of aesthetic, depersonalisation and against representation, the rejection of the actor also united dramatists in the manner of Brecht; no matter how ‘estranged their acting’, the fact of theatre’s unbreakable tie to human performers was an aspect such dramatists struggled to reconcile, and their efforts were realized in various ways:

Theatre reformers such as Edward Gordon Craig [insisted] on retaining total control over their material and therefore [tried] to replace living actors with marionettes, while others such as Oskar Schlemmer, Nicolai Foregger, and Vsevolod Meyerhold, [attempted] to turn the human actor into a machine. (Puchner, *Stage* 6)

Yeats went so far as to rehearse his actors in barrels, in order that their presence and gestures not interfere with the 'sovereignty' of their words, while Craig, in addition to eliminating actors, eventually did away with the spoken word, and subsequently 'ceased performances for spectators at all' (Innes 134-135).

Brecht: Turning Theatre Against Itself

No dramatist was as successful at turning the theatre against itself as Bertolt Brecht; his resistance to traditional theatre and performance was manifest in his own brand of 'epic theatre', in which actors adopted a gestic style of acting that featured physical actions to convey social and/or political attitudes (Brecht 42). According to Christopher Innes, Brecht saw the solution to the conflict between modernism and theatre as one that could be addressed through the political – by maintaining a worldview that rested on the belief everything was changeable (147). Like Nietzsche and Adorno, Brecht feared Wagnerian theatricality, or *gesamtkunstwerk*, threatened 'to unleash an all-consuming theatricality that would draw everything into its vortex', like a 'melting pot'; theatre not only 'melted' into the other arts, theatricalizing them, but it spread into the audience as well, so that they were 'drunk' with it (Puchner, *Stage* 140).

In order to combat theatre's corrupting influence, Brecht sought to destroy one of its main features: what he described as 'the engendering of illusion'; in other words, he felt it was of utmost importance that it be clear to the audience that what they were watching was a play (Brecht 122). To achieve this, his epic theatre emphasized a separation of theatre's elements – the actors as directed were clearly 'acting', placards or intertitles were used to delineate scenes and settings, and aspects such as movement, sound, sets and lighting all proclaimed themselves to be just that – rather than making any pretence of being a real sunrise, an unscripted conversation or an actual

forest in nature. He sought to make everything visible to the audience – from the stage hands manipulating the sets, sound and lighting, to the actors wearing masks or speaking in the third person (National Theatre, ‘An Introduction’).

His innovations in terms of structure were another form of defiance against the naturalism that dominated at the time. Not only did he avoid linear plots in favour of montages of scenes that had echoes of the curvilinear shape of modernist literary narratives and paintings, but also this segmenting of scenes functioned to remove any ambiguity in terms of plot and thus diffuse any potential for suspense (Innes 148). By the same token, through this mode he sought to ‘connect with contemporary society and philosophy; as Claire Warden writes, ‘He wanted a theatre that engaged his audience, not only with the play itself but also the issues the play identified in the hope that a night out at the theatre might actually change audience opinions’ (87). Rather than seeking to ‘[captivate] his audience with intricate stories and compelling characters, Brecht rejected empathic emotion’; however ‘engaged emotion (feeling angry about injustice, feeling furious at warmongering generals etc.) remained central to his aesthetic’ (Warden 87).

By foregrounding all the distinct elements of the theatre as such, Brecht’s focus was on what makes theatre theatre; his work was not only explicitly theatrical, but it demonstrated how powerful such theatricality could be. The distance he created through the use of placards, direct address and music ‘[prevented] his audiences from being swept along by emotion or story or character and [enabled] them to approach the play in a new way, in a more critical, more engaged, (paradoxically) more involved way’ (Warden 86).

Though often radically different, the work of Brecht and other modernist dramatists responded to modernism’s ‘war on theatre’ in a manner that not only gave new meaning to the function and possibilities of its highly contested aspects, namely presence, theatricality and the representation of reality, but in doing so, also produced theatre’s greatest triumphs. Their

innovations – along with Ibsen’s in his role as the pioneer of modernist drama – continue to shape the work of contemporary theatre artists, and have significant implications both in terms of adapting modernist drama and literature to the stage, and adopting a modernist practice, which is the focus of the next section.

Modernism and Metatheatre

My own adaptation takes the form of metatheatre, and it bears touching upon the relationship between modernism and metatheatre, for how it serves my own approach as discussed in Chapter Five. The term first appeared in Lionel Abel’s collection of essays, *Metatheatre* published in 1963, in which he defines it as ‘a comparatively philosophic form of drama’, in which characters are ‘aware of their own theatricality’ (v; 3). He traces metatheatre all the way back to Shakespeare, and as taken up by modernist dramatists, spans the futurists and dadaists to Pirandello and Brecht. For modernist dramatic works, metatheatre allowed for a foregrounding of the conventional nature of the theatrical stage, in which the separation between stage and audience becomes porous (Pérez-Simón n.p.). Mark Allinson describes metatheatre ‘as an exemplary feature of modernism’, one that ‘[reflects] the marked self-consciousness of the modern age, its desire to question the relationship between art and life, and its tendency to experimentation’ (5).

As adopted by Brecht and Pirandello in particular, the form ‘was radically reimagined for the modern stage as an antidote to realism’ (Shepherd-Barr *Modern Drama* 43). Utilized to ‘comment on the theatricality of life as we inhabit roles that obscure our true selves’, Brecht and Pirandello sought to provoke audiences; albeit Brecht’s aesthetic was driven by ideology, politics and a desire to change society, while Pirandello was more philosophically inclined, concerned with investigating the fundamental theatricality of life (Shepherd-Barr, *Modern Drama* 45-46).

The self-consciousness of metatheatre, the manner in which it foregrounds the constructedness of a play and allows for a porousness between the audience and the stage all serve to make it a provocative and effective vehicle for adapting modernist women's narratives to the stage, as is explored in-depth in Chapter Five.

III. Modernist Adaptation/Modernism Adapted

Contemporary productions of modernist plays abound – on any given day, multiple productions of works by Brecht, Beckett and Ibsen play on stages worldwide, from fringe venues and college campuses, to Broadway and the West End; a phenomenon that testifies to the profound impact the tension between modernism and theatre has had in terms of generating some of the most provocative, timeless and exciting plays in history. However, locating adaptations of non-dramatic literary modernism is a far greater challenge. Nonetheless – particularly with the copyrights of many of these works newly expired, as in the case of James Joyce's catalogue – brave theatre companies are taking on these projects and revealing the exciting possibilities these texts have for exploring new realms in performance.

While adapting modernist literature to the stage is not the same as adopting a modernist approach to staging plays, the work of contemporary theatremakers who have embraced a modernist aesthetic, particularly in their handling of classic plays, reveals a great deal about the strategies and possibilities for adapting modernist literature. In *Shadows of Realism*, Nancy Kindelan investigates how modernism has influenced contemporary theatre productions, and argues for the effectiveness of an imagistic approach to staging classic plays. Drawing upon the ideas of Richard Hornby, Robert Brustein and others, she identifies a modernist sensibility and strategies driven by an occupation with the metaphorical, visual qualities of a text that in turn offer a glimpse of the

‘poetic world’ of the play (10). Kindelan describes the process as a ‘reimaging’, in which an analysis of the text evokes a series of images that allow one to re-experience it, and in turn, discover a new vision of the play (1).

If ‘imaging’ provides the means for re-experiencing, analysis of the text itself is paramount as the springboard to these images; in this regard, the structuralist approach championed by Richard Hornby features prominently as a foundation to Kindelan’s argument. Hornby’s embrace of structuralism is a response to what he refers to as the ‘concept’ production – the ‘updated’ play, the ‘rearranged’ text – in which ‘*Hamlet* is set in Spanish Harlem, *Oedipus Tyrannus* performed in the nude, *Phaedra* turned into a rock opera’ (4). He cites these examples to introduce some highly relevant questions: ‘Just what *is* the proper relation of text to performance? Is a playscript a work of literature, or a ‘scenario’, or both, or neither? Does it demand absolute fidelity, like a musical score, or is it only a starting point, like a film script?’ (4).

His mission in addressing these questions is to call out the tendency in restaging classic plays, ‘to reduce the complex to the simple, the multiple to the single, the profound to the inane’ (xiv), which he attributes to an ‘ominous rise in performance theory’ that is responsible for ‘a corresponding decline in scholarly dramatic criticism as a discipline’ (xiv). ‘Will the twenty-first century be dominated...by American performance theorists, writing on shamanism or figure skating but never looking at a playscript?’ he laments (xiv). As he sees it, ‘Performance theory not only excludes playscripts, but preaches an outright attack on literary study as being irrelevant to theatrical performance’ (xiv).

Robert Brustein, similarly, rails against what he terms ‘simile directing’, which relies ‘largely on external physical changes’, while hailing a ‘metaphorical’ approach that has the potential to ‘[change] our whole notion of the play’ (*Reimagining* 116). The parallels with Kindelan’s process of reimaging are recognisable as well; Brustein’s ideal is a ‘reimagining’ of the classics effected by

those who 'are more interested in generating provocative theatrical images...that are suggestive rather than specific, reverberant rather than concrete' (*Reimagining* 116).

Metaphorical directing attempts to penetrate the mystery of a play in order to devise a poetic stage equivalent – a process considerably more radical in its interpretive risks, since the director 'authors' the production as much as the author writes the text... Nevertheless, it is the metaphorical approach, I believe, that has the greater potential for rediscovering the original impulses and energies of the material. (Brustein, *Reimagining* 116)

As Brustein suggests, a hazard of this approach, which favours the 'auteur director', is that which separates the modernist approach from the postmodern; although it is a very obscure distinction, whereas the postmodernist practitioner 'deconstructs' the original text, the modernist 'reconceives' it (Kindelan 2). Under so much conceptual weight, the reimagining wrought by the postmodernist sees the play '[lose] its shape and [become] another thing entirely'; at the same time, as Brustein points out,

[auteur directors] genuinely believe they are releasing the original impulses of the plays they direct from the conventions of traditional production and would vigorously defend their concepts as 'faithful' realizations of a playwright's intention, seen anew through modern eyes. (*Reimagining* 148)

While perspectives on whether a production or adaptation has been 'true' to the original, or the original is 'recognizable' in the restaging or adaptation, are subjective and veer into the

complex territory of fidelity, what distinguishes the ‘trueness’ of a modernist revision or adaptation from the postmodern is its anchoring in the text. A return to Hornby’s questions helps to illustrate this concept: ‘What *is* the proper relation of text to performance?’ When approaching the text through what Kindelan describes as a ‘modernist prism’, the text exists, as she terms it, to be ‘mined’ – not deconstructed for parts to create something entirely new; ‘Is a playscript a work of literature, or a ‘scenario’, or both, or neither?’ For the modernist, the true essence and poetry of a play can only be realised through a metaphorical imaging and interpretive analysis of the text as a whole – as such, it is approached as a work of literature; for the postmodernist, a playscript might offer no more than a ‘scenario’, to be used as a means of exploring the personal, radical, theoretical, political or cosmic vision of a given auteur director.

Although this ‘modernist approach’ has been explored in the context of restaging classic plays, as applied to the adaptation of modernist literature to the stage it holds great potential for opening up a range of possibilities for discovering new meaning in the work. For example, Katie Mitchell’s devised piece *Waves*, adapted from Virginia Woolf’s *The Waves*, which played at the National Theatre in 2006, was composed entirely of visuals, sound, movement and tableaux carried out by a company of actors who spoke no dialogue – the effect was of being immersed in a dream or memory, an interior world – one that evoked the stream-of-consciousness style of the novel itself. Moreover, with its mingling of mediums, it came all the more alive. As Benjamin Fowler suggests, intermediality itself can function as theatre modernism:

Mitchell’s intermedial practice questions the hierarchical stratification of media—allowing, as [Chiel] Kattenbelt argues (and as Woolf asserted in 1924), ‘new dimensions of perception and experience to be explored’—as it simultaneously troubles the stratification of historical aesthetic regimes. (‘Breaking Through’ n.p.)

This collaborative effort, devised by the company and which utilized a range of media all in the service of Woolf's text, echoes Brustein when he writes that 'texts develop fullness of being only through the continuing intervention of collective minds. They are not frozen in time, they are subject to continuing discovery and each new production generates others in response' (*Reimagining* 120).

In addition, 'the modernist approach' one might read in productions like *Waves* reflects what Claire Warden identifies as 'persisting elements of modernist avant-garde theatrical experimentation in late twentieth century theatre and...contemporary performance (139). Citing examples in the work of theatre artists such as Peter Brook, Tim Crouch, Tadeusz Kantor and Richard Schechner; theatre companies including the Wooster Group, Monstrous Regiment and Gay Sweatshop; and playwrights Martin Crimp, Sarah Kane and Mark Ravenhill, she points out that 'one could make a strong case for the continuation of modernist avant-garde methods in the twenty-first century (147).

Adapted for the stage, modernist literature might also be opened wide in a multi-dimensional intervention—one that is collaborative as well as collectively received—to reveal a greater and more profound 'fullness of being'. In this regard, recent adaptations of James Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, and Eliot's *The Waste Land* bear considering, not only for how they were conceived through an imagistic approach rooted in an intense commitment to the text, but also for how they utilized other strategies such as intermediality, a focus on an ensemble rather than the individual and casting against gender in an effort to realize the emotional and psychological elements of the original narrative that pose a particular challenge as far as translating them to the stage.

In 2012, shortly after the copyright on Joyce's works expired, The Pentameters Theatre in London staged an adaptation of *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* that saw an ensemble cast of five in roles not defined by gender; Dedalus himself was played by a woman, which one reviewer noted served to '[draw] out the sensitive, feminine aspects of the character' (Crisan). The stream of consciousness narration was realized in scenes of 'frenetic montage' that served to 'bombard' the audience, an effect the same reviewer noted served to plunge one into Stephen's mind (Crisan). Like *Waves*, the production utilized video, visuals, original music and soundscapes that contributed to a sense of being in an interior, psychological space, rather than observing a drama carried out in the exterior world (Crisan). Interestingly, another adaptation at The New Theatre in Dublin in 2013 utilized all of the same strategies, from montage and multimedia, to casting Dedalus as a woman. Both productions were sold out, and the New Theatre Dublin production went on to tour, suggesting the adaptation of literary modernism, while challenging, offers unique and exciting possibilities for these challenges.

Another notable adaptation of a modernist classic is Deborah Warner's stage version of *The Waste Land*, performed by Fiona Shaw, which was presented in diverse spaces across Europe and North America in 1996, and revived for a final run in London at Wilton's Music Hall in 2010. Rather than eliciting its imagistic quality from a multimedia ensemble performance, the interiority and sense of multiple worlds was realized in a solo performance that drew from the actual physical spaces in which it was performed, as well as Shaw's facility for evoking the many voices and moods of the poem. As Mel Gussow notes, 'Fiona Shaw is both the voice of the poem and the characters who inhabit its landscapes, actual and mythic'; and while Eliot's words remained unchanged, the show took on a new life with every new location because of what Warner describes as a 'combustion of text and space' (qtd. in Gussow). Warner's approach to this text – with the text,

unchanged, at its foundation, yet projected into a multitude of spaces and points in time – could thus be seen to represent another example of a modernist staging of a modernist text.

Conclusion

Exploring the various angles through which modernism and adaptation intersect not only reveals the formative influences that have fuelled our most important dramatists, but also it highlights why theatre itself is so important. As Barish points out, ‘if the dangers of theatricality ever ceased to threaten us in our daily lives, then perhaps our special need for the theater as an art form might also vanish: it would no longer confront us with an account of our own truth struggling against our own falsity’ (477).

Charting the course of adaptation through the modernist period sheds light on some of the common challenges of adapting modernist literature across various media; aspects I have come up against as I approached my own adaptation of *This Is My Body* to the stage. These include how to translate psychologically complex, interior narratives that often encompass multiple settings and even metaphysical realms. In turn, the strategies charted in this chapter, such as the use of flashbacks, voice-over and montage sequences, as well as the possibilities for innovative use of sound, lighting, video, movement sequences and the acting style of the actors themselves – while not all incorporated into my own final script – expanded my vision and encouraged an experimentalism in my own process – and in the final product - that I may not have arrived at otherwise.

However, the most significant influence on my approach to adapting *This Is My Body* stems from the ideological conflict between modernism and the theatre, and how it has shaped the work of modernist dramatists such as Brecht; work that embraces theatricality, ‘plays’ with the concept

of presence and often employs a metatheatrical structure. These elements and how they function in my own adaptation are explored in the analysis of my play in Chapter Five.

While this chapter has considered the adaptation of modernist literature in general, the following chapter looks specifically at modernist women's autobiographical narratives in the vein of Margery Latimer's *This Is My Body* in order to identify what lends them to the stage.

CHAPTER FOUR

The Intersection of Modernism, Feminism and Adaptation:

Narrative as Performance in Modernist Women's Autobiographical Fiction

In seeking to differentiate the work of the modernist women writers such as Dorothy Richardson, Gertrude Stein, and H.D. from (male) high modernism, Sabine Vanacker argues their experimentalism stems from a common autobiographical pursuit: 'rather than writing about their life histories for an audience of absent readers, they in fact seek to "perform" themselves as a strong female presence in front of an audience of reader-listeners' ('Autobiography and Orality' 179). Along these lines, Gillian Beer writes that Virginia Woolf, in her groundbreaking modernist work *The Waves*, sought to '[overcome] what she saw as a central problem for women writing: expressing the body and the passions (xii)'; to do so, she 'found a language and a rhythm...less 'impeded by the extreme conventionality of the other sex' (xiv). 'It would follow a rhythm not a plot. It would inhabit the body' (Beer xv).

What both of these arguments suggest is that these modernist women's texts 'perform' in a manner that actively seeks an intimate connection with their reader, one that can function to blur the boundaries between author, an author's 'self' as realized in the text, and the reader/audience; more than that, as Vanacker argues, it is a connection that is rooted in a desire to assert their subjectivity through the performance of their presence as a woman speaker in response to a sense of being 'absent' – alienated from their selves and in search of their identity – in the environment in which they found themselves in the early twentieth century. This aspect of the connection they seek is what sets their narratives apart from those of male modernists, such as Joyce's *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. Moreover, the unique aspect of this connection profoundly informs the

transference of these novels from page to stage, as the performing, 'present' narrational voice that is at once author and protagonist is realized in the performing body, creating what Ryan Claycomb describes as a dialectical image of history onstage – one that literally realizes the presence these women sought in their writing, speaks their feminism and also reflects on how women 'perform' in the present (23).

My own approach to adapting Margery Latimer's *This Is My Body* is profoundly influenced by these arguments; the foundation of my process is the intimate connection between author, protagonist and reader/adaptor, and the goal has been to realize this strong presence of a woman evoked in the text, in the performing body onstage – a presence that might effect a dialectical image of history on stage, that speaks for 'a woman' and 'women'.

This chapter argues that the distinct performativity in women's literary modernism, one that fosters a point of interaction, reflection and identification between author/narrator and reader/audience that seeks to assert a female presence, is also where adaptation is already at work, such that adapting these texts for the stage becomes a process of foregrounding and activating what is already in place.

Given Vanacker's claim that the experimentalism of many women modernists was driven by 'a common autobiographical pursuit', Part One begins with an examination of the relationship between autobiography and literary modernism, before narrowing in on the relationship of autobiography to women's literary modernism in particular. Drawing upon the arguments of Max Saunders, Lynette Felber and Sabine Vanacker, this section lays the groundwork for a more focused look at these narratives as 'communicative biographies'.

Picking up the thread of the communicative aspects of these narratives, Part Two looks at narrative as performance, with a focus on the self-reflective narratives that share many qualities with the autobiographical modernist women's narratives this thesis is concerned with. Taking as a

starting point Marie Maclean's audience-focused approach as set out in *Narrative as Performance*, this section looks at how a text can recast the role of an audience/reader to one that is more active – or in the context of Linda Hutcheon's 'narcissistic narrative', that sees the reader/audience as a collaborator.

Part Three looks at modernist women's autobiographical narratives specifically in the context of Hutcheon's narcissistic narrative, towards unraveling their multiple layers of performativity, and considering them in the context of adaptation for the stage.

Part Four explores all of these dynamics in American modernist Margery Latimer's novel *This Is My Body*.

I. The Auto/biographical in Women's Literary Modernism

Although he notes that modernism and autobiography might seem diametrically opposed, given the modernist claim that a work of art ought to be autonomous and not explained by, or connected in any meaningful way to its creator/author³, Max Saunders provides a strong argument that the autobiographical is in fact 'central to modernist narrative, and never far from the surface, even in the extended poetry of Pound or Eliot' (12). Similarly, William Spengemann writes that 'the modernist movement away from representational discourse toward self-enacting, self-reflexive verbal structures' – i.e., '[the] various poems, novels and plays that have recently been inserted into the genre]' have had the effect of making literary modernism 'seem synonymous with that of autobiography' (xiii). Rather than negating autobiography, as Saunders writes, modernism served

³ Saunders refers to 'the classic New Critical view (initiated by modernists themselves) that modernist impersonality requires a rejection or abjuring of biography, a view which tended to undervalue autobiographical utterance, whether in lyric or narrative poetry, or in autobiographical prose forms' (12).

to 'make it new'; as such, 'to synthesize modernism and life-writing is to redefine modernism' (13).

Citing the 1870s to 1930s as 'a cusp', which saw the rapid evolution of various forms, Saunders identifies a particular 'fascination with the possibilities of life-writing forms' (11). These range from Joyce's *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, to Proust's *À la recherche du temps perdu*, to Dorothy Richardson's *Pilgrimage* and Virginia Woolf's *To The Lighthouse*. Saunders makes a case that criticism has failed to 'adequately [describe] the relations between modernism and life-writing' (12); moreover, to '[look] at modernist engagements with auto/biography brings out how many modernist works exist through the fusion of fiction and biography' – indeed, to do so 'reveals modernism's precursors in this regard' (13). For example, Jean Rhys's *Postures*, Radclyffe Hall's *Well of Loneliness*, Yeats's *The Tower* and Woolf's *Orlando* might be classed as 'premodernist [forms] of the autobiographical novel'; however 'now that we tend to no longer think of modernism as so monolithic, the idea that some modernists were more engaged with life-writing than others is scarcely objectionable' (Saunders 294). And being engaged with life-writing 'doesn't just mean that [these writers] weren't modernists in the same way that Eliot, Joyce and Pound were *better* modernists, [Eliot, Joyce and Pound were] merely different, more 'impersonal' ones (Saunders 295).

Critical work focused on autobiography as central to women's modernism highlights the female *bildungsroman*, or coming-of-age novel, which gained popularity after the First World War. Saunders cites Suzanne Raitt, who discusses the rise of women's autobiographical fiction after the war in *May Sinclair: A Modern Victorian*; women of the period including Dorothy Richardson, Katherine Mansfield, and Virginia Woolf were writing fiction that '[evidenced] ... an increasingly confident exploration of femininity, of gender identities and of sexuality' (Saunders 296; Raitt 17). Saunders also writes that

The achievements of the Suffragette movement, and the opportunities the war presented for women to work in what had been considered the masculine sphere, undoubtedly contributed to both the experiences women wanted to write about, and to their confidence in writing about them. The testimonial quality of the autobiography was also important, as it would prove to be for other oppressed groups finding a voice in subsequent generations . . . (296)

Although men were writing autobiographical novels as well, Saunders points out that the development novel was ‘predominantly written by men before the war, and increasingly written by women after it’; an aspect he attributes partly to the ‘masculine high modernist’s’ association of these novels ‘first with homosexuals and then with female writers’ (296). While acknowledging that there has been a great deal written about Woolf and Stein’s engagements with auto/biography in gender criticism and feminist work around subjectivity and authorship, Saunders urges that such studies ‘need to be connected to each other, and to studies of other modern writers, including men as well as women, and set against a broader literary-historical context’; doing so, he argues, promises to reveal ‘how a surprising number of major works . . . engage in very profound and central ways with questions about life-writing’ (13).

If the relationship between modernism and autobiography bears close inspection as a foundation for examining modernist women’s autobiographical narratives, so too does the relationship between autobiography and fiction itself – a complicated relationship, as Saunders suggests, played out in the merging of the two genres, from the fictive autobiography to the autobiographical novel (8). With regard to the distinction between the two, Philippe Lejeune insists it is a matter of degrees; while a fictional narrative might incorporate autobiographical

elements, autobiography ‘does not include degrees [of the fictional]: it is all or nothing’ (13).

However, William Spengemann, noting the landslide of ‘poems, novels and plays that have recently been inserted into the genre [of autobiography]’, observes that ‘their fictiveness’ does not exempt them from wrestling with ‘the same problems of self-definition that have taxed autobiographers ever since Augustine discovered that the self is hard ground to plough’ (xiii).

Saunders’s focus is on what he calls ‘autobiografiction’ – narratives that reflect the literary relationship ‘between fiction and a self’s biography, rather than that between fiction and self’ – a category that might include the modernist women’s narratives that are the focus of this thesis; those that like Latimer’s *This Is My Body* are self-reflective portraits of the artist as a young woman. As Saunders points out, the emergence of the modernist *kunsterroman* (novel about the development of the artist) at the turn of the century saw ‘a new kind of experimentation combining the fictive and auto/biographical’, one that placed it squarely in the realm of autobiografiction (11). Among these experiments, includes the roman à clef, arguably the ‘most autobiographical of autobiographical novels’, which ‘[in] its purest form, one might say that only the names have been changed’; of course scenes and verbal exchanges might be added, the biographical characters might remain the same but the plot might change, or vice versa (Saunders 8).

Especially prevalent amongst women writers during the 1920s and 1930s, Lynette Felber writes, was the ‘liaison novel’, a form of the roman à clef used for social criticism (4). Although some liaison novels depicted homosexual relationships, Felber’s focus is the heterosexual liaison novel, which is especially relevant to *This Is My Body* (the final part of this chapter looks at *This Is My Body* as a liaison novel.) In this vein of autobiographical fiction, ‘the woman in the heterosexual relationship initiates her struggle for artistic identity as she rebelliously defines herself against her partner and his masculine aesthetic’ (5). In such cases, the liaison novel serves as ‘a retaliation against male dominance’, which ‘critiques the consequences of patriarchy for the woman artist’ (4).

Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar also observe the liaison narrative phenomenon, referring to it as ‘scribbling sibling rivalry . . . between mutually admiring pairs’ (Felber 7; *No Man’s Land* 1:149). Contextualizing these novels as a ‘permutation’ of the move towards autobiography that took hold in the 1920s and 1930s, Felber suggests these women writers were seduced as much by the promise of freedom offered by the first-wave of the feminist movement as they were by their lovers; thus for these women writers, the liaison novel expresses ‘thwarted desire and the disappointment of a failed idealized relationship in which a woman desired equality in both the personal and public spheres, as both lover and writer’ (7).

Sabine Vanacker also recognizes this distinct ‘alternative’ form of autobiography seized upon by the modernist women writers, and looks closely at the role of gender, stating that ‘autobiographical writing by women takes place against the background of an on-going discussion with . . . fictive identity as propounded by a male voice (‘Stein, Richardson and H.D.’ 117; Felber 9). ‘Making it new’ meant not only challenging established literary and social structures, but for the female partner in a literary liaison, the liaison itself proved to be a ‘[site] of rebellion where, for the woman, an alliance against the literary establishment often evolved, analogously, into a rebellion against her partner’ (Felber 9).

That the liaison novel concerns itself with a couple as opposed to an individual is another aspect of how the genre subverts traditional autobiography. Gabriele Griffin argues that ‘[autobiography] is supposed to be the story of the narrating self. Autobiography is not *alterbiography* or the story of the relationship between one self and another’ (‘What is [Not]’ 152). In this sense, the literary liaison novel might be an ‘alterbiography’ – a distinction that highlights the symbiotic relationship between female identity formation and autobiographical writing; as Mary Mason writes, ‘[a] constant in women’s life writing – and not in men’s – is the sort of evolution and delineation of an identity by way of alterity’ (231).

Approaching autobiographical fiction as a mode of ‘*apophrades*’, or ‘text that relates to a previous model (the real-life relationship) in such a manner as to suggest, in retrospect, that the appropriating writer actually authors the prior text (the relationship itself)’, then as Felber points out, these autobiographers effect a type of re-vision, which allows them to ‘appropriate what was already their own, but may not have been as they wished’ (11). This has significant implications in terms of female subjectivity. A woman who may not have held the role of subject in the actual relationship, can, in her fictionalized depiction of the liaison, not only ‘seize control as a writer, a creator of stories’ – effectively controlling both the writing process and the product – but also ‘as lover, life-after-the-fact (the retrospective function of autobiography)’ she ‘[gains] a kind of control or subjectivity that was never achieved in life’ (Felber 11).

Sabine Vanacker takes this idea further, and examines the manner in which many modernist women writers sought to seize control, and assert their subjectivity – by penning ‘communicative biographies, which perform the presence of the woman speaker’ (*The Presence of Women* 5). Drawing upon the work of Walter Ong, she stresses the orality of their writing that not only lends it ‘warmth, presence and immediacy’, but in which ‘the speaker and hearer(s) are considered mutually interactive, their communication is immediate, rectifiable, and their speech resounds all around them’ (‘Autobiography and Orality’ 179). Reflecting on the work of Gertrude Stein, H.D., and Dorothy Richardson, Vanacker argues that all three ‘investigate the precarious situation of the female speaker who feels alienated from herself in the presence of male interlocutors’ (*The Presence of Women* 4).

What comes forward the strongest out of these autobiographies then, is an existential fear of early twentieth-century women concerning the strength of their identities.

Weighed down by convention and morality, tied to the oral sphere as untrue, ‘absent’

speakers, circumscribed by their environment, modernist women voice fears concerning their presence and performance as ‘acting’ speakers. (*The Presence of Women* 312)

In their writing, ‘the absence of a male interlocutor allows for a woman’s presence’ – what they are striving for is ‘a perverse textuality, located on the boundary between the written and the spoken medium’; as Vanacker concludes, ‘Their modernist goals are to develop writing as a strong presence, so much so that you can almost hear it’ (*The Presence of Women* 313). Thus, as located on the boundary between the written and spoken, these narratives not only naturally perform, but the strong ‘woman’s presence’ – of the author, the protagonist, and indeed, the reader/audience who is called upon to engage with and complete the performance – is yet another manifestation of the blurred boundaries between author, ‘self’ and reader.

The specific dynamics of these blurred boundaries, the more active role this phenomenon demands of the reader, and how in turn these aspects foster a distinctive performativity that lends women’s literary modernism to the stage, is the focus of the section that follows.

II. Narcissistic Narrative as Performance

We all know what we mean by a well-told tale, distinguishing automatically between the tale and the telling. What is implicit in this distinction is that telling involves a performance. (Maclean 1)

Marie Maclean’s emphasis on the performance involved in a ‘telling’ also highlights the necessity of the presence of an audience for whom to perform; this echoes Sabine Vanacker’s

argument with regard to the experimentalism of modernist women writers such as Stein and H.D., who were writing communicative biographies – who sought to perform a powerful female presence for an audience of reader/listeners. That these narratives called upon a reader/audience – as opposed to ‘an audience of absent readers’ – functioned to draw out, provoke and influence these narratives to the extent that the reader/audience might also be seen as a collaborator; such an audience was vital to the completion of their tale.

As a lens through which to examine this distinct, active role of the reader/audience in the modernist women’s autobiografiction that concerns this thesis, Maclean’s audience-focused approach to narrative as performance as laid out in *Narrative as Performance* offers an ideal starting point. Maclean draws from Baudelaire’s *Little Prose Poems* or *Le Spleen de Paris* to illustrate her arguments, choosing them for the self-consciousness of their narrative performance (xiii) and the way ‘they embody a distillation of a wide variety of narrative forms and structures’ while at the same time ‘form together a liminal text, marking the threshold of modernism in literature’ (43). While her specific analysis of Baudelaire’s texts are not discussed here, her approach is worth looking at for how it informs an understanding of the dynamics that foster a more active reader/audience, as well as Linda Hutcheon’s arguments regarding ‘narcissistic narrative’ discussed later in this section.

While oral narrative has long proven fertile ground for testing theories of narrative, Maclean points out that much of the dominant scholarship in this arena—from Propp, to Todorov, Bremond, Prince and Greimas—has focused on the teller/tale nexus (1). And although she is not alone placing her focus on the teller/hearer—as she points out, others such as Seymour Chatman have studied this dynamic extensively—Maclean nonetheless addresses an aspect of this nexus other traditional models and critical approaches have neglected: namely, the *variability* inherent in this relationship, ‘the fact that enactment demands interaction, that a tale is altered in *each* telling’ (2).

In other words, with each new telling multiple contexts are brought into play—that of each individual hearer, that of the teller, and that of the telling itself—such that ‘the textual stability . . . is provided as much by the demands of the audience as by the memory of the teller’ (2). An important element of this mutable relationship is that it is both ‘personal’ and ‘active’, demanding the efforts of both teller and hearer if it is to be fully realized; put simply, ‘for a performance to be successful, it is not enough for it to have purpose, it must have energy and effect’ (xi).

If this forms the basis of her theory of narrative, she nevertheless draws from a range of other studies and ideas to build upon this concept, considering them with a particular focus on what they reveal about the narrative energy between teller and hearer. Among these is the work of Walter Ong, who looks at the energetic forces that drive traditional narratives, and Michael Serres, who has written extensively on the concept of ‘noise’ or the ‘parasite’, which can both interfere with, and enrich a narrative’s power. As Maclean argues: ‘The disruptive input of anarchy, of violence, of noise, stimulates the mutation and new growth of narrative forms and their evolution within the wider interplay of social forces’; thus at the most basic level, the impact of noise helps to illustrate Maclean’s thesis regarding the transformative influence of an audience—‘even if the audience input assumes a seemingly negative and disruptive character’ (4).

A parallel in the context of modernist women’s autobiografiction might see such a disruption stemming from societal/cultural restrictions or expectations – for example, the disruptive forces that might present themselves to a woman living in a patriarchal society. By the same token, as a ‘parasite’ or ‘noise’, patriarchal forces have the potential to enrich as much as they do to interfere – an aspect that echoes Vanacker’s argument regarding the experimentalism of modernist women writers like H.D., Stein and Richardson – that it stemmed from an effort to ‘investigate the precarious situation of the female speaker who feels alienated from herself in the presence of male

interlocutors' (*Presence of Women* 4). These women were, in effect, seeking to be heard above (or below) the noise.

In terms of adaptation, the noise or disruptive anarchy might be in the mind of the adapter; the 'grit' might come with how a given adapter interacts with a narrative performance, given what they bring to it in terms of their own background, experiences and perspective. In the same way that these forces can be creative influences that foster the variability of each unique teller/reader interaction, effectively rendering them collaborators, so too does a similar relationship play out between teller and adapter.

Also relevant in terms of adaptation is Maclean's comparison of the function of a performance with a metatext – that 'the audience's attention moves, in a form of dialogue, between the tale and the telling' (8). Fundamental to this is that '[their] judgment is an active one, constantly providing feedback on the demands of variability versus invariability, on the delights of surprise as opposed to the pleasures of the formulaic' (8). This dynamic also occurs when a novel or story from another medium that is already familiar or well-known is brought to the stage; an audience's attention moves not only from the tale and the telling, but is also often in dialogue with their earlier notions of the story that have equipped them with further expectations (these earlier notions and expectations might also be seen as noise from the audience). In both cases, as Maclean argues, 'the very restrictions of code and context . . . prompt a critical reception which is focused more on the performance as a total dramatic text than on the tale, which is the pretext of the performance' (8).

All of these challenges to the idea of an audience/reader as a capable, objective, placid addressee – as well as the idea of 'the performance as a total dramatic text' resonate compellingly in Linda Hutcheon's *Narcissistic Narrative: The Metafictional Paradox*. Like Maclean, Hutcheon's focus is the role of the reader – and specifically, how the text recasts the role of the reader/audience.

While her work in this area centers on metafiction, defined by Patricia Waugh as ‘fictional writing which self-consciously draws attention to its status as an artifact in order to pose questions about the relationship between fiction and reality’ (2), the modernist women’s autobiografiction considered in this thesis possess metafictional elements such that Hutcheon’s concept of narcissistic narrative is helpful to understanding the active role such narratives engender in a reader/audience. A more in-depth look at women’s autobiografiction, as well as how Hutcheon’s idea of narcissistic narrative helps to identify its distinct performativity, are discussed in Part Three. (In other words, the focus of this section is to gain a clearer understanding of narcissistic narrative in general, and how it fosters a more active role in the reader/audience.)

In referring to metafiction as ‘narcissistic narrative’, Linda Hutcheon makes expressly clear that she means an ‘engaged form of self-reflection’ in the *narrative*, not narcissism ‘as a pathology’ exhibited by a narrator or author (*Narcissistic xi*). Calling to mind the myth of Narcissus, she compares the sheet of paper to a reflecting pool, while the text might serve as ‘its own mirror’, thus highlighting the narcissistic narrative’s obsession with its own makeup as fiction even as it questions what is real in the world beyond the text (*Narcissistic 14*). She rejects any split between process (the storytelling) and product (the story told), drawing upon the Aristotelian view ‘that diegesis was a part of mimesis’, a concept that was recognized by Cervantes as well—‘that in the novel form the narrative act itself is, for the reader, part of the action’ (*Narcissistic 5*).

Reading and writing belong to the process of ‘life’ as much as they do to those of ‘art’.

It is this realization that constitutes one side of the paradox of metafiction for the reader. On the one hand, he is forced to acknowledge the artifice, the ‘art’ of what he is reading; on the other, explicit demands are made upon him, as a co-creator, for

intellectual and affective responses comparable in scope and intensity to those of his life experience. (*Narcissistic* 5)

Thus Hutcheon's reader—like Maclean's audience—is forced into a dual role, placed at once inside and outside the narrative. Integral to this—and perhaps the most important aspect of her argument with regard to narrative—is that it should be seen as a *process*-oriented mode, rather than one geared towards a product; in other words, metafiction or the self-reflective mode represents a move towards a *mimesis of process*, the creation of the fiction itself, rather than a mimesis of product (which in effect describes realist fiction) (*Narcissistic* x).

A more active reader can also mean greater freedom, as one is called upon to 'consciously create a fictive world in his or her imagination while reading words on a page':

In thus reversing the order of the work of the author, the reader of metafiction now openly becomes the creative accomplice, the co-producer of the work. This has always been the reader's role, of course, even in realist fiction, but metafiction [makes] this creative dimension of reading impossible to ignore. (Hutcheon, *Narcissistic* xii)

This dynamic between narrative and reader has direct parallels with the theatre, where an audience—like the reader of metafiction—cannot escape their awareness of the artifice of what is before them, while at the same time they are immersed in the drama on stage. They are also co-creators in the sense that their own lived experiences contribute as much to their experience of the performance as the actions and words of the actors on stage.

For Hutcheon, the point of interaction between author and reader/audience serves as a point of reflection; 'the novelist actualizes the world of his imagination through words so the reader from

those same words manufactures in reverse a literary universe that is as much his creation as it is the novelist's (*Narcissistic* 27). This point of reflection also marks an interaction that is an adaptation—in the manufacture of a reverse literary universe, co-created by both novelist and reader. Hutcheon argues this phenomenon—the point of reflection that is a key element of narcissistic narrative—is a neglected aspect of all fiction; that ‘the making of fictive worlds and the constructive, creative functioning of language itself are . . . self-consciously shared by author and reader’ (*Narcissistic* 30). The role of the reader here must be emphasized—that in addition to possessing an awareness of acting as co-creator of the fictional world, he or she is also involved in ‘making sense’ of it (Hutcheon, *Narcissistic* 30).

If Hutcheon's idea of narcissistic narrative helps to provide greater insight as to how metafictional or self-reflective narratives require a more active, collaborative effort on the part of the reader, then an examination of women's autobiografiction for what it shares with metafiction promises to inform what makes these narratives distinctly performative – the dynamics that change the role of a reader/audience to a more active one, that foster an interaction between them that is similarly collaborative – one that blurs the boundaries between them and emphasizes *the performance* of the narrative, rather than the tale itself. The following section explores modernist women's autobiografiction specifically in this context, towards identifying its layers of performativity and where adaptation is already built-in.

III. Performance and Adaptation in Modernist Women's Autobiografiction

In the same way that many modernist women writers adopted experimental forms to write about their life histories and express their bodies and passions, so too have women writers in general turned to metafiction or utilized elements of narcissistic narrative as a powerful tool to

create distinctly feminist narratives that force a reader to confront the truth and reality of a dominant and repressive patriarchal society. As Gayle Greene writes, the metafictional or self-reflective form '[draws] attention to the codes that govern human behavior, to reveal how those codes are constructed and how they can therefore be changed', and does so by '[exploring] women's efforts at liberation in relation to problems of narrative form, fiction that destabilizes the conventions of realism in a project of psychic and social transformation' (1-2).

Greene even goes so far as to hail feminist fiction as 'the most revolutionary movement in contemporary fiction', not only for its formal innovations, but also for its 'major role in the resurgence of feminism in the sixties and seventies': 'It is a movement as significant as Modernism, producing texts that combine the excitement and experimentation of modernism with the social critique of the great age of realism' (2).

At this point, it bears considering what makes a novel 'feminist'; as Greene describes it, a feminist novel '[analyses] gender as socially constructed' and also recognizes 'that what has been constructed may be reconstructed'; a feminist novel reflects an understanding 'that change is possible and that narrative can play a part in it' (2). Thus one could argue that metafiction serves as an ideal form for the feminist novel, given its self-consciousness that accommodates an awareness of the need for change, and a fascination with its own construction that in turn serves to question the larger constructs that govern both society and the self.

Greene cites the early 1970s as the birth of feminist metafiction, manifest in the novels of writers such as Erica Jong, Gail Godwin, Doris Lessing, Margaret Drabble, Margaret Laurence and Margaret Atwood, among others (7). However, as Joan Douglas Peters argues in *Feminist Metafiction and the Evolution of the British Novel*, feminist metafiction 'did not emerge as a late twentieth-century feminist reaction to the canon but had been revising and regenerating the novel from its beginning' (2). Peters also objects to the manner in which Greene's definition of feminist

metafiction places it in direct opposition to the canon of ‘great books’—for she effectively charts the trend in feminist metafiction in some of the most influential novels in the British literary canon, which include both male and female-authored texts, such as *Moll Flanders*, *Clarissa*, *Jane Eyre*, *Bleak House*, *Mrs. Dalloway* and *Lady Chatterley’s Lover*.

If both men and women have authored feminist metafiction, Greene nonetheless makes an important distinction between specifically feminist metafiction, and metafiction in general (usually male-authored)—a distinction that also has implications with regard to narrative as performance in these texts. Greene argues that for all its self-conscious dialogue with its own form, feminist metafiction also relies upon realism in a way that non-feminist metafiction does not; as she writes, ‘Accessibility is a sine qua non for any writing concerned with change, which is why realism is the mode of feminist writers—as it has been the mode of women writers in the past’ (3-4). Certainly most modernist women writers recognized their debt to the realist women’s novels of the nineteenth century; and yet, their relationship with this tradition was complex—it found them simultaneously ‘writing against it but also writing within it’, effecting a dialogic narrative that ‘[expressed] a mingled sense of identification with the tradition and alienation from it, of indebtedness and opposition—the sense described by Woolf of being both “inheritors” and “critics” of culture’ (Greene, G. 6).

Magali Michael offers a provocative argument with regard to this tension, one that has significant implications when considered in the context of Margery Latimer’s modernism as discussed in Part Four. Michael contends that the modernist women writers have largely been left out of the modernist canon precisely because of their relationship with the ‘New Woman’ novels of the 1880s and 1890s. As she writes, while the work of writers including Dorothy Richardson, Gertrude Stein, May Sinclair, H.D., Mina Loy and Virginia Woolf ‘is firmly anchored within certain aspects that have been associated with high modernism’, their experiments in narrative are

‘intricately linked to their attempts to delineate a specifically *female* subject’ (49). Among the high modernist aspects in their work, she cites: ‘attempts to efface the author’; an ‘emphasis on identity’—not only ‘locating or recovering an essential self’, but also ‘the split between the inner and outer self’; an ‘adherence to the notion that objective reality exists but is always distorted by subjectivity’; and ‘attempts to find a more accurate form of realism through the depiction of individual consciousness’ (49).

At the heart of Michael’s argument is her distinction between what the modernist women writers were effecting in taking up these forms, and the aesthetics of the dominant strain of (mostly male) high modernism that has been canonized:

Although high modernism in theory transcends the political through its engagement in a purely aesthetic realm, in actuality high modernism suppresses turn-of-the century politics: most notably the suffrage, socialist, and New Woman debates. For instance, by severing the radical present from a vilified conservative Victorian past (and thereby creating a binary opposition), the writers canonized by high modernism also erase the ‘anti-bourgeois energy’ and the ‘socioliterary radicalism’ evident in the debates surrounding the New Woman and New Woman novels. (48)

Michael’s claim is that the modernist women writers who ‘[continued] to write versions of New Woman novels’—and thus maintained a ‘connection with and interest in the political debates of the cultural moment’—posed a threat to ‘the binary logic on which high modernism depends to define itself and distance itself from the material situation’ (49). In other words, women modernists, as they engaged with high modernist techniques while also maintaining a focus on the female subject, not only disrupted traditional narrative, but also challenged the binary logic of traditional Western

thought that the institutionalized version of modernism rests upon. Moreover, in this regard, their work prefigures that of the later feminist metafictionists of the 60s and 70s as discussed by Greene:

The woman modernists experiment with narrative and language specifically to create new modes of representation that defy the traditional containment of women, their material experiences, and their experience-based modes of thought. The strategies disruptive of the status quo that emerge . . . anticipate the more radical challenges to Western metaphysics found in the works of many contemporary woman writers.

(Michael 78)

However, if contemporary women writers such as those discussed by Greene pose a ‘more radical challenge’ to Western metaphysics than the women modernists, they also share with them the obstacle of fully realizing their own distinct form, an issue that has long been debated in feminist literary criticism—perhaps the most well-known example being the clash between Toril Moi and Elaine Showalter with regard to Virginia Woolf’s experimentalism in *A Room of One’s Own*.

Returning to Greene and the metafictional narratives embraced by feminist writers of the 60s and 70s, the conflict between these dual impulses—realism and self-conscious experimentation—is significant as it was shared by many of the modernist women writing autobiografiction, and specifically Margery Latimer, as is explored in Part Four of this chapter. In addition, Greene’s argument with regard to the polarizing effect of these two opposing approaches echoes Magali Michael’s arguments in terms of the binary in high modernism that separated the purely aesthetic from the material/political. Rather than seeing the two narrative forms as a distinct choice facing feminist writers as to whether they should engage with traditional modes or establish their own, Greene writes ‘that it is the woman writer’s engagement with tradition that is distinctive about

women's writing' (21). This same emphasis is reflected in Magali Michael's argument that the disruptive power of the modernist women's narratives comes from how they engage with both the New Woman novel and its issues, *and* high modernism.

For example, Greene's summary of the basic trajectory of a feminist metafiction demonstrates how the process of appropriation serves as an alternative—a process that for modernist women writers, as we have seen, involved engaging with nineteenth century (realist) traditions:

[The] protagonist looks to the literary tradition for answers about the present, speculates about the relation of 'the forms' to her life and her writing, seeks an 'ending of her own' which differs from the marriage or death to which she is traditionally consigned, and seeks 'freedom' from the plots of the past. (7)

Within these plots, the question remains: how might a writer realize a narrative that evades linearity and yet still remains accessible? (This issue is considered in the context of Latimer's work later in this chapter, as well as in the chapter that follows, which addresses the question of staging such narratives.) However, Greene's theory is that feminist metafiction adopts 'a pattern of circular return' that 'allows repetition with re-vision' – 'a return to the past that enables a new future' (14). One means of achieving this circular pattern is through the 'self-begetting novel', which sees the female protagonist, at the end of the narrative, set to write the novel the reader has just read (16). Greene cites this pattern as 'so frequent in contemporary women's fiction as to be practically a distinguishing feature', and goes on to list as examples: '[Margaret] Drabble's *The Waterfall*, [Margaret] Laurence's *The Diviners*, [Gail] Godwin's *The Odd Woman*, [Erica] Jong's *Fear of Flying*, [Margaret] Atwood's *The Lady Oracle*, *The Handmaid's Tale*, *Cat's Eye* . . . Octavia Butler's *Kindred*

[and the list goes on]' (14). Passing the role of 'author' from writer to protagonist gives the protagonist not only the capacity to '[contemplate] her relation to the forms of the past', but also 'since she herself is a writer, she has the power to devise new plots'; in other words, '[to] make a protagonist an "author" is to give her control over conventions that have traditionally controlled her' (Greene, G. 17).

The idea of narratives that resist closure is also a key aspect to Sabine Vanacker's argument regarding the experimentalism in the autobiographical fictions of H.D., Stein and Richardson: 'Suffering from a lack of power in the spoken situation as well as in public life, women modernists [offered] a perverse reading of the genre of autobiography, developing life stories which [refused] closure in order to boost the presence of the female individual' (*The Presence of Women* 3). Thus the efforts of these women modernists to seize subjectivity and power in their autobiographical fictions further distinguished their appropriation of the genre; their narratives eluded 'the aura of accomplished death' – the 'felt danger that the finalization of the autobiographical text also freezes, determines, defines the autobiographer's still ongoing life' (*The Presence of Women* 1).

Other characteristics shared by both the feminist metafiction discussed by Greene, and the modernist women's autobiografiction that is the focus of this thesis, concern the central role of language in matters of power in women's fiction – both often focus on protagonists who keep journals, and in many cases, 'the protagonists are professional, self-supporting, self-conscious writers whose writing empowers them to live on their own'—and not just on their own, but unconventionally, which correlates directly with their questioning of narrative convention (17). As such, writing for these protagonists serves as 'a form of activism' (Greene, G. 17). All of these characteristics also serve as examples of how adaptation is ingrained in their narratives; each protagonist by her dual nature as writer/author within and of her own fiction is an adapter—in the sense that any retelling is an adaptation. In turn, the novelist/writer adapts her own 'reality' in the

creation of the fictional narrative; as such, the protagonist/author of modernist women's metafiction effects a *mise-en-abyme*, an endless vortex of mirroring that charges each layer of narrative,

The employment of intertextuality in these narratives also sees adaptation manifest as a form of 're-visioning' that comments on inherited conventions while also employing them to create a new narrative. The echoes of other texts also serve quite literally as elements that might be further activated or explored in adapting the novel for the stage; for example Katie Mitchell's use of excerpts from Virginia Woolf's journals in her stage adaptation of *The Waves*, or Polly Teale's layering of scenes from both *Jane Eyre* and *Wide Sargasso Sea* in her stage adaptation of the latter, *After Mrs. Rochester*, which sees characters from both novels sharing the same stage space, but occupying different worlds.

The connection between adaptation in feminist metafiction—and especially modernist women's feminist metafiction—and the act of 're-vision' as famously called for by Adrienne Rich in her 1972 essay, 'When We Dead Awaken: Writing as Re-Vision' demands special attention, as it holds the key to where adaptation resonates most powerfully in these novels. As Leideke Plate writes, 'Rich's words are well known. They have been quoted many times throughout the past three and a half decades ('Remembering' 389)':

We need to know the writing of the past, and know it differently than we have ever known it; not to pass on a tradition but to break its hold over us.

Re-vision—the act of looking back, of seeing with fresh eyes, of entering an old text from a new critical direction—is for women more than a chapter in cultural history: it is an act of survival. (Rich 18-19)

Although Rich calls for re-visioning as a means of rewriting the past—by which she means adapting and appropriating the classics to tell the stories of the marginalized, and especially women’s experiences—one might see the adaptation of modernist women’s feminist metafiction in a similar light, only instead of rewriting/adapting these narratives to focus on underrepresented characters, the process might be one of adapting narratives that were misunderstood because the protagonists and authors themselves were the marginalized. Plate points out that ‘Rich’s call for re-vision . . . has transformed not only our understanding of the past, but also our understanding of how we came to such an understanding’ (‘Remembering’ 389). In a similar manner, re-visioning modernist women’s feminist metafiction has the potential to change the reader/audience’s understanding of the past, as well as one’s ‘understanding of how we came to such an understanding’. Rich’s description of the process—the transformative impact of re-visioning upon the adapter and reader/audience, as well as the self-reflective aspect inherent in understanding how one came to understand—mirrors the dynamic of feminist metafiction itself. In other words, feminist metafiction in and of itself is a form of re-vision, and as such, locates adaptation at the very core of these narratives.

In the modernist women’s autobiofictions this thesis is concerned with, adaptation—or the narrative as a re-vision—resonates with particular force; a force fuelled not only by the way these narratives seek to challenge societal and literary conventions, but also by the tension of their effort to maintain the right balance between realism and experimentalism in order to be understood. Moreover, the obstacles—or ‘noise’—that shapes these narratives sets them apart from the metafiction of the 1970s feminists studied by Greene: in terms of the modernist women writers, as a group, there were far fewer of them with the confidence, resources and education that would have allowed them to devote themselves to the more experimental forms in their work; the

inequalities and sexism they faced were considerable, especially given the residue of Victorian mores; and the canon of 'great books' they were writing against was formidable. They had far less of a community, unlike the feminist writers of the 70s who were part of a much larger movement—as Plate points out, during the 70s, 'feminist re-vision took off as (almost) a literary genre in its own right' ('Remembering' 393).

In terms of the adaptation of modernist women's novels as a form of re-vision—of 'looking back, of seeing with fresh eyes, of entering an old text from a new critical direction'—Plate brings up an interesting point that helps illustrate the phenomenon—and in turn, hints at why these novels are especially compelling as vehicles for adaptation by contemporary feminist artists:

Today . . . it is generally understood that history is a story that is told in the interest of a particular group of people and that there is always a side to every story. As a result, the past is no longer this distant 'foreign' country but a space open to multiple revisits from the perspective of the present' ('Remembering' 390).

Modernist women's autobiographical narratives might be viewed as history; stories that are told in the interest of women, stories that tell a side that has been overlooked or silenced, much like the stories of the marginalized who are excluded from the 'great books' in the literary canon. Indeed, Joan Douglas Peters states as her aim in *Feminist Metafiction and the Evolution of the British Novel* as being 'to "revision" the history of the British novel so that it includes the substantial contribution of women's voices to the evolution of the genre'; as she points out, 'women's voices have been silenced in the mainstream British canon through the historicizing of that canon, not by the novels themselves' (19). Moreover, the idea of these novels as a 'space open to multiple visits'

also echoes Maclean's emphasis on the variability of each telling; or in the case of adaptation, each retelling.

Julie Sanders highlights the significance of the political connection between the built-in agenda of a source text and its draw as material for adaptation; 'what is often inescapable is the fact that a political or ethical commitment shapes a writer's, director's, or performer's decision to reinterpret a source text' (2). 'There is frequently heartfelt political commitment standing behind acts of literary appropriation or 're-vision' (7). Perhaps most importantly, what is central to re-vision 'is its being grounded in a notion of a shared female experience' (Plate, 'Remembering' 395); in this sense, the recognition of not just shared experience, but a shared *project*—a response to something that remains incomplete, that demands the active involvement of the reader/adapter as a co-conspirator—is what speaks most powerfully to adaptation.

The following section looks at these dynamics in American modernist Margery Latimer's novel, *This Is My Body*.

IV. Margery Latimer's *This Is My Body*: Modernism, Feminism and Adaptation.

American modernist Margery Latimer's novel *This Is My Body*, published in 1930, serves as an ideal example of a modernist woman's narrative that shares many qualities with both Hutcheon's idea of narcissistic narrative and Gayle Green's feminist metafiction. The novel is also 'the most autobiographical of autobiographical novels' – a roman à clef.

This section begins with a brief overview of Latimer's life and career; given that her work is highly autobiographical, a sense of her background and the key events in her life serve to inform *This Is My Body*, and also highlight Latimer's elision from history, despite an impressive body of work and renown during her lifetime. In addition to situating her work both within the modernist

movement, and that of feminist fiction in general, this section also explores narrative as performance in *This Is My Body*, particularly in the context of Maclean, Hutcheon and Greene's work. Finally, this section considers where adaptation is built-in to the narrative and how it might inform the process of adapting it to the stage.

As Joy Castro points out, today Margery Latimer is all but forgotten; if she is remembered, it is 'only as the first wife of the Harlem Renaissance author Jean Toomer, the lover of Leftist noir poet Kenneth Fearing, or the close friend of Georgia O'Keeffe'; however her literary career, cut short by her death in childbirth at the age of thirty-three, saw her published in the same literary journals as Katherine Mansfield, D.H. Lawrence, Gertrude Stein, and James Joyce—indeed, Latimer's two novels and two volumes of short stories were compared by critics of the time to these and other canonized modernists ('Margery' 151). Her work combines both feminist and leftist critique with a high modernist aesthetic that nonetheless is focused on the body and material from her own life (Castro, 'Margery' 151).

Born in Portage, Wisconsin in 1899, she was taken under the wing of local author-celebrity Zona Gale, who would become the first woman to win a Pulitzer Prize, in playwriting, for her adaptation of her novel *Miss Lulu Bett*. After attending the University of Wisconsin, Madison courtesy of a scholarship Gale established just for her, Latimer dropped out after two years and moved to New York City to focus on her writing; unlike many of her young artist peers who received stipends from their families, Latimer supported herself with journalism and freelance typing (Castro, 'Margery' 155). Kenneth Fearing, whom she had dated at university, followed her to New York and eventually they set up house in Staten Island where she supported them both; after reluctantly terminating a pregnancy at his wishes, the relationship soured and Latimer once again moved out on her own (Castro, 'Margery' 156). It was her involvement with the burgeoning spiritual movement led by George Gurdjieff that brought her together with Jean

Toomer, the poet and author of *Cane* who was of mixed race and came to prominence as part of the Harlem Renaissance. Their marriage in 1931 in Margery's hometown of Portage caused a nationwide scandal; *Time* magazine published a short piece on the marriage that opened with 'No Negro can legally marry a white woman in any Southern State. But Wisconsin does not mind' (qtd. in Castro, 'Margery' 157). Indeed, Latimer's parents were forced to flee their Portage home due to death threats and hate mail (Castro, 'Margery' 157). Ten months after they were married, on August 16th, 1932, Margery died in childbirth after delivering a healthy baby girl (Castro, 'Margery' 157).

In her fiction, Latimer sought to combine the two opposing paradigms of womanhood on offer at the time—romance and family life, or that of the independent, sexually pure female artist (Castro, 'Margery' 154). Perhaps foremost of the qualities that distinguish her narratives is the manner in which they are rooted in the body—from protagonists who share her physical presence and attributes, to her use of autobiographical material; as such, her work goes against the new critical view of modernism that sees texts as self-contained art objects, 'suspended in ahistorical space' (Castro, 'Margery' 153). Rather, Latimer 'contributes to that strand of modernism that revisits and extends the romantics' investigation into consciousness, the self, and intensified experience' (Castro, 'Margery' 153). Critics at the time would attack her work on these grounds, expressing both wonder that anyone would be interested in the emotional and personal experiences of a young woman, and exasperation with the experimental aspects of her fiction (Castro, 'Margery' 153). Even as her work was published in the leading avant-garde journals of the day, including *transitions* and *Pagany*, critics found fault with the very aspects of her experimentalism that put her on a par with the likes of Eliot and Pound; the *New Republic* dismissed *This Is My Body* as the 'entirely subjective story of a frenzied adolescent'; the *New York Evening Post* lamented 'its annoying honesty'; and *Outlook* went so far as to declare, 'Miss Latimer's heroine is an hysterical, egocentric

girl whose talk is all of the “realities” of life, but who has not learned the reality of her own insignificance’ (qtd. in Castro, ‘Margery’ 163).

Latimer’s second novel, *This Is My Body*, stands out as the only female-authored *Kunsterroman* (portrait of the artist as a young woman) of the period (Castro, ‘Margery’ 162); and while the narrative itself qualifies as narcissistic according to Hutcheon’s definition, critics attacked the novel for the perceived narcissism of its narrator. The idea that she would ‘focus on the seldom discussed experiences of girls and women’ subjected her to a barrage of attacks from critics, ‘who questioned whether such material was relevant to readers’:

[*This Is My Body*], for instance, describes a young woman’s coming of age, sexual pressure from boyfriends, an episode of sexual harassment by an older professor, a lover (the Fearing figure) who lives off her meager earnings yet prefers the company of prostitutes, and an illegal and traumatizing abortion. Compounding the protagonist’s difficulties, her ambitions and confidence are met at every turn by dismissal grounded solely on gender. (Castro, ‘Margery’ 161)

Female sexuality and other taboos such as unplanned pregnancy are foregrounded in a direct challenge to what was socially acceptable at the time, and especially within high modernism; Castro cites influential modernist critic Cyril Connolly who declares in *Enemies of Promise*, ‘there is no more

somber enemy of good art than the pram in the hall' ('Margery' 181).⁴ Latimer's focus on her protagonist's abortion, which serves as the climax of the novel, lends the narrative a unique charge by creating 'a site of profound anxiety for both the storyteller, who stands revealed as a potential locus of moral culpability, and for the reader, who must contend with a morally contested, emotionally explosive issue' (Castro, 'Margery' 182). In addition, the narrative resonates with a combination of material detail and spiritual symbolism; the abortion costs thirty dollars, a sum referred to twice, which not only serves to play off the procedure as simple economic transaction, but also it has echoes of the thirty silver pieces from the story of Judas's betrayal of Christ (Castro, 'Margery' 183). The biblical references are also placed more explicitly in the novel's epigraph ('I'll give them my body—I will say—"This is my body, friends, world—Oh, take my body and eat—Oh take my soul and do not be afraid—'), and of course, the title of the novel itself; as Latimer writes to a friend in 1929 just before its publication:

Did I tell you the title? It is called 'This Is My Body' and I mean in the same way Christ meant when he said —'This is my body: take, eat.' I felt so fulfilled giving myself that way, my blood, my illusions, my life, the last atom of myself to all... O I hope they don't laugh. (qtd. in Castro, 'Margery' 184)

⁴ This is not to say that female sexuality does not feature in other—and male-authored—high modernist novels; perhaps the most obvious example is Molly Bloom's soliloquy that comprises the final chapter of James Joyce's *Ulysses*—although as Lisa Sternlieb points out, 'Perhaps no female narrative has divided feminist critics more than Molly Bloom's soliloquy. Joyce's ventriloquy has been read alternatively as mindless misogyny and [according to Rebecca West] as 'one of the most tremendous summations of life that [has] ever been caught in the net of art' (757). In this vein, it bears returning to Magali Michael's argument regarding the connection the modernist women writers maintain with *New Woman* issues, which gives their work a political, experiential context in an otherwise experimental high modernist form—for this, Michael contends, the modernist women's novels were considered less 'great', or at least, did not reach canonical status. However, when a male author—such as James Joyce, or Jean Genet—writes what is essentially *écriture féminine*, the result causes a sensation.

As it turns out, critics missed the connection entirely; in fact, one of the only publications to comment on the title and epigraph at all was the reviewer at *The New York Times*, who attributed the title and epigraph to Walt Whitman: ‘Miss Latimer has taken for her text a paraphrase of Whitman’s introduction to “Leaves of Grass”—“who touches this book touches a man.” Only her version of it is somewhat more diffuse’; it simply was not conceivable that the story of a young woman could have any relation to Christ’s (Castro, ‘Margery’ 184).

Another important manifestation of her focus on the body is in its relationship with technology and machines, which Latimer links to ‘the degradation of female subjectivity’—it ‘offers no comfort’ and ‘Latimer repeatedly uses the word *against* to describe its relationship to Megan [the protagonist]’s body’ (Castro, ‘Margery’ 185-186). After one of her friends relates the story of her own horrific abortion, in which she is strapped down unwillingly so the procedure can be carried out, Megan is filled with longing to be immersed in nature—an impulse that goes directly against the high modernist denial of such experiences; ‘She could feel nothing but fear and nausea, a great panic as if she must catch hold of wood, earth, anything solid and clean...’ (310; Castro, ‘Margery’ 186).

The manner in which her work combines high modernism and realism in many ways anticipates the wave of feminist metafiction that took hold in the 70’s—metafiction that would have the same revolutionary purpose, and as such, also needed to be accessible and understood even as it sought to challenge convention through its experimentalism. Margaret Drabble describes this hybrid form in relation to Doris Lessing’s *The Golden Notebook*, as that in which ‘the author reappears, insisting on the reader’s attention to the literary, refractive nature of [her] work, and yet...simultaneously [insists] on its realism, its truth to observed life, its non-literary dimensions, its non-literary authority’ (*Mimesis* 8). Thus Latimer was already working in the vein of the late twentieth-century female metafictionists—writing what Pamela Bromberg refers to as

‘metafictional feminist realism’, which ‘includes destabilizing discourse about her own narrative craft and the European novelistic tradition she has inherited critiqued, and revised’ (7).

As Greene argues, an element of realism was imperative to feminist metafiction if the material was to be understood—in order that the challenges to the literary, cultural and political conventions, which fuelled the narrative, might hit their mark. As Beth Boehm argues,

the feminist writer who employs metafictional techniques to challenge the structures of literary discourse and patriarchy will necessarily find herself in a paradoxical position, not only because metafiction is associated with a group of ‘pretentious white American men’, but also because the more an author attempts to undermine traditional literary conventions, the more she must hope her reader understands and expects those conventions to begin with. (35)

Although Margery Latimer’s *This Is My Body* was ‘real’ enough in its depiction of events from her own life that it has been referred to as a roman à clef, the realism she incorporated was not enough to prevent critics of the period from misreading what is very much still a narcissistic narrative as pathological narcissism on the part of the narrator. Three decades after Latimer published *This Is My Body*, the wave of women’s metafictional feminist realism that swept the 60s and 70s continued to be misunderstood on the very same grounds. Doris Lessing ‘bitterly complained about the many “misreadings” produced by critics of [*The Golden Notebook*] and about the fact that no one noticed that her major aim was metafictional’; as Beth Boehm points out,

Instead of reading the structure of her novel—its fragmented and ‘incoherent’ form— as a commentary on the failings of the conventions of the realistic novel, her early

critics submitted to the authority of the New Criticism and saw such fragmentation and disunity as flaws. (36)

Boehm's suggestion that the 'tendency to view contemporary metafiction as a genre employed by "pretentious white men"' has played a part in the misinterpretation of women's metafiction; namely, that many readers of self-conscious works by the likes of Barth, Fowles and even David Foster Wallace now enter such stories expecting to be dazzled by 'a virtuoso performance', rather than being prodded into questioning 'the ideological structures of our culture'. As such, critics and readers may be less likely to perceive the 'explicitly political agenda' of feminist metafiction. Margery Latimer, writing in the late 1920s and early 1930s, faced such 'feedback' to her narratives in the form of critics and readers who expected a type of romantic, realist fiction of women novelists at that time, and found her modernism 'exasperating' and 'annoying'.

In terms of where adaptation resonates in *This Is My Body*, its very nature as 'feminist metafictional realism'—and thus narrative borne of a desire to change society, to challenge conventions—means that it is a narrative that has the built in effect of turning readers into co-conspirators. The reader—simply by the act of reading—becomes an adapter. On a more technical level, adaptation calls out from performative aspects set out by Maclean; for example, *This Is My Body* is rich with tableaux, characters who perform on the pages in plays, interviews, literary readings, hazing rituals and telling stories amongst themselves. The dialogue also resonates as a 'play within a novel'; many scenes in the novel are dialogue-driven to the extent that one can almost see and hear the characters before them.

This Is My Body is also a 'self-begetting novel'—which reflects another level where adaptation is built in, as it sees the protagonist 'adapting' on the one hand what she has just 'lived', and on the

other, what the novelist has just written. In one of the final scenes, Megan sits alone in a bare apartment typing draft upon draft of a letter to her parents:

‘Dear parents, I have moved uptown. It is close to where I lived when I was in college. It is clean. It looks just the same. Thank you for the stamps. Oh, I forgot to tell you – ’ Now she gasped, now she got white, sweat came out of her. ‘My parents,’ she thought, ‘oh this is my life and you aren’t sharing; I am keeping it from you; I dare not give it; you would loathe me, turn me away, shove me out further than I already am into the darkness.’ She sat looking out the window. Then she wrote, ‘I forgot to tell you that my book is accepted and they like it and I bought you a present the other day. I am so happy [...]’ She crossed that out and wrote, ‘It is cold here.’

(338)

As she struggles to write, free of her lover Ronald, distant from her parents, there is the sense that in this room, and at this typewriter, she is about to write the novel that will become *This Is My Body*.

Perhaps most significant, is the manner in which she evokes the strong presence of a woman – herself – in the narrative. Beyond the parallels to her own life, the focus on the body and her lived experiences conjure the vivid physical presence of Latimer herself, fuelling the narrative’s powerful performance that in turn lends it to the stage—a performance that is placed in the theatre from the very first page with the ‘Evocation’: ‘Girl that I once was, come out into the light. Let me look into your face, let me see your body’ (1). As Castro writes, this ‘Evocation’ ‘[blurs] the division between the fictive protagonist, Megan Foster, and the implied author of the novel’; she goes on to note that the description of Megan, which opens the book, bears a powerful resemblance

to Latimer, who friends described as ‘glorious looking’ with ‘red-gold curly hair’ that was ‘like a halo as the sun coming through windows touched it’ (‘Splitting’, 216). *This Is My Body* begins with:

She was rather large with a full sweet body and her hair fell to her dark brows in front in a curly bang. ‘The gold will go out of it,’ her mother always said. ‘Your grandmother had red hair and dark brows and when she died it was raven black.’ The hair covered her ears rather thickly in short heavy curls and it hung longer on the back of her neck, curved low and rather full like pictures of cherubim. (3)

In sharing many of her own physical characteristics with her protagonist, Castro writes, ‘Latimer deliberately links her embodied self to her text – herself as perceived by those who knew her, herself as presented to the public by journalists’ (‘Splitting’ 217). In effect, she offers herself, her woman’s body, in her novel, as she expresses in her epigraph, ‘Oh, take my body and eat – Oh, take my soul and do not be afraid.’

Her emphasis on the body (one that is emphatically female) – through physical descriptions, the abortion narrative, Megan’s anxieties with regard to her own sexuality, her belief that for flesh to be anything but dead and crude it must vibrate with the spirit, and her yearning to be connected to earth and nature whenever she is confronted with the harsh realities of the modern world – all of these aspects echo Gillian Beer on Virginia Woolf – that her experimental and thoroughly modernist style was fuelled by her desire to express her body and passions – indeed, it was perhaps the only manner in which she could (safely and) most accurately do so. Moreover, this expression of the female body and passions – unique to women’s literary modernism – also functions to create a powerful woman’s presence. It allows for one to be drawn into the interior (the thoughts and

emotions) as much as they are made aware of, tangibly, the exterior (the physical body of a woman). The effect is the creation of a more 'complete' rendering of 'a woman' and 'women'.

Conclusion

The question remains: how does adaptation as it already exists in modernist women's autobiografiction specifically inform the process of adaptation for the stage? Does the pre-existence of adaptation also mean 'the right' instructions or 'script' are waiting to be unearthed? Or perhaps there are hidden signs that once properly identified and interpreted might allow for the 'truth' of the novel to be realized on stage? Are there specific directions – dictates as far as casting, staging— or even decisive clues as to whether the adaptation ought to take a realistic or expressionistic form? In the case of *This Is My Body*, does the fact Latimer includes an 'Evocation' suggest a stage adaptation ought to include a 'narrator'? Should the stage adaptation take a disembodied, experimental form because the source text is 'modernist'?

As Marie Maclean argues with regard to narrative, every telling is infinitely variable, the stability of the text dependent as much on the energy and interaction of an audience, as the performance of the teller; the narrative act is a site of interaction—which is how adaptation might be viewed too. 'Performance at its most general and most basic level is a carrying out, a putting into action or into shape. Both movement and interaction are involved' (Maclean xi). Like a performance, an adaptation cannot be judged as true or false, but as a success or failure. The struggle 'for knowledge, for power, for pleasure, for possession' that takes place between teller and hearer through a narrative text is ultimately a collaboration, 'an intimate relationship' that sees the birth of a specific telling or narration. This reflects the dynamic between a narrative text and

adapter, and also points to the fact that every adaptation is unique, is subject to infinite variability, and cannot be judged as true or false.

As Julie Sanders argues, ‘Adaptation and appropriation . . . are all about multiple interactions and a matrix of possibilities. They are, endlessly and wonderfully, about seeing things come back to us in as many different forms as possible’ (160). However Plate counters, ‘This is the rhetoric of hedonistic liberalism, celebrating multiplicity and pluralism for its own sake, for the choices it allows’ (‘Remembering’ 406). The acknowledgement that an adaptation might take any number of forms is stating the obvious; with regard to adapting modernist women’s autobiographical narratives, one must move beyond the fact of its variability, even though it is a core aspect. What it reflects is that the final product cannot be true or false, and that what matters most is the *process*, as Linda Hutcheon argues.

‘Success’, perhaps, hinges on the new and more active, energetic role required of the reader/adapter of narcissistic narrative; specific to women’s literary modernism, it is a process akin to re-vision, and the factors that enhance the energy and effect necessary for (but which do not guarantee) success are also where adaptation is located. These factors/sites that contain adaptation are activated by the recognition of not just shared experience, but a shared *project*—one that remains incomplete, and as such, excites the active involvement of adapter as co-collaborator, co-conspirator. It is a process that is, in effect, a conversation and collaboration.

Specific to modernist women’s autobiographical narratives, perhaps the overriding built-in aspect is the strong presence of a woman that is evoked, one drawn from a desire to communicate; in turn, her strong presence lends what she seeks to communicate particular force – and what she seeks to communicate might demand a particular force – namely the desires, frustrations or ideas she has been unable to express, or which have fallen into a (patriarchal/societal) vacuum when voiced; issues related to sexual freedom and identity, marriage, abortion, balancing motherhood

and pursuing the life of an artist, and being recognized as an artist on equal footing with men – or in a more universal sense, the value and importance of pursuing the life of an artist, even when society can make it quite difficult. All of these issues are not only recognizable to a contemporary reader, but they continue to spark strong emotions and fierce political debate. Beyond triggering identification, these aspects function to stimulate a desire within the adapter to express their own similar experiences and emotions, but to do so by bringing them to light/life through the performance of a fictional character; and because the physical presence of a woman is so strong, perhaps there is also a natural desire to see such an already tangible presence fully embodied onstage. With regard to the experimental aspects of these narratives, while they may have been lost upon or misinterpreted by critics and readers at the time, read by a contemporary adapter they might finally land with their full and intended impact. Recognition also lies in a shared desire to challenge the canon of ‘great books’, to question literary conventions, language and the very codes that govern human behavior.

What follows is *Portage Fancy*, my own stage adaptation of Margery Latimer’s *This Is My Body*, which in turn is followed by an analysis that draws from two previous drafts, *Maggie/Maggie*, and *Margery*, which are included for reference in Appendix A and Appendix B – although not essential to following the analysis.

PORTAGE FANCY

By Nina-Marie Gardner

Characters:

Molly – a playwright

Robert – her boyfriend, a musician

Margery Latimer (1899–1932) – a ghost, the author of *This Is My Body* (1930)

Megan – the protagonist of *This Is My Body*

Maggie – a ghost, a sylph, Megan’s alter ego; she is mutable and takes on different personalities.

Ronald – Megan’s lover in *This Is My Body*

The characters from *This Is My Body* occupy the same space as the present-day characters, Molly and Robert. In a sense, they are the enactment of the stage adaptation of *This Is My Body* that Molly has come to Portage to write.

The setting is an old farmhouse in Portage, Wisconsin – the house that Margery Latimer grew up in.

The play takes place in the present, save for the scenes that depict Margery Latimer’s novel, *This Is My Body*, which take place in the mid 1920s.

(/) indicates overlapping dialogue.

(–) indicates an interruption, or a hesitant pause.

(...) indicates the search for a word, a trailing off. By itself it indicates a loss for words, a silent implication, a desire to say something.

A ‘beat’ is a pause; there is always a shift, a change, a realization in these moments.

1.

(Late afternoon. The living room of an old farmhouse in Portage, Wisconsin. Stage right is a kitchen, and stage left the front entrance. There is a door that leads to a bedroom at the back.)

(MOLLY and ROBERT enter with suitcases and a few grocery bags. ROBERT also has a guitar case.)

ROBERT So this is it.

(MOLLY stands in the center of the room and closes her eyes, breathes in deep, then surveys the room, giddy.)

MOLLY Ooooooh!

ROBERT It's just a house.

MOLLY I can feel her.

(ROBERT sneaks up behind MOLLY and grabs her. MOLLY shrieks.)

ROBERT Gotcha!

MOLLY Robert!

ROBERT Cutie.

MOLLY Baby – can you believe – it's her house – where she lived and breathed and *wrote*.

ROBERT Where should I put your stuff?

MOLLY Just leave it. I'll sort it out later.

(MOLLY explores the room – a quaint parlor, its décor suggesting something out of the fifties. She goes to the kitchen.)

MOLLY It's so perfect. Robert, look at these appliances!

(ROBERT takes a look.)

ROBERT Wow.

MOLLY You're such a slug.

ROBERT Honey, I'm tired.

MOLLY You know you love it.

ROBERT I do.

(They kiss.)

ROBERT I can't stay long.

MOLLY I know. But you've got time for lunch?

ROBERT Mmm-

MOLLY Oh please please please?

ROBERT Don't do the little girl thing.

MOLLY Fuck. Sorry sorry.

ROBERT I don't mean to be a dick.

MOLLY Baby, please just stay for lunch. We've got that wonderful cheese – you know, *When in Wisconsin!* I'll make sandwiches. Please stay with me just a little bit. We'll celebrate.

ROBERT What are we celebrating?

MOLLY You're kidding, right?

ROBERT Molly.

MOLLY What is wrong with you?

ROBERT Please don't do this. I'm exhausted. I want you to be happy. I do.

MOLLY You know how much this means to me.

ROBERT I know. I do.

MOLLY I want to enjoy it with you. I want you to enjoy it.

ROBERT Baby, I'm doing my best. Okay, I'll have a sandwich.

MOLLY Yippeeeeeee! Oh shit, sorry.

(ROBERT sighs and sits resignedly on the sofa. MOLLY goes to him and takes his face in her hands, kissing him on the forehead.)

MOLLY I love you.

ROBERT I love you too.

MOLLY You do?

ROBERT I'm not going to say it again.

MOLLY Sorry.

ROBERT Stop apologizing woman and go make me some food!

MOLLY Yes sir!

(MOLLY picks up the grocery bags they've left by the front door and brings them to the kitchen. She speaks excitedly to ROBERT as she puts things away and makes sandwiches. ROBERT takes out his cell phone and scrolls through it.)

MOLLY I still can't believe I'm here! I mean, Margery Latimer's actual house!

ROBERT Crazy.

MOLLY Fate.

(Beat. MOLLY is sandwich-making.)

Do you want some of this peach chutney on yours? It's homemade.

ROBERT Just mustard.

MOLLY Too sweet? I love sweet. Sweet and hot.

ROBERT No Tabasco on mine, either.

MOLLY I know I know. Pussy.

ROBERT I just happen to have functioning taste buds. Yours are singed. I'm surprised you can taste anything.

(Beat. MOLLY is sandwich-making, futzng in the kitchen.)

MOLLY Being here is going to make all the difference. I can feel it! I've been so blocked.

ROBERT Mm.

MOLLY I'll be able to channel her. Let her speak through me. I know you don't believe in magic and all that stuff.

ROBERT Just don't burn the place down with those candles you always have going.

MOLLY The candles! Shit!

(MOLLY races from the kitchen. Robert quickly slips his phone back in his pocket. MOLLY rummages through one of her bags and takes out a large pillar candle and zip-lock bag filled with crystals, various talismans and a small carved Buddha. She arranges everything on the mantel, holds the candle in both hands and closes her eyes.)

ROBERT What are you doing?

MOLLY Shh! I'm charging the candle.

(After a few moments, she sets the candle down and lights it.)

MOLLY Much better.

ROBERT You are a freak.

MOLLY Mind your own business.

(MOLLY goes back into the kitchen to finish the sandwiches. ROBERT takes up with his cell phone again.)

MOLLY I was thinking...

ROBERT Uh oh.

MOLLY Maybe we shouldn't have a religious person officiating at our wedding. Can you do that? Do you have to have a minister or whatever to make it legal?

ROBERT My mom will shit if we don't have a rabbi present.

MOLLY Your mom, ugh.

(MOLLY brings out sandwiches and glasses of iced tea on tray. ROBERT slips his phone back in his pocket.)

ROBERT Yum! Thanks baby.

MOLLY I was thinking...

ROBERT Uh-oh.

MOLLY Wouldn't it be cool to have the wedding here?

(ROBERT chokes on his sandwich.)

ROBERT In Wisconsin?!

MOLLY I just meant this would be a lovely place for a wedding.

ROBERT Honey, no. No!

MOLLY I was just saying hypothetically. Don't get so worked up.

ROBERT First of all, we've already booked the venue in Montauk. Second, why are you so obsessed with this woman?

MOLLY I'm not.

ROBERT You are.

MOLLY Just because I'm adapting her novel –

ROBERT We are *not* getting married in Wisconsin. Jesus.

MOLLY I didn't say that.

(Beat.)

MOLLY That cheese is amazing isn't it?

ROBERT Yup.

MOLLY I'm going to get fat eating like this for a month. I won't fit into my dress.

ROBERT What time is it?

MOLLY Quarter past one. You have plenty of time.

ROBERT I should get going.

(He takes out his phone to order an Uber.)

ROBERT What's the address here again?

MOLLY Do you have to leave now? You barely ate your sandwich.

ROBERT I'm sorry honey. I'll take it with me for the plane. I told you it was going to be tight – but I wanted to see the place, I did.

(ROBERT'S phone dings. An Uber is on its way. MOLLY sighs.)

MOLLY Your flight's not for another two hours. It takes ten minutes to get to the airport.

ROBERT Security will take a bit.

MOLLY In Madison? It's not like you're flying out of JFK.

ROBERT Baby, I need to go now.

MOLLY Thank you for doing the drive with me – I know it took a lot in the middle of your tour and everything. Call me when you get there?

ROBERT I will.

MOLLY Where is it you're playing again?

ROBERT Mermaid Lounge in New Orleans. Then two shows in Austin – I forget the venue. Olwyn emailed me the itinerary, hold on.

MOLLY Olwyn? That publicist?

ROBERT You have a problem with Olwyn?

MOLLY She totally wants you.

ROBERT That's ridiculous.

MOLLY She does. Who names their kid Olwyn anyway? Ugh. I bet that's not even her real name.

ROBERT I'm not getting into this.

MOLLY What? You don't think I'm right?

ROBERT No.

MOLLY She looks like an assassin. I don't think I've ever seen her not dressed in black. And those stiletto boots she wears?

ROBERT Stop it Molly.

MOLLY You don't find her attractive?

ROBERT She's not you.

MOLLY Is she going to be there with you guys?

ROBERT It's her job. You have nothing to worry about. She has a boyfriend.

MOLLY I've heard that one before.

ROBERT Please don't be like this. She's a nice girl.

MOLLY 'Nice.' She always blanks me. I've only met her about a million times.

(ROBERT'S phone dings again.)

ROBERT Car's here. Love you babe.

MOLLY Love you too. See you in two weeks?

ROBERT Hopefully. I'll let you know. Happy writing.

(ROBERT kisses her, gathers his things and heads to the door.)

MOLLY Call me. Fly safe!

(ROBERT exits. MOLLY remains where she is, listens to a car door slam, the rev of an engine as the car drives off. There is the sound of a train in the distance, then whistles, then rapid-fire girlish chatter — a cacophony of voices that starts out faint and builds to a crescendo, filling the stage. This should overlap into the next scene.)

2.

VOICES (O.S.) What are you taking? Haven't planned your course. Better get busy! You're from Portage? Oh, my dear, one of our darlinest girls was from there—Ada Perry. Her father owns the bank. Did you know her? A perfect whizz. Fine sport. Oh look that must be Dick Harper's sister. Why he took one of our darlinest girls to prom last year. Oh, yes, we all go to prom—it's a tradition now. Did you hear about her dress? It was perfectly darling—you know—just simple and lots of lace and underpart. Now you must meet the girls!

(MEGAN enters, trailed by MAGGIE.)

MEGAN This place is second rate. I knew the instant I got off the train.

MAGGIE I say, you're taking the wrong attitude. All you need to do is brace up and get to know the girls!

MEGAN It's hideous.

MAGGIE Well nobody asked you to come.

MEGAN I'm not going to stay.

MAGGIE It's the best university in the country. It's famous all over!

MEGAN I'd rather be a failure in life than be a part of this. I think I have a sickness no one knows about. You can't tell. I've never been strong. Probably I ought to be at home right now.

MAGGIE You won't get very far feeling that way.

MEGAN I'm not homesick.

MAGGIE You have your mother's pine pillow, don't you? She swears it's just marvellous for grief. You hold it like this and put your face right into it.

MEGAN Oh god. I hate college. I am remarkable to endure this. There is no one like me.

(Beat.)

MAGGIE Are you an only child?

MEGAN Yes.

MAGGIE Are you your mother's darling?

MEGAN Yes.

MAGGIE Who do you think you are anyway?

MEGAN I'm, I'm, I'm....

MAGGIE You think we're rather a low-brow crowd, don't you? Not fine enough or intellectual enough for you to associate with. Well hooray for Saint Megan!

MEGAN I feel as if I belong somewhere else. On the moon or something.

MAGGIE We know you think you're just about the best looking girl in the crowd with all that hair and those eyes. Oh, yes, we're some all right, we are; we're too good, we are; we're too intellectual to live, we are.

MEGAN I'm going to be a great writer. I don't want anything on earth but that. I want to talk to people.

MAGGIE What are you going to do about men?

MEGAN Oh, I don't believe in marriage. I don't like to think of homes and children and that.

MAGGIE Do you like men?

MEGAN I have everything in myself. I want to live differently from other people. We have to live differently if we want to be different. I'm not satisfied with the life people like. I want something better.

MAGGIE Bunk.

MEGAN I don't want to be safe. I want to be in danger. I want to find out . . .

MAGGIE For heaven's sake what?

MEGAN Oh, I don't know.

MAGGIE *If you'd curb that sort of business you'd be popular around here in no time. Say, I just found out the name of the freshman elected to the literary magazine. It's a huge honour. They wrote a story about it. Do you know him?*

MEGAN Him! It isn't a man is it?

MAGGIE *Oh sure, it's Ronald Chadron. I knew all the time he'd get it. Awful snob, too. Gives me a pain. I'm as good as he is. I've had an A on every theme so far. Oh, hell, I don't care.*

MEGAN Let him have it. Who cares? All right. Good. Let him have it. My time will come.

3.

(MOLLY is sprawled out on the couch, her computer on her stomach. She closes it stretches, yawns. MARGERY LATIMER appears. MOLLY starts and yelps, her computer crashes to the floor.)

MOLLY Aatch! Who are you?!

How did you get in here?

(MARGERY smiles warmly. It slowly dawns on MOLLY who she is.)

Margery?

(MARGERY nods.)

Oh my god.

(MOLLY gets up from the couch, not taking her eyes off MARGERY. She is terrified. She takes a few steps backwards, then turns and darts into the kitchen. She braces herself at the counter and takes a few deep breaths, before filling a glass from the tap. She drinks it down. Then she creeps carefully and peers into the living room. MARGERY is still there. MOLLY re-enters the living room cautiously.)

MOLLY Please know – please know that I'm here with the best intentions...

I – I imagine you're probably here because – because maybe it seems like I'm invading your house?

(She checks to see if her words are having any effect on MARGERY.)

I've never seen a ghost before, but um, I've watched a lot of ghost-hunting shows... I think I'm supposed to acknowledge your presence, right?

(MARGERY takes a step towards her. MOLLY recoils.)

Please don't – I know you're not going to – well, you don't *look* like you want to hurt me or anything, but...

Do you?

(MARGERY smiles warmly, shakes her head.)

Um, okay. I don't mind at all that you're here – actually, I think it's great!

(MOLLY is shaking. She doesn't look like she thinks it's great.)

So....

Is it okay that I'm here? I'm just going to be writing, but you should know... You should know that I do get spooked easily – obviously – no pun intended – gah!

(MARGERY takes a seat on the couch, and gestures for MOLLY to join her.)

You want me to – um, okay.

(MOLLY goes and sits beside MARGERY. She's a bit shaky but her fear is fading. They smile at each other.)

This is very weird.

(Slowly, MOLLY reaches a hand towards MARGERY, then pauses.)

May I touch you?

(MARGERY takes MOLLY'S hand and places it on her face.)

MOLLY Oh!

MARGERY Hello, Molly.

4.

(MAGGIE races into the living room, dragging MEGAN along with her. She points out towards the audience.)

MAGGIE Look! It's him! He's the one!

MEGAN Wait – who?

MAGGIE Ha! You know you haven't stopped thinking about him – you see him with his arms around you, his lips on yours.

(She shouts towards RONALD O.S. /in the audience.)

Can't you see that she owns you?!

MEGAN I have to know him.

MAGGIE Shall I introduce you? Miss Foster, our star performer, Ronald Chadron!

MEGAN Oh –

MAGGIE They're calling him up. He's going to read his poem!

MEGAN Do you think he brought a masterpiece tonight?

MAGGIE You like him. Your beautiful body and that bony... Sure! Sure. Ronald's a fine fellow. You two could have a beautiful child together.

MEGAN I never thought of a child.

MAGGIE You could have one.

MEGAN Last summer I was by the lake in Michigan and the children there were beautiful. Oh, they had such soft skin and ran without anything on them and they were so beautiful.

MAGGIE What are you planning to do with your beautiful body?

MEGAN Be a great writer.

MAGGIE That's for homely women. You have that child. It won't cost you a cent. You could live near a lake and build a hut or something. Ronald could live there with you and write his poems. That could be wonderful.

MEGAN Yes. Oh, if we could!

MAGGIE Why not? You can make the child and Ronald will write his poems.

MEGAN We'll be so happy and he'll see that I really am wonderful!

MAGGIE You are wonderful.

MEGAN He wrote me a letter about my work. A story I submitted to the literary magazine.

MAGGIE He said it was nothing but 'the rattling of sticks and stones.'

MEGAN I'm a better writer than you, Ronald Chadron!

MAGGIE I suppose you've got some hate on him for what he wrote. Are you going to punish him now?

MEGAN He doesn't know yet that we love each other. He doesn't understand that I've chosen him and he can't get away.

(RONALD enters.)

RONALD Oh, hello!

MEGAN I've been hunting you.

RONALD I've been trying to get you on the telephone.

MEGAN Honest? Honest?

RONALD I want to take you to a concert next week. Can you come with me? Listen, break it off if you've promised some other guy and come with me.

MEGAN But no one has asked me. Oh, thank you—Oh how long will I have to wait?

RONALD Then you'll come with me?

MEGAN I'd love to.

MAGGIE You always love everything.

MEGAN But does he like me anyway?

MAGGIE Yes, I'm sure he does. Yes. You both shine.

RONALD Say, what are you doing to me?

MEGAN ?

RONALD Tell me. It isn't fair if you don't. Lord, I really don't care what you're doing to me. Are you mad about that letter I wrote?

MEGAN No.

RONALD You aren't falling asleep, are you?

MEGAN Perhaps I am.

RONALD God, this is a superficial age. Why are you laughing?

MEGAN Let's eat chocolate. I'll pay. Oh, say, I want pie. Let's get pie Ronald.

RONALD Do you like my poems?

MEGAN I think they're wonderful.

RONALD Hey, are you laughing at me again? What the hell!

MEGAN Are we the same person?

RONALD ?

MEGAN But something is going to happen to us. Really.

RONALD I know how to take care of you, Megan. God, why am I saying – did you hear me say it? I said it for the first time.

MEGAN Oh, what?

RONALD Your name. I couldn't say it now, though. I'm dizzy. Please don't let me spoil this. I might, you know. Don't let me—don't let me get away. I can see you to your room, but I can't stay. I'm lonely. I'm damn desolate. I can't be interesting.

(Pulls out his cigarettes.)

Have one?

MEGAN Oh no, I don't smoke.

MAGGIE *What's wrong with you?*

MEGAN I feel—Oh, do you think he knows anything about me inside myself?

MAGGIE *What the hell? He's only seen you about twice.*

MEGAN Oh, that's not true. We know each other. I've lived with him ever since his letter and his picture in the paper—Oh, he hurt me—I'm hurt—I hurt. Everything is hard like this tree. You can't make it understand. You can't make it give or do anything but just be there like cement.

MAGGIE *You've always had your own way.*

MEGAN I haven't!

MAGGIE *Yes, you have. You're afraid of reality. It hurts. You want to own everything. You're afraid of facing the real world—*

MEGAN I'm not. I have faced it. I know I'm scared.

RONALD I'd like to give you my favorite books. I like them better than anything I own. I'm going to write your name in every one of them as soon as I get back. I want you to have everything I prize the most.

MEGAN Oh don't – don't –

MAGGIE You don't want him to love you.

MEGAN I do.

RONALD Try to change me. My god, I wonder if you could. I have to be changed by you. Make me over—make me stop smoking—make me do something— Oh, hell, try, try. I want you to change me into something—something— You probably couldn't.

MEGAN But I could! I will.

RONALD Listen, darling – oh, I've said it, and I didn't feel self-conscious! *Darling...* My God, how am I going to make you happy? What am I supposed to do? Tell me, tell me what you expect. Megan, you're so beautiful, you're pure—I'm expected to know—I mustn't hurt you—what do I do—how—tell me—tell me— How clean you are, how good you smell!

MEGAN I won't ever forget this night or how I feel in this moment.

MAGGIE How do you feel?

MEGAN Far, far away.

MAGGIE How else?

MEGAN I want to sit in the dark all alone.

MAGGIE You don't think you're good enough for him.

RONALD You're beautiful—beautiful.

MEGAN Ronald... I'm tired. I ought to go home.

RONALD Listen—listen, Megan—

MEGAN I ought to go. I can't go and I can't stay.

RONALD Walk with me. We'll walk for a while.

5.

(MOLLY paces the living room. She is on the phone.)

MOLLY Yea, I'm fine, just a bit spooked –

No, nothing, nothing – just being alone in this house. Baby, you’ll never *believe* –

Yea, I know it’s just a house! Listen to me, I have to tell you something, the most amazing thing –

Oh, okay. Yea, no – call me back as soon as you can talk –

Love you –

Robert?

Robert?

(MOLLY sighs. Her phone starts to ring.)

Robert?

Oh, hi Mom.

Yea, no – I’m fine.

I said I’m fine.

Yep. Yep, going well –

No, it’s not for any theatre specifically, I don’t have a commission or anything –

No I’m not, I’m not being paid. I know, I understand that, jeesh!

Mom! As soon as I’m done I’m all yours, promise.

I do. I do appreciate how much you’ve done planning the wedding – I’m eternally grateful.

No, I’m not being facetious, lighten up. God.

I haven’t asked him.

I haven’t asked him that either.

Nope, haven’t asked yet.

No.

No.

No.

What?! We don't discuss the wedding the every day – he's on tour Mom, and I'm trying to work. You better not be bombarding him with emails.

Everything's fine with us. Just busy – busy good.

Look, I'm sort of in the middle of my peak writing time, can we go through some of this later?

I *know* the wedding is less than two months away. Chill the fuck out. Sorry – sorry Mom, god I'm so sorry, I didn't mean that.

No I don't want to speak to Dad – Mom please – No –

Hi Dad.

Yup.

Yup.

It's going well, yea Robert's good.

No, I haven't left my job. I'm freelance.

Playwrights make money.

Dad –

I AM NOT GOING TO END UP A BAG LADY! Thanks for the vote of confidence, Dad.

Look, I have to go. Love you too. Bye.

(MOLLY sets down her phone, collapses on the couch.)

Argh!

(MARGERIE enters, and MOLLY starts and yelps, as before.)

MARGERIE I'm so sorry. I don't mean to keep startling you.

MOLLY You're back! I wasn't sure if I dreamed it –

MARGERIE May I sit down?

MOLLY Of course, please, sit.

(MARGERIE takes a seat on the couch with MOLLY.)

(MARGERIE smiles. MOLLY smiles back.)

(Beat.)

MOLLY I have no idea what to say to you.

(Beat.)

I guess I've read so much about you, I don't know where to start.

(Beat.)

I'm panicking about this play.

(Beat.)

Oh Margery – I'm getting married in six weeks! I'm terrified!

MARGERY Tell me about Robert.

MOLLY He's – oh god, I love him. Maybe too much. My mother always said you should marry someone who loves you more than you love them. But if that's so, I'm completely fucked.

Sorry. I'm nervous so I babble, say inappropriate things.

For insurance, I even made him do this quiz – thirty questions that are supposed to make someone fall in love with you. It was in the *New York Times*. I didn't tell him that though – I just said they were questions to help truly get to know someone. We never got through them all though – ended up drinking too many glasses of wine and fell asleep.

(MARGERY laughs.)

MOLLY *(in a mocking voice)* 'Given the choice of anyone in the world, whom would you want as a dinner guest?'

MARGERY That's easy. John Milton. And I would ask him about Galileo – did you know they met in Florence in 1638?

MOLLY Huh?

MARGERY Can you imagine those two in the same room? What they spoke of?

MOLLY Wow. I didn't really expect you to answer – I wasn't like, *asking*.

MARGERY Oh, I think it's a wonderful game! Let's play.

MOLLY Um, okay. Sure. I still have the questions on my computer – I haven't given up trying to get Robert to do the rest, haha.

(MOLLY scrolls through her computer.)

You know what? This *is* actually a great idea. Might help me to get in your headspace – I want to do your book justice.

MARGERY My headspace?

MOLLY Does that freak you out?

MARGERY ‘Freak me out’? Is that an expression?

MOLLY God it must be so weird – it’s like 2016 compared to the 1920s. Hang on.

(MEGAN turns back to her computer. Notices MARGERY looking on, fascinated.)

MOLLY Yea, it’s a Mac. Like a typewriter with a massive brain the size of a fingernail inside. Should we just jump right in?

MARGERY You want to jump in...?

(MARGERY looks around somewhat anxiously.)

MOLLY Oh no, I just mean start in with the questions. So...

‘Would you like to be famous? In what way?’

MARGERY Exactly as I am now.

MOLLY Really? I mean, no offense, but most people have no idea who you are. And you ought to be up there with Katherine Mansfield and Virginia Woolf – as far as I’m concerned.

MARGERY Oh how I loved Mansfield’s journals! Have you read them? Although it’s shame – I have the sense Mr. Husband edited a great deal out.

MOLLY She’s how I discovered you. I was on her trail when a piece about you turned up. I’d like to see your journals published.

MARGERY Ah well. What’s the next question?

MOLLY Okay, ‘Before making a telephone call, do you ever rehearse what you are going to say?’ Hmm, that one probably doesn’t apply. Moving on.

‘When did you last sing to yourself? To someone else?’

MARGERY On my deathbed, after giving birth to my daughter.

(Beat.)

MOLLY I'm sorry. I knew that. Not that you sang to her – that you died giving birth.

MARGERY The happiest day of my life. She was so perfect. Incredible.

(Beat.)

MOLLY Oh Margery...

(MOLLY regroup.)

Okay, this one is fun:

'If you were able to live to the age of 90 and retain either the mind or body of a 30-year-old for the last 60 years of your life, which would you want?'

MARGERY Is that a trick question?

MOLLY Not in today's society, trust me.

'Do you have a secret hunch about how you will die?' Argh, not again. Sorry.

'Name three things you and your partner appear to have in common.' Okay, for our purposes that would be me.

MARGERY We are both writers?

(MOLLY nods.)

We both love books?

(MOLLY nods vigorously.)

And... I suspect there is something related to why you are drawn to my novel?

MOLLY Megan is so fierce. And idealistic and vulnerable and proud and misunderstood and emotional – how she loves so hard – and is so determined to be a writer – and her pain and Ronald – everything with Ronald.

MARGERY He brought me into the real world. The world of passion and jealousy... and growth.

6.

(RONALD and MEGAN tumble into the room.)

RONALD What do you think about?

MEGAN I won't tell.

RONALD Please.

MEGAN No.

RONALD You're cruel, Megan.

MEGAN What?

RONALD Don't tease me. I haven't got used to you. I want to kiss you. I might kiss your feet. I think I could do that without feeling odd.

MEGAN No, don't.

RONALD I understand you, remember.

MEGAN You like women who look like rats and hide bottles of booze under the bed and spit on the floor. You like women who know about life—reality. Beware of women without illusions, my boy.

RONALD Oh Megan, your eyes are like a fork stirring my insides.

MEGAN I won't let you go into the world. It's too dirty, too hard and cruel. I'm going to save you, shield you.

RONALD You tear my bones apart with those eyes.

MEGAN Grand. Wonderful. Look how happy I am. Don't we love the world? Isn't it noble and honest and good and kind and full of love? Damn all love.

RONALD Quit talking for publication. Stop talking like a book or I'll get mad.

MEGAN We always talk as if someone is listening.

RONALD You mean you do.

MEGAN Oh, I don't mean any of it. Oh, I mean all of it. Oh, what is life anyway?

RONALD There you go. Life's a deep subject.

MEGAN Is it a sin to mention life?

RONALD Just bad taste. Life isn't a subject for the young unless they can stand superior to it and kick it around a bit.

MEGAN But I'm a beautiful mother to you Ronald.

RONALD God, this is nauseous.

MEGAN Oh, go on then. You're making fun of love and of me.

RONALD Don't be so free with that word love. It's bad taste to mention it unless you're joking.

MEGAN You aren't fooling me, Ronald Chadron.

RONALD Megan, for God's sake! How will this end? We can't stop talking.

MEGAN You're immorally serious.

RONALD Says you, with those damned respectable pearls on and that respectable hair and—why can't I kiss you today?

MEGAN You can only hurt me.

RONALD Shall I go?

MEGAN Yes, go!

RONALD How many men have kissed you?

MEGAN I kiss them.

RONALD Can you count them on one hand?

MEGAN Don't be an ass. When did you get like this?

RONALD I don't know. I didn't know I was like this. Intellectually, I understand...

MEGAN Don't be absurd.

RONALD You like freaks. Half-wits. You aren't satisfied until you get your hands on a person and know all his affairs and his whole soul—then—

MEGAN My legs are tired.

RONALD I know the kind of men you like. It's no compliment to be liked by you. You don't know a real man when you see one.

MEGAN I know them; that's why I never see them.

RONALD Tell me you love me!

MEGAN Oh Ronald.

RONALD You don't care.

MEGAN But I love your feet, Ronald.

RONALD I do too.

MEGAN Ronald. Our souls want to know each other before our bodies. I think that's why everything is so hard.

RONALD You won't let me near you at all. I have to take the little you'll give. You won't even let me kiss you in peace without having some argument about Spinoza or Plato or Frank Harris and Spengler.

MEGAN Oh, I'm not like that.

RONALD I'm lonely all the time for you. I miss you like hell when we're apart. Can't you see I'm not the same anymore? Are you blind? I used to get along by myself. Oh, hell, I'm a bawling baby about you.

Maybe we should separate for good, Megan. I'm not the guy for you. Damn it, I don't know whether I can be in love or not. Maybe I'm not made that way. We'd better stop before I make you terribly unhappy.

MEGAN Why?

RONALD I'll make you wretched.

MEGAN That's not true!

RONALD You're an angel. I love you. You don't know it yet, but I do.

MEGAN Then we won't separate! Oh, you don't mean it.

RONALD I don't know. I just feel it would be best in the end. You're so pure. I'm full of that Sir Launcelot stuff yet. You know.

MEGAN But I'm not pure. I don't want to be. I don't want to be innocent. I want to know everything in the world. I want to be alive like others. I want the whole thing!

RONALD You're always so pure. Look at you— How can I make you happy? Everything I do seems to affect you and I don't want to ever hurt you. Lord, can't you see? Can't you understand what's wrong?

MEGAN No.

RONALD But I just told you.

MEGAN I don't understand. I'm not like you say.

RONALD You are. Look at yourself.

MEGAN I'm older than you. I'm twenty-three and you're only twenty-one.

RONALD But you're a child. You've got the mind of a child. I'm so much older than you—really.

(holding up MEGAN'S hands) Whose hands are these?

MEGAN Mine.

RONALD Whose body is this?

MEGAN Mine—mine—

RONALD When are you going to let me sleep with you?

7.

(Late at night. MOLLY has fallen asleep on the couch. Her phone starts to buzz and vibrate on the coffee table.)

(There is a knock on the front door. More knocking.)

ROBERT (O.S.) Molly? Molly, you home?

(MOLLY stirs.)

ROBERT (O.S.) Molly! Molly!

(MOLLY leaps up and races to the front door, opens it.)

MOLLY Oh my god! Baby — I thought you weren't coming 'til next weekend?

ROBERT I know. I thought I'd surprise you. I missed you. Come here.

(ROBERT drops his bags to the floor, kicks the front door shut and takes MOLLY in his arms, he kisses her passionately — even a bit rough, and pushes her back towards the couch.)

MOLLY Robert — hang on — wait —

ROBERT Molly, baby.

MOLLY Robert – no –

(MOLLY wriggles from his grasp.)

ROBERT What is it?

MOLLY You're drunk.

ROBERT I had a few drinks on the plane.

MOLLY Can we just – take a sec/

ROBERT Huh?

MOLLY I just need a minute – I was out cold.

ROBERT Jeesh. I thought you'd be happy to see me.

MOLLY I am! I missed you too – I'm so happy you're here – baby, please.

(MOLLY approaches him, takes his hands.)

MOLLY Robert?

ROBERT What?

MOLLY I'm sorry.

ROBERT Stop apologizing woman.

(He kisses her.)

MOLLY Mmm. Do you have any more?

ROBERT Booze?

MOLLY Yea. I want to catch up.

(ROBERT goes to his bags and pulls out a bottle of Tito's.)

MOLLY Give it here.

(She unscrews the top and takes a huge swig.)

MOLLY Ach!

ROBERT You don't need to do that.

MOLLY I don't know why you hang out with me. I can't even sing.

ROBERT Anyone can sing.

MOLLY Not me. I'm tone deaf. You know that.

ROBERT Sing me something.

MOLLY No way.

ROBERT Happy Birthday. C'mon.

MOLLY Absolutely not. That song is notoriously hard to do right.

ROBERT 'Notoriously'?

MOLLY Yea, I'd need to finish the whole bottle.

(MOLLY takes another long swig. Starts to sing in a croaky voice.)

Haa-a-apy birrrrrthday to you...
Haaa – a – a – apppy Burthdayyyyy-

ROBERT Okay, okay stop!

(MOLLY dissolves into giggles.)

(ROBERT'S phone starts to ring.)

MOLLY Don't answer it –

ROBERT Hang on.

(He checks his phone.)

Baby, I have to get this.

Hey, what's up? Okay – just a sec.

Sorry Molly.

(ROBERT goes into the bedroom and shuts the door.)

MOLLY You kidding me?

(She sighs and sits on the couch, cradling the vodka. She takes another large swig. Starts to undress. Experiments with posing provocatively on the sofa. Drinks more vodka. Wraps herself in a throw from the couch goes to the mantel, pulling out a hidden pack of cigarettes. She lights one and returns to the couch.)

(ROBERT emerges from the bedroom.)

ROBERT I thought you quit.

MOLLY I did.

(ROBERT goes to her and she hands him the cigarette. He takes a drag.)

ROBERT I'm really sorry about that.

MOLLY You were in there for ages.

ROBERT I know – it was a bit of a crisis.

MOLLY A *crisis*?

ROBERT Talking someone down off the ledge.

MOLLY Oh shit – not Dexter again? Was he having an episode?

ROBERT No, not Dexter.

MOLLY Why are drummers always so mental? The guy I went out with before you – wait, it *wasn't* Dexter?

ROBERT Nope.

MOLLY Who was it then?

ROBERT Nobody. It doesn't matter.

MOLLY It doesn't matter? You say you're all excited to see me and then you disappear in the bedroom for ages for some confidential pow-wow and it doesn't *matter*?

ROBERT Trust me.

MOLLY I'm trying. So just tell me. We used to share all our secrets.

(ROBERT sighs. Fidgets.)

MOLLY It was Olwyn.

ROBERT She's been fucking our A & R guy. He's married. His wife got ahold of his phone and read all their texts.

MOLLY How original.

ROBERT Molly, it's complicated.

MOLLY And why is it your shoulder she has to go cry on?

ROBERT Please don't be like this. I can't. I just can't.

MOLLY Is she getting fired?

ROBERT Let's drop it. Any of that vodka left?

(MOLLY hands him the vodka. He drinks some.)

ROBERT You took off your clothes.

MOLLY I did. I thought I might try to seduce you.

ROBERT Oh Molly... I know this is hard. I wish I didn't have to travel so much. I want to be here with you.

MOLLY It will be over soon. We'll have a whole couple months to ourselves.

ROBERT Mmm. Yes.

(ROBERT curls up in her lap.)

MOLLY Precious.

ROBERT Can we just stay like this forever?

(ROBERT burrows into her.)

MOLLY Let's go to bed.

(She helps him off the couch, and they disappear into the bedroom.)

8.

(MOLLY emerges from the bedroom. MARGERY is sitting on the couch.)

MOLLY Can't sleep.

(She fetches her computer, and starts to head to the kitchen. Pauses again and turns to MARGERY.)

MOLLY Will you sit with me while I write?

MARGERY May I?

MOLLY I'd like that very much.

(They go to the kitchen.)

(Beat.)

(MEGAN enters the living room, pursued by MAGGIE.)

MAGGIE *You were allowing him to kiss you. On the mouth?*

MEGAN I kiss him. But it hurts us to kiss. We want more than that. We want to know each other through and through and it's so hard, it seems so unnatural, we can't do anything, we are just helpless and it hurts—

MAGGIE *What kind of kisses are these?*

MEGAN I don't know.

MAGGIE *And what other lovely things do you do together—you and this young man—in your bedroom where your most intimate possessions are, the bed where you sleep, your toilet articles, your night things likely hanging in the closet, perhaps a pair of bedroom slippers under the chair or even an intimate garment? What other things do you and this heedless young man do together? What is there left for you two to do alone, locked in your bedroom at that hour—alone, the young man having kissed you, having returned the kiss. I want you to speak.*

MEGAN I can't—I want to go—I feel odd. I'm sick—sick in my stomach.

MAGGIE *I don't doubt that for a moment. Usually young girls are sick in their stomachs before—before—I mean to say after such things as you intimate a young girl would normally be sick at her stomach.*

MEGAN I'm going. I feel dizzy.

MAGGIE *Sit down!*

What do you mean? What do you mean by bringing down the standards of university women? The standards of womanhood and manhood? What makes you two feel you are isolated members of society and not subject to its laws? This university reflects the high ideals of civilization. We have nothing to do but obey. Now, what right have you to deliberately tear down what someone else has built for the good of it all?

MEGAN We're ashamed, but not for what you think.

MAGGIE *Enough of this moral looseness! It's about time this university took a stand against conditions here. It's unspeakable. There's nothing but sex, sex, sex between students all the time. Their minds are full of it, they talk it, think it, eat it, wear it; sex is their soul and body, their purpose in living, their only means of expression. Look at yourself for one moment and if you have any shame in you, any fine breeding or conscience, then despise what you are doing every time you get out of sight of authority.*

MEGAN I don't want to live in your world. I don't want to make you understand. Oh, this is all I've ever seen. Just the dirt and meanness of people who don't want to love anything or be beautiful and—free. Yes, free. If I didn't want to be free, after looking at you, then I ought to be burned at the stake, I ought to be mutilated until I can't walk or feel. I'm proud that we are lovers.

MAGGIE *What amazes me, is that affairs have gone so far that you will speak out this way. That impudence and self-assurance alone is enough to convince anyone that you are not desirable as a student in this institution. Or any institution. I have also had occasion to glance at your literary work. I understand that you cannot write anything without putting something suggestive of sex into it. I've had my eye on you. You can't get by forever, you know, but our best evidence against you lies in your very modern poems and stories.*

MEGAN Yes, I mentioned a breast and a navel in a story once.

MAGGIE *You're rotten. Rotten!*

(MAGGIE exits. MEGAN remains.)

VOICES (O.S.) *Expelled for being immoral! Expelled for being immoral!*

(In the kitchen, MOLLY looks up from her computer. MARGERY is beside her.)

MOLLY What next?

MARGERY The city, I suppose.

MOLLY Describe it to me.

MARGERY Monstrous towers that stretched to the sky. Severe doormen in heavy coats. Hours spent walking alone, small and unseen. Saying to myself, over and over, 'I am not afraid.'

Bracing myself for the throb of anguish, when everything in me would give way.

But when I hear the voices that say, 'You can't — you don't dare — you can't —' I stand taller, and move as if I'm in a stream that flows above all the darkness.

(MAGGIE re-enters the living room and approaches MEGAN.)

MAGGIE *Where will you go? What friends have you there?*

MEGAN I'm going. I'm taking my money.

MAGGIE *Will you take your winter coat?*

MEGAN Yes.

MAGGIE *Telegraph.*

MEGAN I will.

MAGGIE *Write.*

MEGAN I will.

MAGGIE *Don't forget.*

MEGAN No.

MAGGIE *Your mother trusts you.*

MEGAN Yes.

MAGGIE *You're all she's got on earth.*

(MARGERY and MOLLY in the kitchen.)

MARGERY The room was large enough for a bed and a table and a chair. It had water bugs on the walls. It had one barred window where I watched one-half of the sun setting every night. I would press my face close to the cool sooty bars, my body against the wall, as the glowing sun rolled deep into the rising clouds. The noise of the city clanked and roared past and lights burned in my face all night.

(MAGGIE and MEGAN in the living room.)

MEGAN Oh Ronald, come to me, help me.

MAGGIE *If he really loved you, he'd come.*

MEGAN Don't say that! Don't.

MAGGIE *What did you expect?*

MEGAN No, he's going to be a great poet.

MAGGIE *He's not coming.*

MEGAN He's going to marry me.

MAGGIE *Why do you have to pretend all this?*

MEGAN He was right—he was right that time—we had to separate—something was wrong.

MAGGIE *Now you have no home.*

MEGAN Now I am facing life. I'm free. I'm not frightened anymore.

9.

(The next morning. MOLLY paces the living room, holding a manuscript. She is excited.)

MOLLY Robert? Robert you ready? Let's start.

(ROBERT peeks his head out the bedroom door.)

ROBERT You want me to enter?

MOLLY Yea, shut the door. Then enter like it's the start of the scene.

(ROBERT shuts and then opens the door, walking through in great bouncy strides.)

ROBERT Like this?

MOLLY Yes. But you don't need to walk like you're on a bouncy castle. Just do it like you normally would.

ROBERT Okay, okay. Gotcha.

(ROBERT goes back in the bedroom, shuts the door.)

(Beat.)

(He opens the door and makes a grand entrance. Throughout the scene, they both over-act and fumble with the script, stumble over lines.)

ROBERT *(in a booming voice)* 'Gee, this is swell!'

MOLLY 'You had your trousers pressed.'

ROBERT 'Just for you.'

MOLLY 'Why were you mad at me, Ronald?'

ROBERT 'I've forgotten. Honest.'

MOLLY 'We have a room. We're going to live in it.'

ROBERT 'You're looking great. I wanted to buy you something. Everything was closed. I want to buy you something that will be right next to you. Something silk. And slippers.'

MOLLY 'I'm almost happy.'

ROBERT 'Almost?'

MOLLY 'I have to give you all of me before I can be really happy. But did you mean what you wrote? That you don't need me any more and if I had stayed you would always need me?'

ROBERT 'I do mean it.'

MOLLY 'I don't understand. You love me now.'

ROBERT 'Hell, before I couldn't walk alone. I've learned to walk. I couldn't write for anyone but you. Now I write for everyone.'

'I could get along without you, but it would be hell. I could do it though.'

MOLLY 'Don't say that!'

ROBERT 'You shouldn't have gone.'

MOLLY 'Ronald!'

ROBERT 'Let's talk about something pleasant. Shall we get married?'

MOLLY 'Why?'

ROBERT 'You're great.'

MOLLY 'I want to be generous.'

ROBERT 'Yes, and there mustn't be any reservations.'

MOLLY 'None.'

ROBERT 'If you get a baby we'd better marry. I guess you won't though.'

MOLLY Okay, okay, stop.

ROBERT I like how he says 'if we get a baby'. Sounds like a little kid.

MOLLY Do you think it works?

ROBERT Sure.

MOLLY What was it about?

ROBERT...?

MOLLY Tell me what it was about.

ROBERT Um. Is she pregnant?

MOLLY No!

ROBERT Sorry. I was concentrating so much on my acting, the words didn't really sink in. Also the language – but I guess it's the period – time difference or whatever.

MOLLY It's crap.

ROBERT It's not crap – just because I didn't understand it, doesn't mean it wasn't amazing.

MOLLY Oh god.

ROBERT Explain it to me.

MOLLY She's run off to the city, it's the scene where her lover Ronald finally joins her. She's about to lose her virginity to him.

ROBERT Are you going to write the sex part?

MOLLY No!

ROBERT Just asking, jeesh.

MOLLY Can we do it once more? Just quiet. You don't need to make an entrance – we'll just read it plain, standing right here.

ROBERT Honey, I really need to start getting ready/

MOLLY Please?

ROBERT Okay. Sure.

Ready?

MOLLY Yup.

(This time they read the scene simply. It is completely different – they come off as shy, earnest – they connect.)

ROBERT Gee... this is swell.

MOLLY You had your trousers pressed.

ROBERT Just for you.

MOLLY Why were you mad at me, Ronald?

ROBERT I've forgotten. Honest.

MOLLY We have a room. We're going to live in it.

ROBERT You're looking great. I wanted to buy you something. Everything was closed. I want to buy you something that will be right next to you. Something silk. And slippers.

MOLLY I'm almost happy.

ROBERT Almost?

MOLLY I have to give you all of me before I can be really happy. But did you mean what you wrote? That you don't need me any more and if I had stayed you would always need me?

ROBERT I do mean it.

MOLLY I don't understand. You love me now.

ROBERT Hell, before I couldn't walk alone. I've learned to walk. I couldn't write for anyone but you. Now I write for everyone.

I could get along without you, but it would be hell. I could do it though.

MOLLY Don't say that.

ROBERT You shouldn't have gone.

MOLLY Ronald.

ROBERT Let's talk about something pleasant. Shall we get married?

MOLLY Why?

ROBERT You're great.

MOLLY I want to be generous.

ROBERT Yes, and there mustn't be any reservations.

MOLLY None.

ROBERT If you get a baby we'd better marry. I guess you won't though?

(Beat. ROBERT and MOLLY giggle.)

ROBERT It's great baby. Right, I gotta start packing.

(He heads towards the bedroom.)

MOLLY Robert?

ROBERT What?

(Beat. MOLLY hesitates. She's having a hard time saying what she wants to say.)

MOLLY I woke up this morning to your back. You wouldn't budge.

ROBERT Baby I was exhausted – plus all that vodka. Hey, do you have any aspirin?

MOLLY Baby –

ROBERT ?

MOLLY I'm afraid.

ROBERT Of what?

MOLLY I'm afraid I'm going to lose you to the band and success and all that.

ROBERT That's ridiculous.

MOLLY I feel like it's already happening.

ROBERT What are you talking about? Have I been anything but supportive? I just read your scene for christ-sakes!

MOLLY I know – I know – thank you – but I mean, you seem – I don't know – kind of distant a lot of the time – always checking your phone – it's like you're half there. I want the rest of you.

ROBERT Baby, it's a pretty stressful time. I'm in the middle of a tour.

MOLLY We're getting married in six weeks.

ROBERT Right. I know. And that.

MOLLY Unless – do you still want to?

ROBERT Of course! But honey, we're never going to make it if you don't have a little more faith in me. And confidence in yourself.

(Beat.)

I didn't mean that to sound like a threat.

MOLLY I know I know, you're right. Please – let's just forget we ever had this conversation.

(ROBERT sighs. He goes to MOLLY. They hug.)

ROBERT Now will you let me pack? I think I'm gonna try to get in a nap before my flight.

MOLLY Oh. Okay. Bummer – I was hoping we could go for a walk. I found this gorgeous little path through the woods, I've been dying to show you.

(ROBERT kisses her on the forehead.)

ROBERT Next time.

MOLLY Maybe I'll join you for a nap. I'm pretty whupped myself, I barely slept last night.

ROBERT I'd rather you didn't.

MOLLY What? Oh.

ROBERT Sorry, it's just/

MOLLY Okay, no prob.

ROBERT I won't be able to sleep if you're there.

MOLLY No, no, that's fine. I need to fix this scene anyway. While it's fresh.

ROBERT Good girl.

(ROBERT exits into the bedroom.)

(MOLLY slumps on the couch. MARGERY enters, and sits with MOLLY. They stay there through the next scene – they should overlap.)

10.

(MEGAN enters, pursued by MAGGIE.)

MEGAN I want to *do* something for him.

MAGGIE All he wants is to spend the day in bed.

MEGAN But it's beautiful. I want to see the outdoors!

MAGGIE You see, you never really want what he wants. He doesn't like the outdoors. He hates to walk in the daytime.

MEGAN Please, can't I wake him up now?

MAGGIE You run along the way I told you.

MEGAN I won't. I don't want to. I want him to walk with me now.

MAGGIE Can't you just let him be? He's feeling wonderful today. Why do you have to ruin it?

MEGAN He feels wonderful too! Of course!

MAGGIE Must be the weather.

MEGAN (*horrified*) You really think it's the weather?

MAGGIE You don't object to that, I hope.

MEGAN Then it isn't me—I've just given him my body! This is all something tremendous to me and to him it's like—like eating breakfast.

MAGGIE Little Me-Me. You still have to be the center of everything, don't you?

MEGAN I'll go.

MAGGIE No you won't.

MEGAN I will. I won't love him so much anymore. I can't. I'll go.

MAGGIE He's really your slave. He's just pretending.

MEGAN But he used to be humble about it and now he acts—as if he has power over me.

MAGGIE Lord. You know, he needs to get a job. A guy can't be happy without money.

MEGAN Why not?

MAGGIE Has to eat, has to have a good time, has to smoke, has to get drunk, has to go to the concerts. You don't know anything about men. But you're his now.

MEGAN And he's mine.

MAGGIE He's going to make you happy.

MEGAN We will be alive when we die. Nothing can kill us. Nothing can put us out of the world.

MAGGIE Don't get transcendental, Megan. You distort the most basic things.

MEGAN But—

MAGGIE Darling, you're always feeling something eccentric. Nothing common pleases you. Everything has to have meaning. The poor guy can't just read the paper and enjoy it, or just smoke, or just walk. Everything has to be significant.

MEGAN I don't care. He has to see what I am.

MAGGIE Damn it, can't you let him love you just plain?

11.

(MOLLY and MARGERY are reclined on the couch, MOLLY at one end, MARGERY at the other, facing each other.)

MOLLY We are both in this room feeling...longing? Incomplete.

MARGERY We are both complete in ourselves – even if you don't know it yet.

MOLLY Writing completes us. We both believe in magic.

MARGERY We both have faith in a power that is greater than ourselves.

MOLLY We are both vegetarians. We both love cheese.

MARGERY And sunflowers. And long walks in the woods.

MOLLY We both have loved artists. And suffered.

MARGERY I did resent him.

MOLLY I feel so inferior.

(Beat.)

I guess that's more than three similarities apiece.

MARGERY Your house, containing everything you own, catches fire. After saving your loved ones and pets, you have time to make a final dash to save any one item. What would it be?

MOLLY Nothing. As long as Robert made it out.

(ROBERT emerges from the bedroom. He has his bags. He does not see MARGERY.)

ROBERT Right. I guess that's it.

MOLLY Did you sleep?

ROBERT For a nanosecond. Were you talking to someone out here?

MOLLY Oh, ah no. Just reading a scene out loud to myself.

ROBERT Oh hey – did you find any aspirin?

MOLLY Sorry, I didn't look. Hang on –

ROBERT No, don't bother, I can grab some at the airport.

MOLLY So where now?

ROBERT New York. Webster Hall.

MOLLY New York?! That was the one I was going to try to get to – I was saving my miles! Why didn't you tell me?

ROBERT I want you to write. It's no big deal.

MOLLY It is! You promised!

ROBERT Seriously, Molly. You're not missing anything.

MOLLY I can't believe it. I'm just –

(She is devastated, on the verge of tears.)

(Robert's phone dings.)

ROBERT Shit, that's my car.

(He gives her a hug. She is limp.)

Don't be sad baby. I'll see you in two weeks.

(He kisses her on the forehead and exits.)

12.

(MEGAN hesitates at the threshold between the kitchen and living room. MAGGIE is at her side. They peer into the living room.)

MAGGIE *Why don't you go in?*

MEGAN I won't bother them. Not while they're playing poker. Ronald gets cross.

MAGGIE *He's glaring at you. He looks like he loathes you.*

MEGAN They read their poetry sometimes if I ask them. Ronald won't, but they will.

MAGGIE *Who is that extraordinary woman? She's like that marshmallow stuff – you know – you spoon it out.*

MEGAN Oh, that's Princess Odelliva. Used to be Oda Helfer. She's an ex-typist and switchboard operator – she changed her mind and got to be a princess one night in a Brooklyn moving picture.

MAGGIE *Ha! Lord, that's grand. That's good.*

MEGAN I'm afraid of her. She knows everything I don't know. She knows tricks – she knows . . . something.

MAGGIE *You think she's a dirty whore. You want to put your hands on that putty flesh of hers and rip her apart like dough.*

MEGAN I'm frightened because of Ronald. If he sees how I loathe and make fun of Oda, he'll take her home. He'll make love to her because I hate her.

MAGGIE *He'll leave you for her.*

MEGAN When a common prostitute comes in I can't compete. I might as well go about my business.

MAGGIE *I'll bet she's a hot baby in bed.*

MEGAN Don't!

MAGGIE *He just wants you to be decent to everyone.*

MEGAN Oh I am, I am.

MAGGIE *You're not. You're jealous. You act superior.*

MEGAN Look at her.

MAGGIE That poor thing has had a hell of a life.

MEGAN I can't win.

MAGGIE You don't know what it means or what she's gone through. The struggle to eat, just to eat.

MEGAN I do – I work – I typewrite – I/

MAGGIE Do you know what it means to get up early and steal bread from the crates when it's piled in back of the grocery store? Did you ever steal milk early in the morning or try to lift eggs? She's had to face reality all her life and you've never faced it.

MEGAN Stop!

MAGGIE You don't understand. You never have. You never really give yourself to him—you pretend to, but you don't—you're always putting your personality in his face. He doesn't want it. He doesn't want your ideas. He has better ones of his own. He wants to see you.

MEGAN I never loved the way I wanted to – until I wasn't myself anymore.

MAGGIE When he doesn't want you anymore he won't be able to tell you. It will be horrible. He'll have to stay because he can't hurt you and it will be hell.

MEGAN Oh, my brightness, my self, my own—Oh I cannot give him, I cannot let him destroy, I cannot let go—No. I can't.

MAGGIE Lord, there you go. Always fancy. Always distorted. Never plain so a person can meet you simply. Always fancy.

MEGAN Stop! I'm a woman. Stop. Don't you dare. I'm a woman—Oh, I am, I am. Ask anyone. I am.

MAGGIE He wants your flesh. He needs it—He wants it—then he'll love you forever.

MEGAN He doesn't want me?

MAGGIE No.

MEGAN He just wants my body?

MAGGIE Yes.

MEGAN He doesn't want my love?

MAGGIE No.

MEGAN My flesh—this flesh—

MAGGIE Yes.

MEGAN Oh women, women of the world, loved by men, tell me how you get so empty—so soft—so sweet.

MAGGIE *I'm telling you the truth. He wants your body. Give him your body and he'll love you forever. He won't ever be able to leave you.*

MEGAN I can't!

MAGGIE *Your body is all he has left in the world. The only reality.*

(RONALD enters.)

RONALD What are you doing out here?

MEGAN I'm frightened.

RONALD You're impossible.

(Beat.)

MEGAN We're going to have a baby.

RONALD I guess it isn't true.

MEGAN It is true.

RONALD I guess it isn't.

MEGAN Oh, it is.

RONALD Then do something now, for god's sake, stop it, do something.

MEGAN You don't mean that.

RONALD I do. I'd go insane.

MEGAN You just think that now.

RONALD I know it! I'm hungry, I'm cold. I want to be a great poet. I want to stay in the world.

I'm going for coffee. Can't you loan me a dime? You'll get it back.

MEGAN In my coat.

RONALD Can I take this quarter? You'll get it back.

MEGAN Why don't you work? Why don't you go out the way I do and break yourself apart typing books and earning two cents. For God's sake, grow up and earn your own bread at least.

RONALD I knew you felt that way about me. But I've paid back every damned cent so far and I will if I have to sell my own blood. God, I won't ever borrow anything from you again.

(RONALD throws her money on the floor.)

Take it back, for cripes sakes, I don't want it or anything from you. I don't want anything, did you hear me? You can keep all your precious/

MEGAN Oh, God, what do I do to you, Ronald?

(Beat.)

RONALD I'm a damned weakling.

MEGAN If you love me...

RONALD Shall I bring you back a sandwich? I'm going to bring you something good.

MEGAN One of those cheese sandwiches with the pickle stuff.

RONALD Want anything else?

MEGAN No, thank you.

(RONALD exits. MEGAN wraps her arms around herself.)

MEGAN Oh Mama, oh Papa, how horrified you would be if you could see me now. How miserable and wretched you would be. I am going to have a baby and I hope you don't mind. I'm not married. Once I didn't believe in marriage but I do now. I would rather have a baby than anything in the world. I am going to have a baby...

(MAGGIE gently leads MEGAN off into the kitchen.)

13.

(MOLLY enters from the bedroom. She is on the phone.)

MOLLY Please pick up, oh please, please... Pick up pick up pick UP.

(The mumble of ROBERT's answer message sounds.)

Robert? It's me, please call me as soon as you get this.

I'm sorry to keep leaving all these messages – it's just – you won't answer and you don't call back. I don't understand. I hope you're okay.

Please, baby. It's urgent. Okay. I love you. Bye.

(MOLLY slumps down on the couch.)

Oh god, Robert. Oh god.

(She puts her head in her hands.)

(MARGERY enters. Strokes MOLLY gently.)

MOLLY What happens next?

MARGERY There is the nausea that never goes, the sickness in my stomach...

But I endure it because of the happiness and strength I feel in every cell and bone and tissue.

Nothing can hurt me or touch my joy or my courage – all I know is the monstrous contentment of my body.

MOLLY *(whispers)* Yes. Oh yes.

(MOLLY and MARGERY remain where they are. This scene should segue right into the next.)

14.

(MEGAN and MAGGIE enter from the kitchen.)

MAGGIE *Honestly, I've never seen you look more beautiful.*

MEGAN I feel odd.

MAGGIE *You know what an abortion is, don't you?*

MEGAN No – yes, but why?

MAGGIE *An abortion is where a man won't do his part. He makes the doctor take it so he can go back to his wife and children and not –*

MEGAN I think marriage is right. I used to think the opposite but now –

MAGGIE Lord, a woman learns from men how valuable marriage is. Lord, you certainly do. I wouldn't go. I wouldn't consent to it. I was horrified and terrified and everything and I told him I'd tell my father about it and he made me go to a doctor friend of his. He said he'd just examine me but they strapped me down and did it. Nobody knows what it was like. My God, I shrieked—I simply yelled myself to pieces. I didn't know what was going to happen. They took me in there. He pretended he was doing it for my father, that I had got in trouble with some student and he was being my benefactor. God. I don't think I like men at all.

MEGAN How could you let them?

MAGGIE I couldn't help it. I tell you they strapped me down.

MEGAN I'm sick.

MAGGIE At first it was beautiful. Then when I got that way he was horrible. I always thought men were brave. My father is. My father takes care of all of us. I never knew before that men could be so cowardly. You know they take marriage so seriously; that's why they always try to get women without it.

MEGAN Oh, I don't believe—I don't believe—No—I can't—

MAGGIE But they do. They'll marry a girl if she holds back. Of course. We're supposed to be smart enough to know that. Sure. This is a grand world.

MEGAN But not all. Not all. Oh, they aren't all like that.

MAGGIE I think they are.

MEGAN No, no, they can't be; they aren't.

MAGGIE Perhaps they aren't.

MEGAN I know—I have faith.

MAGGIE I think I'll go to Europe. Daddy will give me the money if I can get someone to go with me. Would you?

MEGAN Oh, I couldn't.

MAGGIE Has Ronald asked you to marry him?

MEGAN He did once.

MAGGIE When?

MEGAN A long time ago.

MAGGIE Why in hell didn't you, idiot? Don't you love him?

MEGAN I thought it was indecent to marry until you—you had given—everything—every part of you. That's the marriage. That's the wedding—when you give it all.

MAGGIE I guess it is.

MEGAN You should have had the baby.

MAGGIE I tell you, dumb-bell, they strapped me down.

MEGAN I won't accept this ugly world other people make. I won't live with them. Now I see what it is. It's dirty. It's shrewd. I'd rather be an outcast than one of them.

MAGGIE You'll have a sweet time of it then. I'm going to get a grand new dress. Something grand. Daddy told me to. You know we have laws just because men are so vile. All they want to do is go over the universe impregnating all the women and leaving them. Of course if they're forced, if you drive them into a corner with a broom handle, so to speak. I just say salt and pepper all the time to myself. Salt and pepper. Isn't that insane? Of course I sort of forced him into it and he never did anything like it before—with students. I really believe that. I do. If you drive them into the corner they will pray for their little lives even—

MEGAN Oh I don't believe . . . We can't live on a level with hogs. We have to exalt life. We can't let them degrade it and turn it into something to be shrewd and sly about—we can't—we mustn't—

MAGGIE Well, I'm going to. I'm going to chase one of them. I'm going to chase him with a broom handle and make him marry me and treat him like a dog so he will love me forever. Yes, I am. I don't care how vile it is. I'm going to.

MEGAN But where would the love be? Where?

MAGGIE In your eye, darling. All the doctor could think of to say to me was—'Be a thoroughbred. It will soon be over. That's right—be a thoroughbred.' But it's all so final, Megan. You can't go back and you know that nothing, nothing can happen ever and you have to accept it. You have to take it and you know you can't ever get back again to where you were. Nobody asks you whether you can accept it or whether you want to, or anything about it. You have to. I want to work. I'd like to have a job and work terribly hard.

MEGAN Yes.

MAGGIE But we're all nothing but rats. Even the ones that look awfully good. Rats. Don't you feel well, Megan?

MEGAN No, I feel awful.

MAGGIE What's the trouble?

MEGAN Oh, if the world's like you say.

MAGGIE *It is. I'm so sorry.*

15.

(Dawn. MOLLY is curled up asleep on the couch. MARGERY is gone. The front door opens and ROBERT enters. He goes and sits next her, strokes her head until she stirs.)

MOLLY You're back.

ROBERT Why are you sleeping on the couch?

MOLLY Thought I'd wait up. I was writing this scene and it upset me –

ROBERT Shh. Go back to sleep. I'm going to take a quick shower.

MOLLY No I'm up. What time is it?

ROBERT Half-past six.

MOLLY I'm up.

(MOLLY reaches up and hugs him, burrows into his side.)

ROBERT Baby...

MOLLY So glad you're here.

(MOLLY motions for ROBERT to come under the blanket with her. He starts to resist, but then gives in.)

ROBERT I'm wrecked.

MOLLY Remember I used to be so afraid of you flying?

ROBERT *You* hated flying.

MOLLY No, but before you'd go away I used to wake up in the middle of the night and gaze at you sleeping beside me, and think, 'This. Oh god, just this.'

ROBERT Molly...

MOLLY Remember those red pants you used to wear? I never knew any guy who wore red pants. You were wearing them the first night I saw you.

ROBERT They got too tight for me.

MOLLY Not too tight. Remember your cousin's wedding in Hopewell?

ROBERT The one where we...?

MOLLY Yea, the one where we snuck up into the balcony and had sex all during the service.

ROBERT You wrote it in the guest book. They loved it.

MOLLY I wonder if anyone will do that during our wedding? I hope so.

(Beat.)

ROBERT So you nearly done with the play?

MOLLY Kind of. Still have to do the last bit. I hate endings.

(ROBERT makes a move to get up.)

MOLLY Don't – stay with me.

ROBERT Honey, I'm hot.

(MOLLY flips the blanket off him.)

MOLLY Better?

(ROBERT sighs.)

MOLLY What is it?

ROBERT What did you have to tell me that was so urgent?

MOLLY So you did get all of my messages!

ROBERT I tried calling.

MOLLY Right.

ROBERT But it's better being here with you in person.

MOLLY Mmmm.

ROBERT I need to tell you something too.

MOLLY ?

ROBERT So, what then?

MOLLY You first.

ROBERT No, you.

MOLLY I'm —

ROBERT I don't —

MOLLY I'm preg/nant

ROBERT I don't think we should get married.

16.

(MEGAN and RONALD burst in.)

MEGAN You don't love me.

RONALD What the hell?

MEGAN I mean I love you more—more than you can love me—

RONALD You're stifling me. You suffer all the time no matter how much I love you. Why, when I was really insane about you—

MEGAN What?

RONALD When I was simply infatuated with you...

MEGAN Oh, Ronald...

RONALD You're never satisfied with what I give you.

MEGAN I want you to marry me.

RONALD What the hell! All right. I'm willing.

MEGAN Willing?

RONALD Well you can't expect more than that, for God's sake.

MEGAN I do. It must mean something. You must want to.

RONALD Can't be done.

MEGAN Can't I make you want to, Ronald?

RONALD No.

MEGAN All right. You needn't. All right. Never mind. Never mind, never mind.

RONALD It's bad enough now but if we were married I'd eventually strangle you.

MEGAN I want to be unselfish. I want to be different. I want to be—

RONALD You can't be. I can't be. This is life.

MEGAN Please want to marry me. Please want a good life. I'll take care of you Ronald.

RONALD All right, we'll get married. God I don't want to hurt you any more but—

MEGAN I'll take care of you, I can, I want to, I will.

RONALD For Christ's sake, can't you ever see anything? Don't you know yet what I really want?

MEGAN No.

RONALD You do. You can't help but know. Won't you get an abortion?

MEGAN God, don't say that—I'm so happy—don't—don't.

RONALD But you won't be. I'd go crazy with a kid around. I'd run off and leave you and that would be hell for me, remembering you all alone—

MEGAN I feel brave.

RONALD Hell of a thing to do, but they're doing it all the time. But I'll marry you if you say so. Any time.

MEGAN I feel strong. I can walk forever and not get tired. I can do anything...

RONALD Then do what I say! I'm not influencing you. I know you want the baby.

MEGAN I don't mean this crying. My eyes are crying. I'm not.

RONALD To hell with poetry. I can live in a bungalow and sell bonds.

MEGAN I'm strong, I'm not afraid.

RONALD I can be a hardware salesman.

MEGAN I can do anything,

RONALD Megan, don't you know I'd do anything on earth to make you happy?

MEGAN I'm happy. I feel brave.

RONALD Where are you going?

MEGAN Out.

RONALD What for?

MEGAN Does my stocking show very much?

17.

(MOLLY and ROBERT haven't moved from the couch in the living room. They stare at each other in silence, trembling. Without a word, MOLLY gets up and goes to the kitchen. She starts to make coffee.)

ROBERT How long have you known?

MOLLY Barely a week – I called you the second I found out. I wasn't going to leave it on your voicemail.

It's early. Little over a month.

ROBERT I'm so sorry Molly –

(MOLLY doubles over in pain. ROBERT goes to her.)

ROBERT Honey, baby, are you alright?!

MOLLY Of course I'm not alright. I was so happy – so excited to tell you. And all you can do is apologize.

ROBERT I just meant I was sorry for not answering the phone – I mean not returning your calls!

MOLLY Oh god oh god.

ROBERT Shh, baby please. Sit down. I'll make the coffee.

(MOLLY sits. ROBERT makes coffee. Long beat.)

ROBERT I'm going to support you, you know that, right? No matter what happens.

MOLLY Are you... are you even just a little...

ROBERT What?

MOLLY Happy? Excited?

ROBERT Well, yes, sure – honestly I –

MOLLY What are we going to do?

ROBERT Whatever you want.

MOLLY I want to stay together. I want to get married. I want this baby.

ROBERT Oh, Molly –

MOLLY What?

What?

ROBERT I think we should wait.

MOLLY Wait? What? Why?

ROBERT There's just too much – I need some time.

MOLLY Well how much time do you need? One thing needs to be figured out pretty soon. Not to mention the two hundred guests set to descend on Montauk in six weeks.

Oh god.

(MOLLY crumples again, keens silently. ROBERT stops what he is doing, goes to her and holds her. They stay that way for a while.)

(MOLLY pulls away.)

MOLLY Okay. It's okay. I'm fine.

ROBERT You don't have to be fine.

MOLLY I'm *fine*.

(ROBERT goes back to making coffee.)

MOLLY No, you're right.

ROBERT ?

MOLLY We should cancel the wedding.

ROBERT Molly.

MOLLY You're right. Who knows what will happen. We need time.

ROBERT It just – it wouldn't be fair to you. I've got to figure some shit out.

MOLLY 'It's not you, it's me.'

ROBERT No, it's me, not you –

MOLLY I know. I was putting the words in your mouth.

ROBERT Oh.

MOLLY Don't get mad.

ROBERT What?

MOLLY I have to ask.

ROBERT Okay.

MOLLY Is there someone else? Olwyn?

ROBERT Oh Molly...

(Beat.)

Not Olwyn.

MOLLY Oh my god, so there is –

ROBERT ...

MOLLY Who?

Who?

Who?

ROBERT Molly –

MOLLY It's that singer! The girl, the girl, the girl who sang on your album – Anjali!

ROBERT Why would you say –

MOLLY Yes, yes. You said she was doing some gigs with you guys on this tour. It's her.

ROBERT ...

MOLLY I'm right. I'm right. Jesus, of course.

ROBERT Molly –

MOLLY You once said she looked like Natalie Portman with boobs.

ROBERT I – ?

MOLLY Say it. It's her.

ROBERT It's nothing.

MOLLY ?

ROBERT But...

MOLLY Aha! But?

ROBERT Okay. It only just – but we – we both – just – we have strong feelings for each other. But nothing's happened, I swear.

MOLLY Nothing. Just feelings. But more than like, Facebook flirting.

ROBERT It's not fair to you – I know that. That's why I need time. If I feel this way – I think – I think I'm not ready to get married.

MOLLY Okay. Okay. Got it.

(She starts to hyperventilate.)

It's okay, it's okay. I get it. People fall out of love. They meet someone else, it just happens. Nothing to do for it. It's life.

(MOLLY gets up clutching her chest. She begins to stagger/hop around the room like she's navigating hot coals.)

Oh god but it hurts, it hurts. I'll be fine. Gotta roll with it, roll with it. Ow ow ow ow! Oh god, it hurts, ow! Oh ouch! Oh ow ow ow ow owwwwwww.

ROBERT Honey – please don't –

(He goes to her but she pushes him away.)

MOLLY No! Let me do this! I'm hurt. Let me hurt.

ROBERT

MOLLY Oh god I'm in pain. OW OW OW ow owwwwwww. Oh my heart, oh my heart. You should go. It's okay. I understand. I get it. We'll talk tomorrow. Wedding's off. Go. Please go.

ROBERT Baby...

MOLLY Go! Ow. Ow. Ohhhhhh.

(He hesitates.)

Get out of here.

ROBERT I'm going, I'm going.

I love you.

I'm sorry.

ROBERT exits.

MOLLY Ow. Ow. Owwwwwww.

(MOLLY drags herself into the bedroom, shuts the door.)

18.

(MEGAN and RONALD enter.)

MEGAN It's over.

RONALD My God. Did you go alone?

MEGAN Yes.

RONALD That was brave.

MEGAN I feel kind of weak but I'm all right.

RONALD I say, was it bad?

MEGAN Awful. I'm still shrieking.

RONALD It's over now.

MEGAN Let me have just your hand, your hand, just one of your hands, just your finger...

RONALD Are you sick?

MEGAN No, I feel all right.

RONALD Do you want a glass of water?

MEGAN Say it again! Oh, would you really give me something? Say it over, say it over.

RONALD Loads of women do it, you know.

MEGAN You used to say it all the time. Say it just once—'I want to do for you Megan.' You needn't do anything—just say it—just once—

RONALD Don't hate me! I'll die if you hate me. Don't suffer, don't hate me, please, it kills me. I love you, I really love you.

MEGAN If you loved me you would have wanted a child, you would have wanted to give me something to keep forever. Now I haven't anything—a child is the only real gift from a lover.

RONALD I'd do anything to make you happy, I swear I would.

MEGAN Think of one thing I want.

RONALD Don't let's talk. It's weak to talk about ourselves all the time.

MEGAN Comfort me.

RONALD What did the doctor soak you?

MEGAN Thirty.

RONALD I'll pay half. I can wire my father for it. God, and you went all alone. Thank you for that.

MEGAN I'm going

RONALD Don't go. Why? What have I done?

MEGAN You didn't want the baby.

RONALD I can't help that.

MEGAN Did you ever want to marry me?

RONALD Yes.

MEGAN Did you ever think we could have a good life?

RONALD Yes.

MEGAN Did you ever think of a baby?

RONALD God, yes, I wanted all of it.

MEGAN Oh, when? When did you want it?

RONALD I don't know. A long while back. I don't know.

MEGAN The rent's paid. Stay here, Ronald. I have to know where you are. Stay.

RONALD I haven't a cent. Guess I'll have to.

MEGAN May I write to you?

RONALD You act as if I'm the one who is leaving

MEGAN Oh, you are.

RONALD Don't go now. Wait until tomorrow.

MEGAN Never again will I wait and wait on corners for you where you've promised to be and then forgotten to come.

RONALD Don't hate me. If you hate me, I'll die.

MEGAN Then I'll hate you. I'll loathe you.

RONALD It's your fire that keeps me alive. I swear I'll die if you stop loving me.

MEGAN Then I'll stop.

RONALD No, you'll love me, Megan.

MEGAN I want so much and I can't take anything.

RONALD I know.

MEGAN As soon as you love someone then they stop loving you.

RONALD You're full of morals and denunciations and reproaches and you're always blaming—
blaming—

MEGAN Don't let me go! I want to be changed by you. Make me over, make me what you want.

RONALD We both knew it. We knew it was true. You knew all the time.

MEGAN What if I die and you're not there to hold me? What if you die and I'm not here—?

RONALD Nonsense. You're going to be a great writer.

MEGAN I want a baby. I want you.

RONALD I don't love you the way you want to be loved. I can't.

MEGAN You'll let me go. You won't even hunt for me. This is a relief to you.

RONALD It's vile but it's the truth. You have been boring me every minute for months.

19.

(MOLLY emerges from the bedroom, sits on the couch. MARGERY appears and sits beside her.)

MOLLY It's okay.

MARGERY Shhh.

MOLLY I'll be fine.

MARGERY Come now.

MOLLY I finished.

(MOLLY'S phone rings. She answers it.)

MOLLY Hey Mom.

Yes, I meant it.

Well, you're just going to have to deal with it.

(In the kitchen, MEGAN is seated at the table, a typewriter before her. This is not a new scene — the action between MOLLY in the living room and MEGAN in the kitchen takes place concurrently.)

MEGAN Dear parents, I have moved uptown. It is a lot like where I lived when I was in college. It is clean. It looks just the same.

(In the living room, MOLLY is still on the phone with her mom.)

MOLLY If you put Dad on, I'm going to hang up.

MEGAN Thank you for the stamps. Oh, I forgot to tell you—

MOLLY My heart is broken. All I need now is a hug.

MEGAN My parents, oh, this is my life and I'm keeping it from you. I dare not give it. You would loathe me, turn me away, shove me out further than I already am into the darkness.

MOLLY I have a few more days here. I need some time alone. I have a lot to think about.

MEGAN I forgot to tell you that my book is accepted and they like it and I bought you both presents the other day. I am so happy.

I am wretched.

MOLLY It's beautiful here.

MEGAN It's cold here.

MOLLY I'm dreading going back to the city.

MEGAN I love the city. Love from Megan.

MOLLY I love you too Mom. I love you too.

THE END

CHAPTER FIVE

Adapting Margery Latimer's *This Is My Body* for the Stage

As argued in Chapter Four, the dynamics in modernist women's autobiographical narratives that actively seek a personal connection with their reader in a manner that blurs the boundaries between author, self and reader – and which in turn perform a woman's presence – can also function to inform the strategies for adapting them to the stage. This chapter explores these strategies through an examination of *Portage Fancy*— my own stage adaption of American modernist Margery Latimer's autobiographical novel, *This Is My Body*, as well as two previous, contrasting drafts, *Maggie/Maggie* and *Margery*.⁵ Drawing upon Ryan Claycomb's arguments with regard to the challenges faced by feminist playwrights in approaching historical women's lives onstage, my own adaptations are considered in the context of contemporary feminist theatre; not only towards discovering how a woman's identity – and her search for this identity – might be constructed in performance, but also to explore what this reveals about the unique adaptability of women's literary modernism to the stage. Through an examination of how a woman's identity as realized in the performing body functions to offer a dialectical image of history onstage, it is also possible to see the ways in which the experiences and themes explored by the modernist women writers can speak powerfully to – and even instruct – contemporary audiences, particularly in terms of how these modernist texts as staged offer a unique insight into the ways women 'perform' in the present.

Part One examines Ryan Claycomb's arguments with regard to how the shared process of identity formation – the blurring of boundaries between author, self and reader – is carried forward

⁵ These drafts are included for reference in Appendix A and B.

on the stage, where the process becomes one of constructing an identity in the body of the performer.

Part Two examines three contrasting drafts of my own stage adaptation of *This Is My Body: Maggie/Maggie, Margery*, and the ‘final’ draft and primary focus of this section, *Portage Fancy*. These adaptations are considered in the context of the three main strategies as set out by Claycomb:

First, how the presentation of history reflects both the relationship between the historical and fictional, as well as the constructed nature of the plays (in the case of my adaptations, this strategy is effected by structuring the plays as metatheatre).

Second, how the splitting of the subject – an aspect that is also facilitated by a metatheatrical structure – allows for a performance of the search for, and construction of, identity.

Third, how the performance of the process of erasure performs women’s history by performing the elision of that history, and also justifies the revisionist nature of the work itself.

Finally, the main themes from the novel are considered in terms of how they are manifest in performance – in other words, how they are realized in the performing body, reflected in the dialectical images that speak to the present. The two primary themes from the novel discussed are those that center around a woman’s body: the abortion narrative, and the narrative surrounding a young woman’s struggle to reconcile with her body in a more general, physical sense – her sexuality, her maternal urges, and the conflict between wanting to be at home in her body, sexually free and uninhibited versus achieving a (perhaps androgynous) transcendence, one that is pure, intellectual and spiritual (the latter being that which might best allow her to realize her artistic ambitions amongst men).

I. Constructing an Identity in Performance

As Ryan Claycomb argues in *Lives in Play: Autobiography and Biography on the Feminist Stage*, in which he explores the nature of the construction of an identity in performance, biography plays by feminist playwrights ‘in performance propose a new model of biographical inquiry that doesn’t merely seek to recover the life of exemplary women, but rather to reclaim, through the body of the live actress, the radical gender performances of those women’ (23). In other words, staged biography can serve not only as a ‘politicized inquiry into how gender roles...are constituted, shaped and presented through performance’, but also ‘*the very notion of the subject who takes on such roles*’ (2). Navigating between the two poles of ‘real life’ and ‘performativity’, the performance of these narratives sees ‘the performability of identity and the efficacy of the live, speaking body together create a rhetorical effect’; one in which the performing body ‘might represent a theatrical image of reality while at the same time complicating the structures of narrative, identity, body, voice, history, and community that defines [a woman’s] very presence onstage’ (2).

The body of the actress in a biography play becomes a ‘dialectical image’ as conceptualized by Elin Diamond following from Walter Benjamin:

Women have long been associated with the superficialities and duplicities of fashion, advertising, consumerism, and fantasy. Typically, an image of idealized or abjected ‘woman’ is circulated in order to sell goods, affirm the patriarchal family, prop up masculine sexual prowess – usually a combination of the three. . . . To jam the machinery of image reproduction, critics have articulated strategies of reiteration or reinscription to mark the specificity of what is elided – in the above case, the complexity and differences of women’s experiences and desires. (*Unmaking* 146)

Diamond's proposal, the dialectical image, allows for 'a strategic reimagining of the images themselves'; as manifest in the performing body, '[images] . . . can be torqued from within, thrown into new relations, shocked into dialectical contradiction' (*Unmaking* 146). As such, a dialectical image 'doesn't stand in for an absent real (woman, man, toaster, Chevy), nor is it internally harmonious'; rather, 'it is a montage construction of forgotten objects or pieces of commodity culture that are "blasted" out of history's continuum' (*Unmaking* 146).

For Claycomb, the dialectical image serves as 'a physical embodiment that uproots the body of the biographical object and the body of the actress from their historically specific places and creates the dialectic of historical narrative'; a 'marker of the history' of women's experience (19). Thus, in the same way that the text in a novel becomes a site that sees the merging of the author, self and reader, on stage these entities come together and inhabit the body of the performer, merging past and present, novelist's voice, playwright's voice, character and actress, which speak as a community of women of a shared history that extends to the present – an idea that resonates in Charlotte Canning's argument that the performing body functions

to foreground the idea that one's autobiography is not one's alone, but is a part of a larger narrative about the experience of women in a particular culture. Thus, an autobiographical performance is not only the story of one woman's 'life', but also the story of 'a woman' in that culture. (74)

Towards this goal of constructing of a woman's identity in the performing body that offers a dialectical image of history onstage, Claycomb points out several key challenges specific to dramatizing women's biographical narratives. For one, the emphasis on a single individual and her

life and accomplishments allows the subject disproportionate authority; it assumes ‘the monolithic, univocal presentation of self’ traditionally assigned to the male voice – one that ‘necessarily elides the fragmentary, fluid nature of identity’ (Claycomb 3). In other words, as Anna Kuhn points out, ‘biography has traditionally been a male domain’; and the traditional (male) auto/biography is characterized by the monolithic, univocal presentation of self – one that marginalizes the ‘other’ (13; Claycomb 129). It is this traditional form associated with the ‘male’ that feminist critics have taken ideological issue with (Claycomb 129). As Broughton and Anderson write, feminism’s challenge to the traditional autobiography has led to ‘the location and problematization of the ‘subject’, an answer – or part of one – to the claims of enlightenment epistemology’ (xii).⁶

Leigh Gilmore writes in *Autobiographics* that ‘[traditional] criticism of autobiography has constructed a genre that authorizes some “identities” and not others and links “autobiography” to post-enlightenment politics of individualism or the post-Romantic aesthetics of self-expression or both’ (xiii). She points out that ‘much feminist criticism of autobiography has sought thematic, formal, and even broadly epistemological coherence among all women’s autobiography’, based upon the argument that ‘women represent the self by representing others because that is how women know and experience identity’; moreover, the female ‘self’ being represented ‘has frequently been white, heterosexual, and educated; has sought identity in relationships rather than autonomy; and has been conscripted as a player in the mother-daughter plot’ (xiii). Thus,

⁶ Expanding on this, Claycomb writes that ‘[just] as the notion of a unified self is a politically charged fantasy, so is the notion of a unified biographical tradition - a stable set of conventions - that feminism must work against. Nonetheless, these ideas are perceived to constitute a tradition of ‘conventional’ biography; they serve as literary figureheads of life-writing authority, and feminism’s responses to these conventions are not merely reactions to this straw man per se.’ While there are numerous examples of traditional biography, what is at play is ‘an attempt to work against a perceived set of traditional practices in a way both espouses an oppositional ideology and provides a methodology for recovering women’s lives that is viable within the framework of feminist discourse.’ (230)

[insofar] as feminist criticism of autobiography has accepted a psychologizing paradigm, it reproduces the following ideological tenets of individualism: men are autonomous individuals with inflexible ego boundaries who write autobiographies that turn on moments of conflict and place the self at the center of the drama. Women, by contrast, have flexible ego boundaries, develop a view of the world characterized by relationships (with priority frequently given to the mother-daughter bond), and therefore represent the self in relation to 'others'. (Gilmore xiii)

Not only does the individualistic formation as used to depict women's lives risk adopting the monolithic presentation of self traditionally associated with the male voice, but also it tends to situate the female subject as an object to be observed, rather than as an empowered subject (Claycomb 3). Strategies employed to address these issues include the use of Brechtian alienation tactics, alter egos, multiple identities and other more radical performative identities (Claycomb 19-20). The subject might also be split between the biographical figure and a character who serves as the biographer; this tactic functions to '[help] the audience contextualize the act of witnessing a life' and also serves to bring the audience into the life-writing process such that the notion of community is enhanced (Claycomb 20).

However, these tactics bring with them new obstacles, particularly the risk of shattering the subject to the detriment of the political project as a whole, which relates to Gayatri Spivak's concept of strategic essentialism; as Claycomb points out, '[it] becomes imperative, then, to complicate this binary between performativity and referentiality, between discourse and materiality' (10). And yet, it is this contentious dynamic that lends a unique power to the performance of a woman's auto/biography, in that

while the existing scholarship might suggest a *tension* between the radical gender performances afforded by an unstable, flexible notion of identity as a performative on the one hand, and a particular purchase on the real aided by a historical narrative verified by the performing body on the other, this dialectic is precisely what undergirds the political heft of life-writing in performance, particularly for women's lives. (Claycomb 14)

Related to this is the extent to which the play relies upon historical facts; as Claycomb suggests, 'good history seems an impossible goal, a task that can only be undermined by its own necessary fictionality, lost in the blurred lines between fictional and historical discourses' (121). What is involved is 'drawing a line between what constitutes fictional discourse and what constitutes history' (122). The solution might rest in Joan Schenkar's description of historical facts serving as 'hinges' upon which the circumstance of a play swing:

By characterizing the function of history in these plays as hinges, she literalizes history's pivotal role in constructing the narrative and its politics, and in serving as the hub around which the functional elements of the drama (i.e., the political commentary, the polemic, the rhetoric, etc.) revolve. (Claycomb 122)

As a further explanation of this concept of 'hinges', Claycomb offers the metaphor of a door that might be decorated in numerous ways – 'coherent, plausible ways if the rules of fictional truth are to apply' – but it retains its basic function, opening in service of the liminal path; in other words, no matter how it might be dressed, it remains hinged to the frame that surrounds it. The hinges 'root [the play] firmly to 'the real'; 'it establishes that the real underpins these biographical

narratives, shores up the metadiscursive explorations they undertake, and legitimates the political critique that they hope to bring to the present' (Claycomb 122).

Most relevant to the discussion of *Portage Fancy* and the two earlier drafts, *Maggie/Maggie* and *Margery*, are the three main strategies embraced by feminist revisionists in staging women's auto/biographical writing as identified by Claycomb. The first is linked to the issue of the relationship between the fictional and historical; namely the manner in which the documentation of history is presented, such that 'the constructed nature of the work being done in these plays [is revealed]' (131). In other words, plays that like Fiona Templeton's *Delirium of Interpretations* employ the Brechtian tactic of inserting 'objective' accounts of history that contradict the action onstage; in her play, Templeton has her characters speak in borrowed historical voices – literally, text from various historical sources – which serves to both highlight the unreliable nature of such documents as they contrast ironically with the visible narrative, and also reveal her own process in constructing the play (Claycomb 132).

The second strategy, as touched upon earlier, involves the splitting of the subject; this might be accomplished in a variety of ways, such as casting a figure who serves as biographer, witness, journalist or scholar (135).

Finally, the third strategy sees the 'performance of the process of erasure that [has] made such recovery work necessary in the first place' (135). For example, in Joan Schenkar's *Signs of Life*, much is made of the Henry James character's destruction of his sister Alice's journals; not only does this 'work to perform women's history by performing the elision of that history', but it functions to '[justify] the revisionist nature of [the] work by highlighting the tyranny with which the patriarchy asserts itself against female subjectivity' (135).

The section that follows examines all of these strategies in the context of my own stage adaptations of *This Is My Body*; the focus of this analysis is the final draft, *Portage Fancy*, while two

earlier drafts, *Maggie/Maggie* and *Margery* are discussed in relation to my final draft for their contrasts, successes and failures.

II. *This Is My Body* adapted for the stage; *Portage Fancy*, *Maggie/Maggie* and *Margery*

My own adaptations of *This Is My Body* join a long list of contemporary plays by female playwrights who have chosen as their subject another female writer – a woman similarly involved ‘in the business of representations’; indeed, their metatheatrical aspects perhaps serve as the most logical starting point in terms of identifying both the strategies employed to bring the novel to the stage, and what lends it its unique adaptability. Like Polly Teale’s *After Mrs. Rochester*, Alma De Groen’s *The Rivers of China*, Linda Manning’s *Do Something with Yourself! The Life of Charlotte Bronte*, Liz Lochhead’s *Blood and Ice*, Maria Irene Fornes’s *Summer in Gossensass*, and countless others, these plays examine the life of a woman whose own life was consumed with literary production; a metadramatic element that is compounded by the presence of characters that serve to shatter the singular biographical subject. In addition, their metatheatrical form serves to effect the three strategies as identified by Claycomb: foregrounding the relationship between the historical and fictional in a manner that also reveals the constructed nature of the work being done; allowing for multiple subjects; and serving the performance of a historical (female) figure’s elision from history.

What follows is a brief of summary of each adaptation: *Maggie/Maggie*, the first draft; *Margery*, the second draft; and *Portage Fancy*, the final draft, which precede a more detailed exploration of how their metatheatrical form succeeds or fails in the context of Claycomb’s three strategies.

MAGGIE/MAGGIE

The sequence of these drafts reflects not only my process and how the final adaptation, *Portage Fancy* evolved, but also shows how and where dialogue as excerpted from the novel features in each draft, as distinguished from that which I invented.

Maggie/Maggie, my first draft, began as an exercise in stripping the essential elements of the narrative from the novel that I wished to keep. The play is comprised of only two characters, whose dialogue is taken directly from the novel, as well as text from Latimer's short stories. The character 'Maggie' (always in Roman text) is 'Megan' from the novel, and speaks only her dialogue (as written in the novel, with some cuts and minor changes). The character '*Maggie*' (always in italics) takes on the roles of various characters from the novel and speaks their dialogue (as it was written, with minor cuts and changes). While 'Maggie' occupies her set place in time – that which corresponds to the novel, Madison, Wisconsin and New York City in the mid to late 1920s – '*Maggie*', on the other hand, might occupy various realms, as described in the stage directions, she 'might be all these things: Maggie's alter-ego, tormentor, conscience, ghost, guardian angel and/or inquisitor. She is often brutal; she is omniscient (or thinks she is) and exists in the past, present and future (Appendix A 306).

The effect of only having two characters circling each other in a far less-defined world creates a much starker adaptation of the novel; one that is on some level the most abstract and experimental of the three drafts, even though it has (on the surface, at least) the fewest metatheatrical levels. This stripped-down draft, effectively a skeleton of the novel, served as a blueprint for my subsequent adaptations, which saw the characters, scenes and dialogue that I invented layered on. As much as this draft was a synthesis of the novel, it also served to open up the spaces in Latimer's original narrative, allowing for the directors who staged it as readings vast

possibilities that stretched beyond the limits of the novel, while still staying true to its themes⁷. This in turn also freed me as a playwright; viewing the narrative in the barest sense, I was less constricted as I conceived my subsequent drafts by the great many (arguably) extraneous details from the novel, which were left out of this first draft. Finally, even though this draft was comprised entirely of text written by Latimer, in the selection, paring down and its reincarnation as a two-character play, it differs dramatically from the novel in tone, style, pace and what was foregrounded; in other words, it stands on its own, as an adaptation.

MARGERY

Margery sees the preservation of nearly all the scenes from *Maggie/Maggie*, only in this draft they are framed by scenes involving the invented characters Robert and Molly (a PhD student and her supervisor), as well as the introduction of the character who is Margery Latimer herself. As much as the Robert and Molly scenes are ‘fiction’, they are also drawn from conversations and written correspondence I had with my own supervisor during the process of writing these drafts. The Megan/*Maggie* scenes remain as lifted from the novel, while the Margery Latimer/*Maggie* scenes are drawn from the novel, from Margery Latimer’s letters, and from my own imagination.

In terms of metatheatrical levels, *Margery* is comprised of the most. One layer sees the play-within-the play, the scenes directly from the novel involving Megan and Ronald; this narrative is in turn framed – or observed – by Margery Latimer ‘the author’ and *Maggie*, the sylph-like alter-ego (from the first draft) who interacts with Margery while simultaneously crossing over into Megan’s

⁷ This first draft had two staged readings: the first was as part of Royal Holloway’s Doctoral School Conference on 24 January 2014, directed by Yael Shavit and performed by Denise Gough and Gabriella Moran. The second was as part of the Traverse Theatre in Edinburgh’s ‘Words Words Words’ festival on 14 November 2015, directed by Caitlin Skinner. The Traverse Theatre production saw one scene between the two women played as if they might be on a ship. In other words, the director and actresses for this production, working solely from the text, were not limited to an idea of the play as being set in the exact physical locations from the novel; in addition, the characters became Scottish. What did remain true to the novel was the relationship between the two women, and the ideas they discussed.

realm to take on various roles; the third layer sees Molly the PhD student in a series of meetings with her supervisor Robert, in which they discuss the stage adaptation of *This Is My Body* she is working on as part of her methodology – in other words, her adaptation of *This Is My Body* is the play-within-the-play, Megan and Ronald’s story. And of course, there is a fourth layer, which involves the audience of the play as a whole, who witness all three dramas unfold in unity.

PORTAGE FANCY

My third and final draft, *Portage Fancy*, takes the furthest step into the invented/fictional realm; the play is set entirely in Portage, Wisconsin, and is framed by Molly and Robert’s story – this time a young woman playwright and her musician boyfriend. While both Molly and her relationship share aspects drawn from my own experiences, there is much about her – and her relationship with Robert – that is invented; in other words, she is not quite so explicitly ‘me’ in the way Molly the PhD student in *Margery* is. The scenes between Margery Latimer and Molly are wholly invented. However, as with the earlier drafts, the scenes involving the characters from the novel (Megan, Ronald and *Maggie*) remain much as they were written in the novel.

In *Portage Fancy*, subjectivity is shared amongst the character of Margery Latimer herself, the historical figure and author of *This Is My Body*; Molly, the young playwright who is adapting the novel; and Megan, the novel’s protagonist. A closer look at these metatheatrical layers helps to further set their relationships in context. The first portrays the present day: Molly and her boyfriend Robert arrive at the childhood home of Margery Latimer in Portage, Wisconsin, where Molly plans to sequester herself to write a stage adaptation of *This Is My Body*. The second layer involves the world of the novel (and simultaneously, Molly’s adaptation of the novel as a play), which sees Megan, the novel’s protagonist, as she heads off to university, meets and falls in love with Ronald, and moves to New York City to pursue a career as a writer after being expelled from

school for 'immoral' behavior. Existing somewhere both within and outside these two worlds, is Margery Latimer herself, who interacts with Molly and is also an outside observer to both Molly's relationship with Robert, and that of Megan and Ronald; however she does not interact with Megan – even if she is understood (perhaps not initially) to be the author of the novel upon which the Megan/Robert scenes are based, and which loosely depict her own life.

Finally, the audience might be seen as comprising an added layer, as active observers of all three of these intersecting worlds onstage; the dynamic that fosters their more active role being the play's metatheatricity, which encourages them to make the connections between the varying iterations of 'Margery Latimer' the historical figure – as the ghost-like presence who visits Molly; as Megan, Margery's 'self' as realized in the novel and Molly's stage adaptation; and in Molly – for in the course of the play, the identities of the three women (Margery, Megan and Molly) might be seen to merge through their shared experiences, desires, traumas, disappointments and dreams – the strongest of their shared dreams being that of becoming a great writer (although attaining an equal and fulfilling romantic relationship might be a very close second). The effect, which echoes Claycomb and Canning's arguments discussed earlier, is one that underscores the idea of community; not only the community of women who populate the play, but a larger community that includes the audience. It also reveals where the novel as a communicative biography, one that effects a woman's presence, as translated to the stage sees this woman's presence both physically in the body of the actresses, but also it exists in a more universal sense – it is a presence that extends to include the audience. In turn, this aspect also relates to Marie Maclean's audience-focused approach, one that recasts the role of an audience/reader to one that is more active, that invites them in as collaborators; as a communal shared experience the woman's presence effected is not only richer, but more complete, spanning history but united in experience.

What follows is an in-depth consideration of these adaptations in the context of Claycomb's three strategies.

FIRST STRATEGY:

How the presentation of history reflects both the relationship between the historical and fictional, as well as the constructed nature of the plays (in the case of my adaptations, this strategy is effected by structuring the plays as metatheatre).

Starting with the first draft, *Maggie/Maggie*, the metatheatrical construct is perhaps both the simplest and also the most abstract. History and fiction are blurred in the sense that the excerpts from the novel – the 'history', in that the novel scenes are rooted in an actual historical place in time, and are lifted from Latimer's biographical narrative – are in turn fictionalized through the metatheatrical construct that transforms the narrative into a two-character play, and invents the character *Maggie*, who takes on various roles, often in contexts slightly skewed in relation to the original scenes in the novel. The most significant impact of *Maggie's* fluidity of character is perhaps the considerable demands it places upon an audience. Who is she?

Audience feedback from a staged reading at the Traverse Theatre points to the challenges this two-character metatheatrical construct posed for an audience; members of this audience grappled with the idea of who *Maggie* was intended to be – Maggie's alter ego or inner voice, or as one stated, possibly her sister⁸. From this feedback, however, the audience also appeared willing to go along with the ambiguity of the character, and picked up that she might be an inner voice; however where the metatheatricality may have failed was in the 'consistency' of this voice. *Maggie's* sylph-

⁸ Audience feedback for this production was gathered by Catherine Makin, Artistic Administrator at the Traverse Theatre, and forwarded to me via email.

like qualities, her rapid changes, slipping from one character to another may not have allowed time for them to follow – the demands of the text as performed, the self-reflective narrative, tested the audience in terms of how active a role they were willing to play. A few were able to throw themselves in from the beginning and engage with the scene and characters throughout ('Engaging, it worked well.');

others were hesitant at first, less clear – then caught on ('I didn't understand until 2/3 of the way through that it was a voice inside her head but enjoyed it.');

and others resisted from the start and never entered into the scene ('I didn't understand it so I didn't understand the form').

This draft, with its two-character metatheatrical structure, informs several of the arguments related to the performativity of women's biographical narratives and the strategies for adapting them to the stage, specifically in the context of the more active role they demand of an audience. The majority of the audience identified *Maggie's* role as Maggie's 'inner voice'; in other words, the self-reflective aspect of the novel as realized on stage – and it was this aspect, above all others, that challenged and intrigued them – ultimately either drawing them in, or pushing them out of the narrative/performance. What complicated or made the play difficult as metatheatre appears to have had very little to do with the number of layers; rather it was a matter of how consistent the voices were. The splintering succeeded where it was clear which voice was speaking, and it perhaps failed when the identity of the speaker was too ambiguous – an aspect that harkens back to Gayatri Spivak's concept of strategic essentialism, and Claycomb's point about the risk of shattering the subject to the detriment of the project as a whole.

Turning to the second draft, *Margery*, which has multiple layers of metatheatricality and six characters, four of whom – Megan, Maggie, Margery and Molly – might be splintered embodiments of Margery Latimer (the author and historical figure) – the dynamics in terms of what is demanded of the audience offer a provocative contrast to both *Maggie/Maggie* and *Portage Fancy*.

In this draft, history and fiction are contrasted more obviously, with the history (both the scenes from the novel, and the scenes that include Margery Latimer the historical figure) framed by the fictional present-day scenes involving Molly and Robert. Although there are more layers, feedback on this draft indicates that an audience is less likely to struggle with the identities of the various characters, in terms of who is speaking⁹. The ‘worlds’ – historical and fictional – are defined such that the transitions from scene to scene are easier to grasp, and in turn, so are the identities of the characters. Robert is always Robert, Molly is always Molly, Megan is always Megan, etc.; even Maggie (*Maggie* carried over from *Maggie/Maggie*) is more clearly defined as an alter-ego who also takes on the roles of various characters from the autobiographical novel (and thus presumably, from Margery Latimer’s past). As metatheatre, in spite of its multiple layers, this draft might be the least demanding of an audience in terms of understanding its form and distinguishing its characters; however, accessibility does not make it any more engaging than the more challenging *Maggie/Maggie* – indeed, of the three drafts, responses suggest this draft was the most ‘difficult to like’ (Rebellato, ‘DR Thoughts’), and as such, the draft audiences might perhaps be less willing to enter into – for reasons that have nothing to do with its form.

In terms of metatheatre, *Portage Fancy* exists somewhere between *Maggie/Maggie* and *Margery* in the complexity of its layers – although I would also argue that of the three, it is the most accessible; however, its accessibility does not require any less-active role on the part of the audience. Like Polly Teale’s *After Mrs. Rochester*, in which the characters from Jean Rhys’s novel *Wide Sargasso Sea* exist onstage with those from both *Jane Eyre* and Jean’s real life, *Portage Fancy* sees characters from the past and present not only occupying the same space and time, but also interacting with each other. Margery Latimer (the author and historical figure) makes herself

⁹ Feedback on this draft came from three outside readers, playwrights Poppy Corbett and Gemma Langford, as well as playwright and supervisor Professor Dan Rebellato.

known to Molly (the young present-day playwright) from the beginning, and the two begin a dialogue – indeed, they form a relationship that continues throughout the play; at the same time, Megan, Ronald and *Maggie* consistently burst forth upon the present-day scenes. Molly observes them as if they are ghosts, even as it becomes gradually clear that she (and Margery) have also created them. These dynamics cast the audience in a more active role as they must make (their own) connections between the worlds – the parallels, contrasts, and the linked journeys of the two main protagonists, Molly and Megan.

SECOND STRATEGY:

How the splitting of the subject – an aspect that is also facilitated by a metatheatrical structure – allows for a performance of the search for, and construction of, identity.

In addition to the ways metatheatre functions in terms of the relationship between history and fiction, and revealing the constructed nature of the plays, it also splinters the subject, which in turn helps to foreground the performance of the search for, and construction of, identity. As the metatheatrical layers have already been well established in both the play summaries and discussion of metatheatre in the context of Claycomb's first strategy, this analysis of metatheatre and subjectivity takes a more integrated approach and compares and contrasts all three adaptations together (as opposed to considering them in sequence).

In *Portage Fancy*, Molly, Megan, and even Margery are reflections of each other; so too are Molly, Megan, Margery and Maggie in *Margery*, while in *Maggie/Maggie*, Maggie and *Maggie* might be seen to share an identity. Thus, in all three plays, the lines between author/creator, subject/self and audience are effectively blurred. Megan, (in all three play drafts – she is Maggie in *Maggie/Maggie*) questions 'what' she really is – what it means to be a woman, what is expected of

her in society, what her role should be in terms of Ronald. In turn, the construction of Megan's identity, as witnessed by the other characters in each play, as well as the audience, is drawn into sharper relief – in other words, the performance of the search for and shaping of her identity is brought to the fore. Each metatheatrical layer that frames Megan's journey is a reminder to the audience that this is what they are watching – a performance of the process of identity formation, which echoes Linda Hutcheon's argument regarding self-reflective narratives, that they examine the *process* of coming to one's 'self', rather than the 'self' itself.

Even in *Maggie/Maggie* – perhaps the least obvious instance of the phenomenon of characters within the play observing from the outside (where the construction of the play as a 'play' is laid more explicitly bare as it is in *Margery* and *Portage Fancy*), *Maggie's* role as a sylph, alter-ego, and seemingly omniscient force nonetheless allows for a sense of the constructed-ness of the play as a whole, as she takes on the roles of the different characters from the novel. Moreover, as she prods, threatens, cajoles and essentially leads *Maggie* from scene to scene – for *Maggie* is the one in control as she initiates each scene throughout the play from beginning to end – it is her presence that alerts the audience that the play is metatheatre. Her presence allows for the blurring of boundaries – she is *Margery Latimer*, *Maggie*, and also the catalyst that stimulates the audience's active participation. Where the audience feedback to the staged reading identified her role as an alter-ego, they were in turn – consciously or unconsciously – being made aware of *Maggie's* journey as a search for identity; for a character who engages with her alter-ego onstage, is also essentially performing a search for her identity.

In *Portage Fancy* and *Margery*, the performance of this search for identity might be easier to recognize for the way these plays are constructed – with Megan's story as a more clearly defined play-within-a play. The splintered subject sees Molly's struggles begin to mirror Megan's in *Portage Fancy*, while in *Margery*, the shared experiences of Megan and Molly are less specific, more universal

– and yet no less personal. In both cases, the audience witnesses Megan’s story both in its own right, and as a construct – in other words, the audience is privy to both the process and the product; in both *Margery* and *Portage Fancy*, each Molly’s process in drafting their respective adaptations of *This Is My Body* is as much a part of the drama as the staged scenes from the novel itself.

Thus, the splintering of the subject in all three plays not only has the effect of blurring the boundaries between the author, the historical figure, the protagonists, and indeed, the audience who engage with and identify, but also it allows for the performance of a woman’s search for her identity. And it is this performance – one that is directly linked to the performativity of the original narrative – its internal, self-reflective aspects – that also informs how women ‘perform’ in the present.

For example, in *Portage Fancy*, Megan’s experiences as played out on stage that reflect Margery’s ‘real’ life, Margery’s active re-experiencing of her past, and Molly’s struggle to realize both in her stage adaptation in turn foreground the radical gender performances of not just women writers and artists in Margery Latimer’s time, but also comments on how women writers ‘perform’ today.

Similarly, in *Margery*, Megan acts out her frustration at not being able to study the writers and philosophers she believes will make her a better writer; and Molly expresses her frustration at being too ‘thick’, at not possessing the intellect to penetrate the male-dominated arena of modernist studies that will enable her to write a great play about a female modernist. After reading her short story aloud to the class, Megan rebels against criticism that her story about a young girl does not have any real meaning, that the symbolism is heavy-handed and sentimental; Molly repeatedly expresses her fears to Robert that her depiction of Margery/Megan’s coming-of-age is too ‘girly’, that it doesn’t have enough conflict, that it ‘tells’ rather than ‘shows’. The Margery

Latimer author character ‘invokes’ the birth of the narrative at the outset of the play by calling her characters to the stage, telling them they are now in her power, that they belong to her, that the story they are being called upon to act belongs to her; Molly performs her own lack of control – her doubts and insecurities about ‘owning’ the characters, and indeed, the story itself – making the adaptation her own.

And in *Maggie/Maggie*, although one does not see the performance of a contemporary woman in the same way that one does – literally – in *Portage Fancy* and *Margery*, *Maggie’s* various incarnations as Megan’s alter-ego, as the voice of Margery Latimer, as the various characters from the novel, do more than simply offer a catalogue of various women and men from the 1920s; one is explicitly aware that one is viewing a performance of these characters – and as such, *Maggie’s* performance of them also comments on the roles these individuals play – an aspect that might vary according to the choices of the present-day actress who plays *Maggie*. Even *Maggie*, although her ‘role’ remains consistent throughout the play (she does not step into the role of any other characters, as *Maggie* does) offers insights to how women in the 20s performed that in turn reflect upon how women (and men) perform today – particularly in relation to issues such as abortion, marriage and the experience of making one’s way as a female writer in a patriarchal society.

Megan in *Portage Fancy* and *Margery* offers the same comments, but perhaps they are placed in sharper relief given the metatheatrical framework that allows for her performance to be viewed in direct contrast to her present-day double, Molly.

As such, the actress performing Megan (in *Portage Fancy* and *Margery*) and *Maggie* (in *Maggie/Maggie*) carries out a radical gender performance that also serves as a dialectical image and historical archive of the female modernist in the 1920s and early 1930s, while the performance of each respective Molly in *Portage Fancy* and *Margery* reflects the similar ways contemporary women writers and artists ‘act’ in order to achieve their goals in what remains a patriarchal society. Both

Megans and Maggie, like Margery Latimer the historical figure, refuse to go along with the accepted gender roles of their time – in the books they read, in their shunning of sororities and tea parties, in their outspoken disdain for the institution of marriage (at least while they are at university), in their single-minded drive to be ‘a great writer’ rather than ‘a moral woman’ – indeed, their attitude towards the school regulations and accepted notions of propriety are what get them expelled. The metatheatrical construct of each play brings out this aspect of the roles women of the period were expected to perform, and offers a visual depiction – one that is live but also layered in terms of the levels of presence – the past and ‘the now’, the historical and fictional, the material and subjective.

In *Portage Fancy* and *Margery*, Megan’s performance is shaped by but also shapes Molly’s performance; we see the performativity in each Molly’s struggles to construct Megan’s performance – struggles that have as much to do with Molly’s own discomfort and self-consciousness about her identity as a woman writer in contemporary society, where male writers and artists still dominate.

THIRD STRATEGY:

How the performance of the process of erasure performs women’s history by performing the elision of that history, and also justifies the revisionist nature of the work itself.

In all three adaptations, the performance of the process of erasure is evoked primarily through the manner in which historical facts and documents are used. This is perhaps most explicit in *Margery*, where Molly references critical reviews of Latimer’s novel, and gives a conference paper related to her work adapting *This Is My Body*. In addition to giving the audience glimpses into the historical facts of Latimer’s ‘real’ life, and further revealing what went into the construction of

the play as a performance, they also serve as a reminder that Margery Latimer and her work have been all but forgotten.

While *Maggie/Maggie* does not incorporate the explicit use of historical documents or concrete factual evidence related to Margery Latimer's life and career, as previously discussed in relation to Claycomb's first strategy, the very nature of the play as an adaptation – one that is constructed through a collage of scenes left very much as they were on the page – means the novel itself might be seen as a historical document of sorts, one that is interwoven through the play, and upon which and through the bodies of the two actresses perform. The novel as historical document also echoes through the language the characters use, the books they read, and their references to the political and social issues of their day. The same dynamic functions in the play-within-the-play scenes in *Portage Fancy*.

While *Portage Fancy* does not feature historical documents per se in the present-day scenes involving Molly and Robert, it is worth noting that the very first draft did. In its first incarnation, Robert and Molly arrive at Margery Latimer's house and their attention is immediately drawn to framed newspaper clippings hung over the mantel – the real-life articles documenting Latimer's marriage to Jean Toomer, as well as her obituary. As Rebellato points out, this effectively reduced them to 'sock puppets' – 'Their interest as characters [takes] a back seat while we learn details about Margery Latimer':

I don't think it works. We're not going to learn anything about her. Because remember, we don't know anything about her. We might not even know if she really exists. So the actual dramatic situation is that a couple arrive in a house that one of them is renting and the first thing they do is not what most people would do: flop down on the couch [etc.]...instead they start reading out bits of obituary. And what

that tells us is nothing about Margery Latimer, because I don't think theatrically we'll be listening for the details.' ('DR Thoughts')

If this method for including historical fact and documents failed, perhaps the presence of Margery Latimer herself – as a specter or ghost – allows for a more effective weaving in of history; not only does she reveal historical facts from her life to Molly in conversation, but her presence is also in a sense a performance of her erasure. Margery Latimer died at age thirty-three in childbirth, her early death very likely a factor in her elision from history (and the modernist literary canon); her presence in the play makes one aware of this. Not only does this make her more 'real', but also it functions to justify the revisionist nature of the project of adapting her novel for the stage.

THEMES:

The Abortion Narrative

Perhaps the most powerful and contentious aspect of *This Is My Body* is the abortion narrative. As Joy Castro points out, citing Judith Wilt,

Latimer's novel does *not* conform to Wilt's analyses of abortion plots. Interpreting the work of more recent authors (Didion, Barth, and others), she argues that abortion functions to resist control. Thus if a man tries to control a woman with pregnancy, the plot resists with abortion. Conversely, if a man tries to control a woman by coercing or forcing her to have an abortion . . . then the plot resists with continued pregnancy. ('Margery' 182)

Megan's act of going through with the abortion – which is portrayed (albeit offstage) in all three drafts of the stage adaptation – might seem like a not-very-radical gender performance in the sense of standing up for herself as a woman in a patriarchal society; instead she 'punishes, defiles and betrays' herself – 'I'm not a woman. No woman destroys life. Men do that. Women don't – they keep it, they protect it' (Latimer 331).

The draft *Margery* is worth considering in-depth with regard to both the abortion theme, and how it functions in terms of speaking to how women perform in the present, given the manner in which the metatheatrical construct of the play allows for a type of autocritography¹⁰ – and indeed my methodology in adapting the novel – to be performed. As such, the audience is confronted not only with Megan's experience of her abortion, but is also privy to a discussion of the topic (in the context of Megan's experience) by Robert and Molly – characters who exist in contemporary society, and who may or may not reflect the audience's views. In addition, Robert and Molly's discussion is as much about Molly's process in depicting Megan's abortion as it is about the issue itself. For these reasons, *Margery* explores the abortion theme more extensively and on more levels than the other two drafts. (This is not to say that the abortion theme comes across any more powerfully or successfully in *Margery* than in the other two drafts; indeed, I argue later that it is most powerful in *Portage Fancy*.)

In *Margery*, Robert addresses what is perhaps the most contentious aspect of Megan's abortion – that she allows herself to be persuaded by Ronald to go through with it, even though she desperately wants to keep the baby. Joy Castro suggests that Megan's lack of resistance reflects the pressures placed on many women aligned with leftist party politics in depression era America;

¹⁰ As defined by Michael Akward, 'If autobiography is a genre in which contributors shape their self-representations in response to earlier texts, 'autocritography' is a self-reflexive, self-consciously academic act that foregrounds aspects of the genre typically dissolved into the author's always strategic self-portraits. Autocritography, in other words, is an account of individual, social, and institutional conditions that help to produce a scholar and, hence, his or her professional concerns.' (7)

Ronald uses leftist party rhetoric to persuade her to have an abortion and the trauma Megan experiences as a result of going through with it highlights ‘the failure of leftist party politics to comprehend important aspects of women’s experience and women’s desire’ (‘Margery’ 182).

If (Molly’s) stage adaptation fails to fully realize this aspect, Robert’s reaction to how the abortion narrative plays out allows the audience to not only gain insight into the forces that drove Megan to have an abortion (via Molly’s response to Robert) but also lets them in to the difficulties Molly contends with in translating the novel to the stage:

ROBERT . . . it feels a bit odd to have the two abortions in such close succession. Of course they’re in the book but maybe do something with them. Do more with them. Intertwine and confuse them somehow.

MOLLY You said that of the last draft. I tried – I thought I layered things a bit - but not enough? You think Megan’s experience is somehow – I don’t know – lessened coming right after Arvia’s?

ROBERT The thing is, Megan chooses to have the abortion. Megan wasn’t tricked or forced, just persuaded. And – though this may be anachronistic of me – it all gets very pro-life rhetoric to me

MOLLY That’s it though – I think many women – I’m totally pro-choice and I don’t think I ever want to have children. But if I got pregnant? I don’t know. I don’t think if it came down to it, I could go through with an abortion.

ROBERT So why does Megan do it? (Appendix B 408)

Molly's defense of Megan's decision, which draws on how she herself might feel and act, is one of many aspects of the novel that speaks to women as a community, of their shared experiences; as performed onstage, it allows the play to comment on how women 'perform' in similar circumstances, in the present.

If the abortion narrative in *Margery* allows for a more comprehensive view into the process of constructing its performance, as well as further insights into the cultural and political forces that might help to explain Megan's choice to not have the baby, *Maggie/Maggie* is perhaps most true to the novel insofar as it replicates the scenes from the page to the stage. Although the process is not on view, Megan's experience – and perhaps even more so, Arvia's – offers a view of the harsh reality women of the period came up against when faced with an unwanted pregnancy – particularly unmarried women, who desired to be self-supporting – not to mention those who yearned to be self-supporting *and* artists.

Lord, a woman learns from men how valuable marriage is. Lord, you certainly do. I wouldn't go. I wouldn't consent to it. I was horrified and terrified and everything and I told him I'd tell my father about it and he made me go to a doctor friend of his. He said he'd just examine me but they strapped me down and did it. Nobody knows what it was like. My God, I shrieked— I simply yelled myself to pieces. I didn't know what was going to happen. They took me in there. He pretended he was doing it for my father, that I had got in trouble with some student and he was being my benefactor. God. I don't think I like men at all. (Appendix A 337)

Arvia's experience in particular is most gripping – and an example of how the orality of the novel – the manner in which it speaks, simply by means of scenes that are primarily dialogue, naturally lend themselves to the stage. The scenes in *Maggie/Maggie* in which *Maggie* takes on the role of Arvia are essentially the novel performed; moreover, they speak powerfully to women (and men) of the experience of being a woman in the period – and also prompt an active reflection on the way men and women behave today.

In *Portage Fancy*, the abortion narrative arguably plays out the most powerfully; perhaps the main reason for this is because Molly and Robert's story, the present-day couple, is more developed and compelling (than Molly and Robert's relationship in *Margery*) and serves as a richer parallel to Megan and Ronald's drama. Indeed, as much as Megan and Ronald's performance surrounding the abortion theme comments on the present, I would argue that what Molly and Robert enact onstage serves to open-up and deepen what the audience understands and feels with regard to Megan and Ronald. In other words, it is the performance of the contemporary couple's experience that charges what transpires between their 1920s doubles, more so than vice-versa. In contrast, both *Margery* and *Maggie/Maggie* lack this dynamic; while Molly and Robert in *Margery* discuss the abortion scenes in Molly's play, and abortion in general, theirs is the performance of a purely intellectual interaction. And of course, in *Maggie/Maggie*, there exists no contemporary couple as a parallel to Maggie and Ronald.

Reconciling the Female Body

Another key theme around which the novel centers, and that all three stage adaptations address in markedly different ways, is that of Megan's struggle to reconcile with her body and all that goes with it – her sexuality, maternal urges, and relationship with Ronald – and her desire to attain a level of transcendence and artistic freedom by immersing herself in a purely intellectual and

spiritual realm. It is an aspect that was most commented on, in terms of feedback to the first two adaptations, *Maggie/Maggie* and *Margery* – and also one that is particularly relevant in terms of adapting women’s literary modernism as it relates directly to the translation of interior narratives to the stage.

Reader/audiences of the first two adaptations commented that much of the action ‘seemed to exist entirely in the mind, and there’s not enough sense of the body’:

Look at this line: ‘All she could hear was the monstrous contentment of her body, as if it were spinning softly or humming in a low earth breathing’. On the page that’s a very sensual presence of the body in language; but on stage it’s abstract, the body trapped in language because we can SEE bodies up on stage and there seems so little connection between it and them. (Rebellato, ‘Cloud of Gold’).

Because the entirety of *Maggie/Maggie*, and the Ronald/Megan scenes from *Margery* were taken straight from the novel, it makes sense that the drama suffered from an excess of ‘telling’ rather than active ‘showing’. It also reflects the particular challenge of adapting these types of narratives; as another reader pointed out, ‘I imagine the problem you may be having is that the theme is so intellectual in nature and experimental in form that it puts the play at risk of being too cerebral’ (Langford).

Ironically, because these first two adaptations were so deeply rooted in the source text – even the ‘fictional’ parallel narrative involving Robert and Molly in *Margery* was one long conversation about the text – the theme of Megan’s struggle to reconcile with her body *was* translated to the stage relatively clearly – but not in a manner that benefitted the drama such that an audience might truly be engaged and invested in Megan’s plight. Readers were left ‘[yearning] for a

little more of the domestic, of the day to day physicality and the vulnerability which comes from that':

I miss the sweating, breathing, smudgy, boring parts of these women - I know it would be a beautiful thing to see the small humanities in them. Megan struggles so much with her relationship between soul and body. Show us her at her most homely . . . what I'm saying is, flaws are beautiful. An audience loves characters who are flawed. We see something in another which we are embarrassed about / ashamed about in ourselves, we CONNECT. (Langford)

Instead, Maggie/*Maggie* sees Megan's struggles with her body played out entirely in her intellectual conversations with Ronald. Time and again, to a degree that gets repetitive – as one reader commented, 'the cyclical arguments became a little tedious to read' (Corbett) – one sees Maggie and *Maggie* (who speaks for Ronald) at odds over her refusal to accept 'reality', to forget her airs and intellectual talk and meet Ronald on a simpler plane.

You don't understand. You never have. You never really give yourself to him—you pretend to, but you don't— You're always putting your personality in his face. He doesn't want it. He doesn't want your ideas. He has better ones of his own. He wants to see you. (Appendix A 334)

In the same way that Megan's 'airs' keep Ronald from being able to truly see her, so too is the audience cheated of seeing her onstage. What Maggie/*Maggie* lacks is enough action and physicality – the characters as written might be stick figures from the page, and even as portrayed by actors,

they are not truly allowed to breathe as they are limited in the drama to discussing their thoughts and emotions, rather than living and embodying them.

As touched upon previously, *Margery* takes a step forward in addressing this aspect through its construct that allows for autocritography – Robert and Molly discuss this very issue, and the ‘Princess Oda’ scene which follows, ostensibly written by Molly, sees a much more physical Oda who challenges Megan, highlighting the theme of Megan’s anxiety surrounding her body and sexuality. Indeed, Megan’s conflicted or perhaps naïve attitude towards the sexual/physical might be most problematic in her judgment of other women – and particularly Oda. Oda is lower class and inhabits her body in a manner that exudes sexuality and in turn gives her tremendous power over men – a power Megan to some degree envies; Megan, in contrast, a middle class intellectual, disdains Oda for her lascivious behavior.

In *Maggie/Maggie*, the manner in which Oda inhabits her body, and Megan’s animosity towards her, exist only as a performance.

In *Margery*, Robert and Molly’s presence means the Megan/Oda relationship and its implications can be discussed and thus emphasized.

ROBERT I wonder if I am reading their relationship right? I think [Ronald] is kind of using [Megan]. She’s got some dream of complete immersion, of the intensity of a romantic-sexual relationship, but he’s mainly in it for the sex – or at least he’s just not ever going to completely commit in the way she is.

MOLLY Now – yes - but it wasn’t always that way. In the beginning it was pure. Or, as pure as it can be, they’re so young and naïve.

ROBERT Okay, but if my reading is a plausible example of what an ordinary audience member might think, it distances us from Megan because we understand what she does not. We are, in fact, in his position.

MOLLY We are? . . .

ROBERT . . . I think it relates to my comments on Megan: when she talks worriedly or scornfully about the ‘Maggies of the street’ are we supposed to favor her? But those women - and Princess Oda too - seem to be bodily, physical women, which is something that Megan is aspiring to.

MOLLY Right, but-

ROBERT So why the scorn? Is it because they are what she doesn’t dare to be? Or is it that they betray the intense truth of the body by using it for cheap sex? Is it that they evacuate love or the soul from the body?

MOLLY No—I mean, yes, it’s all of those things, but it’s also much simpler than that—it’s a human—of course she scorns—

ROBERT What about class? She scorns these women for their lower class behavior, it seems to me. What do you think about that? (Appendix B 396-397)

The element of autocritography the scenes with Robert and Molly afford the play include the audience, as they debate the issues of class and Megan's attitude towards Oda – raising questions the audience themselves might be grappling with; their presence also allows for the play to comment on the shortcomings and/or ambiguities in Molly's adaptation. This does not necessarily, however, make the play more successful in this regard as compared with *Maggie/Maggie* and *Portage Fancy*, which lack this metatheatrical commentary. Indeed, the presence of Molly and Robert in *Margery*, as PhD student and her supervisor, risks being too heady and precious – as well as stalling and/or distracting from the drama (Schafer).

In *Portage Fancy*, the subtler parallels¹¹ between Molly and Robert and Megan and Ronald prove to be more striking and effective in this regard; Molly's jealousies surrounding the women Robert works with are contemporary and familiar, and in turn serve as a bridge to understanding Megan's behavior, which on its own might come off as dated or overly dramatic. Molly judges her perceived rival Olwyn for dressing like an assassin and presumes she is just another shallow music industry hustler – much like Megan sees Oda as no more than a common prostitute. But perhaps most of all it comes down to the language itself; because Molly's voice is so familiar and accessible, Megan's becomes easier to grasp and to feel. As dialectical images they feed each other through what they share visually, in terms of their performance – the way they both fight being viewed as 'little girls' in their efforts to hang on to their lovers, their shared desire to find success as writers, how they both yearn for a true love between equals – even in their relationship to Margery Latimer herself, which on different levels for each resembles a mother-daughter bond; for Molly, Margery

¹¹ Of course in one sense, the parallels between Robert/Molly and Ronald/Megan in *Portage Fancy* are more obvious, given that both couples are romantic couples – rather than PhD student and supervisor as in *Margery*. But in the sense that the Robert/Molly pairing in *Portage Fancy* comments on Ronald/Megan through 'showing' rather than 'telling', it is more subtle.

is a maternal presence, while for Megan, the maternal aspect is in the dynamic that sees author as mother to her heroine.

Thus while the theme revolving around Megan's desire to be a bodily, physical woman, which she struggles to reconcile with her determination to be seen as an intellectual equal and spiritually powerful woman is central to both the novel, and manifest in all three adaptations, its power and effect as far as engaging an audience and offering comment on how women perform today is influenced by each play's form.

Of the three, *Maggie/Maggie* lets the novel speak, unadorned by either (the performance of) contemporary commentary on the issue (as in *Margery*), or as contrasted with a contemporary couple facing similar dynamics (as in *Portage Fancy*). For all its simplicity in terms of metatheatre, it still comments on how women perform today – but perhaps of the three makes the greatest demands of an audience in terms of bridging the gap from past to present (although this gap might be minimized depending on how the play is directed).

Margery is the most explicit in terms of foregrounding this theme and the contentious issues it raises – although it might do so at the expense of the project as whole, depending on whether Robert and Molly's presence in the play is accepted or rejected by an audience.

In *Portage Fancy*, the parallels with and performance of the contemporary relationship between Robert and Molly serves to enrich that between Megan and Ronald, and in turn, perhaps succeeds where the other two drafts – and indeed the novel itself – might have faltered.

CONCLUSION

The fluidity and interiority of modernist women's autobiographical fiction – one that effects a powerful female presence that links author, the female subject(s) and the reader/audience – allows such narratives to serve as a powerful historical archive as realized in the performing body, one that speaks as much about the lives and experiences of modernist women as it speaks to women's issues today. In other words, in the same way that these narratives seek a connection that blurs the boundaries between author, 'self' and reader, so too are author, playwright, actress and audience joined through the body of the performer in the staging of these narratives. The empathy forged between author, character and reader that occurs in the act of reading a novel is carried over to the stage, offering a powerful visual account of not only the past, but also one that informs the present.

What makes the performance of women's literary modernism especially valuable in this regard, is not only how it allows for women of the modernist period to engage with women in the present, but also for its potential to redefine modernism through a synthesis of modernism and life writing. The fusion of fiction and auto/biography as undertaken by female modernists that falls into the category of autobiografiction – that which involves the relation between fiction and a self's biography – allowed for a whole new realm of experimentation in their time; as adapted for the contemporary stage, these same narratives have tremendous potential as an instrument for political change given the tension between the performativity of radical gender performances that serve as dialectical images, and the purchase on the 'real' backed by historical facts substantiated in the body of the performer.

Margery Latimer's *This Is My Body* as adapted for the stage serves as an ideal case study of this phenomenon; for one, the novel is a striking example of women's literary modernism given its handling of themes that consumed many female modernists – sexual relations, the role of women in society, abortion, and the struggle to be recognized as an artist in a patriarchal society. In addition, the novel effects a high modernist aesthetic that nonetheless is grounded in the 'real' – personal experience, the natural world, and the body – aspects that would appear to go against the traditional view of modernism, as characterized by the impersonal and autonomous. However, recent criticism of literary modernism, which highlights the close relationship between autobiography and fiction not only points to a new definition of modernism itself, but also underscores the relevance of Latimer's novel in contributing to this new definition.

This Is My Body also reflects through the experience of one woman, the plight of many women in the 1920s and 1930s; for example, how they might have been affected by the first wave of the feminist movement such that their expectations with regard to achieving equality on both the professional and private fronts further complicated their personal relationships. Women writers like Margery Latimer who were also in romantic relationships with writers and/or artists experienced a particularly bitter disappointment when their idealized vision of an equal relationship – a vision the social currents of the period led them to believe could be possible – was obstructed. Along these lines, the novel also reflects what Sabine Vanacker describes as the existential fear women in the early twentieth century carried with them surrounding the strength of their identities, as Megan strives throughout the novel to identify as a writer, even as she is dismissed at every turn.

In terms of what the process of adapting *This Is My Body* reveals about the specific adaptability of modernist women's novels to the stage, many aspects can be identified by approaching the play in the context of staged women's life writing or a history play. Beyond the strong presence of a

woman these narratives convey, the keys to where adaptation might be built-in surface in the process of addressing the challenges and applying strategies specific to the staging of women's auto/biographical narratives. Adaptation sees the dynamics of identity formation that play out in a text take on a similar function in the construction of a woman's identity onstage; however, onstage this identity is realized in the body of the performer. As Ryan Claycomb argues, both the biographical figure and actress are lifted from their 'historically specific places' to form what is essentially the physical embodiment of a historical narrative – one that marks the history of women's experience, and in turn speaks as a community of women linking the past and the present.

The strategies effected in all three of my drafts to adapt *This Is My Body* follow closely those outlined by Claycomb. Subjectivity is split amongst the various iterations of 'Margery Latimer' to avoid falling into the monolithic, univocal presentation of self that traditionally has served to glorify the achievements of great men – or in the case of a female subject, situating her not as an empowered subject, but as an object to be observed. Although in varying ways, all three adapted drafts also utilize historical facts as 'hinges' upon which the narrative maintains its purchase on the 'real'. As much as each of the adapted plays serve as fictional explorations of the feelings, desires and experiences of a historical figure, the incorporation of material such as actual reviews of the novel and Molly's conference paper (*Margery*), the presence of Margery as a specter who shares actual facts of Latimer's life with Molly (*Portage Fancy*), or allowing the novel itself to serve as a historical document, by means of placing scenes from the book onstage with very little changed in terms of language and details related to the specific period in time (*Maggie/Maggie*) ideally function to not only raise an audience's awareness of Margery Latimer, but also to contextualize her life and experiences as a female modernist, and in relation to the modernist movement as a whole. The performance of Latimer's autobiographical novel creates a rhetorical effect that sees the performability of her identity showcased in concert with the live, speaking body onstage – one in

which the performing body is a theatrical image of reality that also complicates the history, narrative, identity, voice and body that define her very presence.

Adaptation is built-in to *This Is My Body* in ways that reflect the unique adaptability of women's literary modernism as a whole: through its overriding theme of a women's search for identity, and in how easily the fluidity and interiority of the narrative allows for the splitting of subjectivity. The unique relationship between history and fiction in the novel is another dynamic that creates a generative tension onstage; indeed, many modernist women's novels are examples of the autobiografiction identified by recent critics as a characteristic of many masterpieces in the modernist canon (Saunders 295). Finally, the manner in which *This Is My Body* as a modernist woman's narrative performs lends it to the stage – not only the way it blurs the boundaries between author, self and reader, but also its aural and oral aspects – characteristic of modernist women's narratives – that highlight Latimer's revolutionary intentions as she sought to escape the limitations of textuality. Indeed, she not only escapes the limits of textuality, but in creating a strong woman's presence – herself – she escapes from the text; the active reader/adaptor facilitating this flight is lifting her from history so that she and the performer might inhabit the same body. Moreover the process itself might be like a conversation, a collaboration between adaptor and author.

Portage Fancy seeks to go beyond simply rediscovering Margery Latimer; rather the goal is to also investigate how performance might open up our understanding of how and why women 'perform' as they do in (a patriarchal) society. Through the bodies of the actresses, Latimer's life and experiences might not be viewed as hers alone, nor simply as part of the larger narrative of women in the 1920s and 1930s, but as part of a universal narrative of women's experiences that extends to the present. And it is precisely because *This Is My Body* is so relevant in terms of issues

faced by contemporary women – how it speaks to the past and the present – that the project of adapting it to the stage has such political importance.

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Appendix A

MAGGIE/MAGGIE

Characters:

Maggie 20s-30s

Maggie 30s-40s

The play is set in the Midwest and New York City in the late 1920s.

Note:

Everything in italics is spoken by *Maggie* except for the stage directions, which are in parenthesis, and the poems, which are in the voice of a young man (Ronald). Everything that is not in italics is spoken by Maggie.

Maggie might be all these things: Maggie's alter-ego, tormentor, conscience, ghost, guardian angel, inquisitor, etc. She is often brutal - as in, *Maggie* beating herself (Maggie) up. She is omniscient (or thinks she is) and exists in the past, present and future. When she plays other characters in the story, it should be clear that she is still *Maggie* playing them.

(Sound of a train. Whistles. Then rapid-fire girlish chatter.)

What are you taking? Haven't planned your course. Better get busy. You're from Portage? Oh, my dear, one of our darlinest girls was from there—Ada Perry. Her father owns the bank. Did you know her? A perfect whizz. Fine sport. Oh look that must be Dick Harper's sister. Why he took one of our darlinest girls to prom last year. Oh, yes, we all go to prom—it's a tradition now. Did you hear about her dress? It was perfectly darling—you know—just simple and lots of lace and underpart. Now you must meet the girls!

(Lights up on Maggie, seated on a battered trunk.)

I'm not homesick.

All you need to do is brace up and get to know the girls!

This place is second rate. I knew the instant I got off the train.

I say, you're taking the wrong attitude.

It's hideous.

Well nobody asked you to come.

I'm not going to stay.

It's the best university in the country. It's famous all over.

I'd rather be a failure in life than be a part of this. I think I have a sickness no one knows about. You can't tell. I've never been strong. Probably I ought to be at home right now.

You won't get very far feeling that way.

I'm not homesick.

You have your mother's pine pillow, don't you? She swears it's just marvellous for grief. You hold it like this and put your face right into it.

Oh god. I hate college. I am remarkable to endure this. There is no one like me.

*

Are you an only child?

Yes.

Are you your mother's darling?

Yes.

Who do you think you are anyway?

I'm, I'm, I'm. . . .

You think we're rather a low-brow crowd, don't you? Not fine enough or intellectual enough for you to associate with. Well hooray for Saint Maggie!

I feel as if I belong somewhere else. On the moon or something.

Of course we've recognized your superiority. We aren't much but we could see that at a glance. And we know you think you're just about the best looking girl in the crowd with all that hair and those eyes. Oh, yes, we're some all right, we are; we're too good, we are; we're too intellectual to live, we are.

I know what's perfect. I can feel it inside me. But this—this is wretched all through.

Miss Foster, I am forced to read you an ultimatum prepared by the Sophomores of Elden Hall. Anyone who persists in an attitude of unwholesome lawlessness is always punished this way.

'Maggie Foster is denied the use of elevators in this hall during the first semester. No sophomore who cares to retain her standing in this hall will do more than speak cordially to Miss Foster. Until Maggie Foster can learn to be a good sport she will merely be a visitor in this hall, not an outcast, but no one will befriend her.'

I don't care what anyone thinks or how much they laugh. They can go to hell.

Put her out! Put her out! Put her OUT!

(Shrieks and thunderous laughter.)

*

Are you Maggie Foster? Come in and sit down.

Maggie, your house-mother tells me that you are unhappy. Now sit down and we'll talk this out. We want all our girls to be happy here. And that is what I am for. Just to make you contented. You must tell me everything, Maggie. You need have no fear. We're acquainted now, aren't we?

Is—do—Oh, did my mother telegraph me?

If there is ever a telegram for you remember that it will be in the office, Maggie. Don't come to me for it. Go to the office. So many girls come running to me for their trunk keys and telegrams and what-not until I wonder what sort of mothers they have and what kind of homes they are from.

Oh how miserable everyone is.

But you don't mix with the other girls. Come, answer! Do you mix with the other girls?

I don't know.

Well I know. I have watched you. I know that you're an extremely moody girl and that you think about yourself too much . . .

I have to like myself! No one else does. I have to. I would die otherwise.

Nonsense! I see too much of this. Nonsense. Rubbish. Get out and mix. Everyone here has to make an effort. Homesickness is something we all have to conquer. It is not pleasant. Nothing is pleasant. I mean to say, nothing unpleasant is pleasant. We have to conquer!

*

Show them what you really are.

Oh god.

You can do it. Come out of yourself.

Oh please, make them like my story.

Go on. Reveal what's inside you.

The name is 'Voices.'

'It was a day of sticks and stones with frisky sprites behind. A world of trees that sang their song in one voice and leaves that rustled like thousands of lips struggling to say the same word. A sun that tried hard not to look wise. The child lifted her face to the rays of light and tried to catch them to her. They were golden lanes that led up and up. On the table was a brown bowl with heaps of flour that made desert dunes, pools of dark molasses, and raisins as brown as the thoughts of dwarfs.

'Gizzie,' said the child in her serious way. 'God is in everything, isn't he?'

The maid opened her mouth that was full of teeth. 'Lord,' she said with one floury hand raised,

'Lord sakes, what do you mean?'

'Isn't God in everything?'

'Hah! Hah!' Her laughter was like the snipping of giant scissors. 'Do you think God is in this here molasses and flour?'

Now the trees sang their song in many voices and the leaves looked down on the earth. The sun reached out for her rays and held them back. The child put her head on the table.

'Get out!' screamed Gizzie. 'I don't want your hair in my cooking. Get out!'

Well class, what do you have to say about that?

I object to little girls being wistful about God. They've been used so much in fiction.

Too jerky. I miss the steady flow of language.

'Raisins as brown as the thoughts of dwarfs' is too much for me.

Miss Foster's work appears to be divine to her but to me it's simply too foolish for words. I listen to it as I would to a curiosity. The symbolism is forced. I wish Miss Foster would tell us what she means by having a tree sing. I would honestly like to know—I am serious about this—and Gizzie is such an extreme name. Wouldn't Mary or Jane be better?

How do you answer these attacks, Miss Foster?

It's excellent. It means something. I wouldn't have written it if it didn't mean something. 'Raisins as brown as the thoughts of dwarfs' is the best thing in it.

Let us all try next time to put more meaning into our stories . . .

Mine had meaning. It meant something—it meant—it had meaning—Mine—

Don't be so personal, Miss Foster.

It meant something!

*

If you could choose, what you would rather be— a great writer or a moral woman?

A great writer.

I'd be a moral woman. But I don't think any the less of you for your opinion.

Who's your favorite writer?

I think Dante's pretty good. And I've been awfully amused at Leonard Merrick. Oh, I read everything I can get on trade unionism and that sort of thing. But you know . . . I like books about sacrifice. I think if a woman sacrifices herself in some way for a man—you know—

What do you mean—what is that?

Oh, I don't know. I think it's glorious. I think a woman who can really be noble enough to make a great sacrifice . . .

But do you have any idea *what* you are?

Well, kind of. Anyway, I know I'm really different from what I think I am.

How? What does that mean? Different from what you think. How?

We all think we're wonderful until we grow up.

How do we show what we are? We're all covered up. We try to act and then they act so mean that we are different. Oh I don't know. I'd like to find out. Why is it you're so different from me? You're so calm. You don't feel wretched because you really know things . . .

Puff, I don't.

Oh, you do. Alice, you aren't scared. You go up to anyone and you aren't scared.

What are you going to do, anyway?

I'm going to be a great writer. I don't want anything on earth but that. I want to talk to people.

What are you going to do about men?

Oh, I don't believe in marriage. I don't like to think of homes and children and that.

I know. It's kind of a nuisance I guess.

But what are you going to do?

I—Oh, I don't know. Do you like men?

I have everything in myself. And anyway there is no one, here for me, of course. I want to live differently from other people. We have to live differently if we want to be different. I'm not satisfied with the life people like. I want something better.

You silly

I always heard that professors wanted opposition. They always say that they like questions better than anything else.

Bunk.

Then you think they really don't want to tell us anything? They don't care whether we just ache trying to find out something or not—they don't really see us or know we're living?

Listen, you just have to agree with them or they think you don't understand. Just give them back in your own words what they've told you or they'll flunk you. Honest, Maggie. They think we haven't got any minds. Lord, if they knew what we thought of them.

But Alice, do you agree with what they say?

It's not a question of agreeing or disagreeing. It's in making your grades and having a swell time. Just sit on the front row and smile a lot and always agree—you can be thinking of something interesting all the time, they don't know—and then you're safe with them.

I don't want to be safe. I want to be in danger. I want to find out . . .

For heaven's sake what?

Oh, I don't know.

If you'd curb that sort of business you'd be popular around here in no time. Say, I just found out the name of the freshman elected to the literary magazine. It's a huge honour. They wrote a story about it. Do you know him?

Him! It isn't a man is it?

Oh sure, it's Ronald Chadron. I knew all the time he'd get it. Awful snob, too. Gives me a pain. I'm as good as he is. I've had an A on every theme so far. Oh, hell, I don't care.

Let him have it. Who cares? All right. Good. Let him have it. Good. Good. Good. My time will come. Good. All right.

*

I wish I hadn't come.

That's because he's not here.

I don't know what you're talking about.

Look! It's him! He's the one!

Wait- who?

Ha! You can't stop looking at him! You see him with his arms around you, feel his lips on yours.

(to Ronald) Can't you see that she owns you?!

I have to know him.

Shall I introduce you? Miss Foster, our star performer, Ronald Chadron!

Oh—

They're calling him up. He's going to read his poem!

Do you think he brought a masterpiece tonight?

You like him. Your beautiful body and that bony . . . Sure! Sure. Ronald's a fine fellow. You two could have a beautiful child together.

I never thought of a child.

You could have one.

Last summer I was by the lake in Michigan and the children there were beautiful. Oh, they had such soft skin and ran without anything on them and they were so beautiful.

What are you planning to do with your beautiful body?

Be a great writer.

That is for homely women. You have that child. It wont cost you a cent. You could live near a lake and build a hut or something. Ronald could live there with you and write his poems. That could be wonderful.

Yes. Oh, if we could!

Why not? You can make the child and Ronald will make his poems.

We'll be so happy and he'll see that I really am wonderful.

You are wonderful.

Oh once he wrote me a letter about my work. A story I submitted to the literary magazine.

He said it was nothing but 'the rattling of sticks and stones.'

I'm a better writer than you, Ronald Chadron!

I suppose you've got some hate on him for what he wrote. Are you going to punish him now?

He doesn't know yet that we love each other. He doesn't understand that I've chosen him and he can't get away.

*

My dear, why, this is simply grand!

Hello Alice. I saw you the other day and you didn't see me.

Maggie, you look positively human today. You look just like anyone. It's grand. Where are you living?

Mrs. Glore's.

Heavens! That's a terrible place. Watch out for her, she's positively vicious.

Aren't you living at the house anymore, Alice?

No, I'm not. Not this year. I could get you in easily, Maggie. Don't you want to come? It gives you all sorts of privileges with the deans. You know Miss Holmes is a dean now. Yes, sir, Dean of Women!

(Waves to boys.)

Hello dumb-bells. Say, all these young boys give me a pain all of a sudden.

Did you ever think of me, Alice?

Honestly, I did, Maggie. Let's talk about life now. I like you lots more than I did before. Do you like me?

Yes—Oh, I do, very much.

Shall I tell you my whole life?

Oh, please. Then we can be friends!

Lets stand here. I want you to see someone. He'll be along in a minute. I've got a class but I don't care.

So have I.

Look — look! See — there he is. Dean Sinclair.

I've seen him before. I can't remember where . . .

Probably had a class with him.

No, I'm sure I didn't.

He's been Dean of Men here for ten years.

Is he really decent?

Why of course. He's a darling. I adore him. Oh, come on out of all this. Let's step out where we can smoke. I feel—I feel—miserable.

I never smoke except in front of people like Dean Sinclair or someone who disapproves—Miss Holmes or someone like that.

He doesn't disapprove. He never minds when I do. And I do it all the time. He really doesn't care. I feel odd. Oh I'm alive—that's all I care about anyway.

I wish I could feel the way you do, Alice.

I suppose I don't really care so awfully. But, oh, I don't think it's decent to hide things all the time. I don't consider it manly to—Oh, I think people ought to be honest.

So do I.

Listen, Dean Sinclair and I are having an affair. We're in love.

Good heavens!

You have to say he's nice or I'll loathe you, Maggie.

But—but—I can't—I mean—

He's really grand. He's never felt this way about anyone before in his whole life. I don't see why he doesn't get a divorce. Why doesn't he Maggie? He loves me. He doesn't care for his family. He told me so. He . . .

But is he a human being! I can't imagine him even eating a meal or combing his hair. He looks like a wooden man.

Oh, that's not true. Oh, that's unfair. Oh, I wish I understood about it. I don't really understand. I don't. I don't know what it's about or what it means and sometimes I think it's going to end just—horribly.

But could he ever feel warmly enough to kiss anyone?

Of course. I think you're horrid. He's terribly—warm. That's why he's a dean. He has to know all about everything like that or he wouldn't be any good in the job. He told me so.

But he isn't lenient with the students.

Say, I'll hate you in a minute, Maggie. I can't help it. It—just comes over me. You have to like him a lot now and persuade me he's grand. I'm weakening. Oh, sometimes when I see him the way we did this morning and he acts so distant I feel as if I'm going to end up horribly—kill myself or something.

But if you're really living does anything else matter? I know I would be frightened but other people seem so much braver than me and so much more used to things.

Everything matters. I don't know—sometimes I think I'll just leave him and dash around with these young boys on the campus.

Do you suppose all these professors are human beings, Alice?

I imagine.

Then why do they look so frozen and dead?

I don't know. Oh, he's—I can't tell you—he's—

He can kiss a girl. Dean Sinclair can really kiss someone.

Oh, deans are particularly that way. He told me. And they all notice girls' legs too. He said so. I suppose he does too.

Oh, I'm sure he doesn't, Alice.

Listen, if I ever telephone for you will you come right over because I might get just miserable some night—and oh, you will come, won't you, Maggie? Please promise me. You're the only one here I've told. You don't know anyone . . .

Oh, I wouldn't tell. Oh, I promise you, Alice.

He'd kill me if he knew. And no one knows where I'm living. I have a different address in the directory. I'm in the Italian quarter near the station and it's grand. They have the sweetest babies over there and the cellars are full of wine and such funny little rooms. I love it.

(Alice picks a blossom and sticks it in her dress, begins a Spanish dance.)

You be my audience, Maggie. Tell me how you like it.

I can't—I have to find someone—

*

You see him outside the reading room. He dodges to a catalogue to look up a book, then slams the drawer in and stands with his back against it.

Oh look up, look up. Find me, I'm right here!

He smiles. Turns to face you.

I've been hunting you!

Ah! And he's been trying to get you on the phone.

Honest? Honest?

How does it feel to have his eyes on you? Taking you in. Your eyes, hair, body, breasts . . .

Oh!

You heard him. He wants to take you to a concert next week.

Oh thank you.

Then you'll go with him?

I'd love to!

You always love everything. But he likes you anyway. Yes, yes, I'm sure he does

Something is going to happen to us. Surely.

You both shine sometimes - but the people here, they don't shine any of the time.

Are we the same person?

He knows how to take care of you, Maggie.

I'm dizzy.

Don't let him get away. Say, what's wrong with you?

I feel – Oh, do you think he knows anything about me inside myself?

What the hell? You've only seen him about twice.

Oh, that's not true. We know each other. I've lived with him ever since his letter and his picture in the paper—Oh, he hurt me—Everything is hard like this tree. You can't make it understand. You can't make it give or do anything but just be there like cement.

You've always had your own way.

I haven't!

Yes, you have. You're afraid of reality. It hurts and you're afraid. Of course reality is hard. You can't put your own face on it, you can't make it your own, so of course you hate it. You want to own everything. And you're afraid of facing the real world—

I'm not. I have faced it. I went away—I worked—I have— I know I'm scared.

What do you want to do?

Let's walk.

*

'Two in Love'

We decided after much argument and debate that we were really in love in spite of our physical attachment. Since then he has telegraphed me every two weeks asking permission to come and see me, and has followed my invitation with: 'But do you really want me?' and that, an hour later, with the time of his arrival. It is very nice.

'Hello,' he always says at the station. 'How are you?' And I always answer: 'Very well, thank you,' in spite of my painful stomach disorder. 'You got my telegrams?' 'Yes, Ronald, thank you.'

Then he laughs and lights a cigarette and I am glad that my uncle isn't there to see him because he calls every cigarette smoker a dirty dog and I wouldn't want Ronald insulted by anyone but me.

When we reach home my heart falls through to stone and lies there helpless. I realize that I must discover him all over again. I realize that we are not as wonderful as our letters led us to believe. It is a sad affair.

Suddenly the air falls apart and I want to fall into it and never see anyone connected with love again. It is a frightful moment and one that I hope I can never forget.

*

What's he doing here anyway? Does he have to hang around this house all the time night and day? Can't we have any peace here? Do I have to wait until one o'clock every night before I lock my door? What's he doing here anyway?

You know he's visiting me. And he's dying up at that vile hotel.

Have I ever put a stop to your entertaining anyone here? Tell him to come here. What in the world is this Mr. Chardon?

He's part Jewish. His mother is Jewish.

Aren't there any Americans at your school?

I don't like Americans.

I see. I see. Well, he looks like a nut from what I've seen of him.

And so am I. I'm one too. I'm a bigger one.

Don't be a nut. Be a Christian and try to think right and talk right. I never felt a race prejudice in my life. If you like that Roland or Robo or Ronald or whatever you call him, why for heaven's sake like him, love him, do anything you want; but be decent and remember this country was made by your ancestors and the foreign idea is different. They come over here in droves like cattle and expect to make this into the old country—by Jove, they can't as long as I am alive. I'm a fighter. What do you and this boy talk about?

Oh, we aren't in love.

I'm asking what you talk about during those hours you are together. All day yesterday, all evening, most of the night, all this morning, late for dinner, and then all afternoon again I suppose and evening and half the night again. What in the world you can talk about is beyond me.

Papa, please —

I object to this loafer who spends all his time around here as if there wasn't any work to be done on this earth. And I've seen the cigarettes he smokes—the dirty weeds— How a man can put a piece of poison in his mouth and smoke it is beyond me. Thank the Lord I have no habits.

Oh, good heavens!

Say, it's about time you learned what it means to act like a Christian and respect your father.

Papa, you simply don't understand.

I understand everything that's worth understanding and just you remember that. What's that fellow's business here?

I've told you he came to visit me during his vacation.

Hasn't he a home of his own?

Of course.

Well, you look after your work and let men alone. And do begin soon to think for yourself.

Well anyway, we don't have much to say about our thinking. It is all built up from . . .

Where'd you read that?

Nowhere. I discovered it myself. I don't read my ideas . . .

Tut, tut, you're young. Of course you're influenced by everything. But I tell you, I'd rather have an idea that was my own—even if it was wrong—than take someone else's.

Well who knows what's wrong?

Any decent person knows what's wrong, any decent right-thinking man or woman who doesn't ought to be put in an institution for the criminally insane.

All this talk is meaningless, Papa.

So that's the kind of truck they teach you—

No one teaches me anything.

Well, it's about time someone taught you something.

*

Breakfast was different. It was a pleasant meal and I felt handsome and Ronald looked it. It was as though we were existing in a delicious space just inside the one my mother was in, a space she knew nothing about. I felt rather sorry for her. Then I reached under the table for Ronald's hand and there seemed no doubt about our love.

'Isn't there something awfully amusing about in this room?' I asked my mother, but she looked very cross and shook her head. 'Ronald and I are going walking,' I said. 'We can't stand this laughter here. Something is laughing at us.'

How terrible that I didn't know then that I was the one who was laughing. I—but we went on walking and came to a fallen tree as soon as they do in the movies. 'Darling,' said Ronald, 'I'm yours. I've said it before but this time I mean it.'

'I shall always love you,' I said and then I was kneeling to him and I could feel a crown on my head and wonderful jewels on my neck and yards and yards of velvet and fur falling around me. I laid everything before him...'

*

Don't say anything like that in front of him again. Please. I'll do anything you say but don't talk that way in front of him again.

All right Mama. I won't.

Maggie, we can't cause all this unhappiness and not suffer for it some time. Look at the way you torture your father. The one thing he's proudest of is that he can send you to college. It's been awfully hard for us but we're proud that we can send you. Oh, why do you have to be this way?

Did you ever feel like dying Mama? Did you ever feel so happy you wanted to run in the middle of the street and say, 'Run over me!?' Have you ever been so wildly happy that there is no place to put it and you could simply walk into the ocean and fall down into it laughing and feeling at home at last?

No. I must say I haven't.

I guess I haven't either

*

He took the early train the next morning.

'Oh Ronald!' I began to cry. But I didn't mean it. And I waved to him as the train went out. On the way home I decided to clear away all the images I had of him and find out directly what he was like. I cleared for days and spent my nights nursing the clearings.

He came again and he had as much presence as vapor. I knew that something in me was making him unreal. I think it was the laughter, but I was helpless. 'What has happened?' he asked. 'I think my mind or something has killed our love.' 'Don't say that!' he begged. 'Minds make it better.' 'Mine

didn't.' 'Damn it all pretend anything you want about me just so you love me—pretend anything—I don't care.' 'I can't.' 'But you can! We don't have to say anything about this.' 'Why do you ask me to try then?'

He tried to kiss me and then he moved away. 'You look like Miss Muffet, he said, and stared at his hands a long time. 'Oh, it's untrue, I love you, I love you!' Then I waited for something to happen, for that delicious space to open and let us inside, for us to be changed back again with the tissue between us firm and our blood the same. But nothing happened.

'I wish you would stop bothering me,' I cried, and laughed when he looked hurt. 'I mean that!' And now I am alone.

*

I know the kind of men you like. It's no compliment to be liked by you. You don't know a real man when you see one.

I know them; that's why I never see them.

How many men have kissed you?

I kiss them.

Can you count them on one hand?

Don't be an ass.

You think you're fooling him, but he knows you're worthless.

Don't be absurd.

But that's no way to get out of an argument. You like freaks. Half-wits. You aren't satisfied until you get your hands on a person and know all his affairs and his whole soul—then—

Oh please - I'm tired.

You don't care.

I do too. It's just that our souls want to know each other before our bodies. I think that's why everything is so hard.

His soul could give a damn about knowing yours. He wants your body. Can't you see? You're full of talk about souls and mystics and impracticality. He despises impracticality. He hates mystics. He hates souls. You won't let him near you at all. You won't even let him kiss you in peace without having some argument about Spinoza or Plato or Frank Harris and Spengler.

No. Oh, I'm not like that.

Well, can't you see he's not the same anymore? Are you blind? He used to get along by himself. Don't you see what it means? No, you don't—you don't—

I . . . I . . .

If you'd just let him get close to you. Damn it all, if you could just forget yourself and all your airs and ideas then he'd— Oh, hell, he's a bawling baby about you. Maybe you should separate for good, Maggie. He's not the guy for you. Who knows whether he can really be in love or not. Maybe he's not made that way. You'd better stop before he makes you terribly unhappy. He's not any good but you don't know it yet. It's hell, but it will be better—in the end—

Why?

He's such an egoist.

That's not true.

He'll make you wretched.

Oh, you don't mean it.

I don't know. I just feel it would be best in the end. You're so pure. He's full of that Sir Launcelot stuff yet. You know.

But I'm not pure. I don't want to be. I don't want to be innocent. I want to know everything in the world. I want to be alive like others. I want the whole thing.

You're always so pure. Look at you—and what can he do? Everything he does seems to affect you. Lord, can't you see? Can't you understand what's wrong?

No.

But I just told you.

I don't understand. I'm not like you say.

You are. Look at yourself.

I'm older than he is.

But you're a child. You've got the mind of a child. He's so much older than you—really.

I love him.

Whose hands are these?

Mine.

Whose body is this?

Mine—mine—

When are you going to let him sleep with you?

*

He was calling on me.

I don't believe I understand.

Mr. Chadron

Tell me from the beginning. Was it after hours?

It was about eleven o'clock and it was in my room.

I see. About eleven o'clock and in your room.

It's fixed up like a sitting room.

I see.

Mrs. Glore's parlour is terribly stiff.

Yes, I understand. And what were you and Mr. Chadron occupied with? I mean to say, what were you doing at the time she entered your room?

Sitting on the floor talking.

On the floor talking. Oh, yes. And what had been going on prior to that?

Kissing.

I see. I see. You were allowing him to kiss you. On the mouth?

I kiss him. But it hurts us to kiss. We want more than that. We want to know each other through and through and it's so hard, it seems so unnatural, we can't do anything, we are just helpless and it hurts—

What kind of kisses are these, Maggie?

I don't know.

And what other lovely things do you do together—you and this young man—in your bedroom where your most intimate possessions are, the bed where you sleep, your toilet articles, your night things likely hanging in the closet, perhaps a pair of bedroom slippers under the chair or even an intimate garment thrown carelessly around as women will do in haste? What other things do you and this heedless young man do together? This young fellow who seems to think it is all right to permit a young girl to entertain him in her bedroom at eleven o'clock at night when rules say there are no callers after ten. What do you feel like at eleven o'clock? What is there left for you two to do alone, locked in your bedroom at that hour—alone, the young man having kissed you, having returned the kiss. I want you to speak.

I can't—I want to go—I feel odd. I'm sick—sick in my stomach.

I don't doubt that for a moment, Maggie. Usually young girls are sick in their stomachs before—before—I mean to say after such things as you intimate a young girl would normally be sick at her stomach.

I'm going. I feel dizzy.

Sit down!

What do you mean? What do you mean by bringing down the standards of university women? The standards of womanhood and manhood? What makes you two feel that you are isolated members of society and not subject to its laws? This university reflects the high ideals of civilization. We have nothing to do but obey. Now, what right have you to deliberately tear down what someone else has built for the good of it all?

We're ashamed, but not for what you think.

I've had enough of this moral looseness. It's about time this university took a stand against conditions here. It's unspeakable. There's nothing but sex, sex, sex between students all the time. Their minds are full of it, they talk it, think it, eat it, wear it; sex is their soul and body, their purpose in living, their only means of expression. Look at yourself for one moment and if you have any shame in you, any fine breeding or conscience, then despise what you are doing every time you get out of sight of authority.

I don't want to live in your world. I don't want to make you understand. Oh, this is all I've ever seen. Just the dirt and meanness of people who don't want to love anything or be beautiful and—free. Yes, free. Free. If I didn't want to be free, after looking at you, then I ought to be burned at the stake, I ought to be mutilated until I can't walk or feel. I'm proud that we are lovers.

What amazes me, is that affairs have gone so far that you will speak out this way. That impudence and self-assurance alone is enough to convince anyone that you are not desirable as a student in this institution. Or any institution. I have also had occasion to glance at your literary work. I understand that you cannot write anything without putting something suggestive of sex into it. I've had my eye on you. You can't get by forever, you know, but our best evidence against you lies in your very modern poems and stories.

Yes, I mentioned a breast and a navel in a story once.

You're rotten. Rotten!

*

'City'

She walked all alone, small and unseen here by the side of the monstrous towers and buildings of ivory blocks that rose in the bright blue sky with hundreds of orange awnings and severe doormen with heavy coats. She began to feel compressed and small, strange, confused, and then she whispered as she walked with the throngs: 'I love the city.' She felt that if she looked up at the great office buildings all meeting there in the sky that she would turn and fly into the country, and then she forced her eyes up, up, and in her terror she whispered, 'I love the buildings. They make me feel big.' Now she could walk faster, swing her arms more easily, find a path for herself on the cement. She breathed now as if any instant something strange and startling would happen, making her life different. 'I am not afraid,' she said over and over. Then she waited for the throb of anguish, as if suddenly she might turn back or something would give way in her. When she thought of those faces in classrooms, the voices that said: 'You can't--you don't dare--you can't--' she stood taller, moving as if she were living in a bright cloud or stream that flowed above all the darkness that had been.

Her room was large enough for a bed and a table and a chair. It had water bugs on the walls. It had one barred window where she clutched to watch one-half of the sun setting every night. She would press her face close to the cool sooty bars, her body against the wall, the glowing sun rolling back deeper into the rising clouds that opened in bright blue creases and ridges of gold. The noise of the city clanked and roared past and lights burned in her face all night from the brilliant street . . .

*

You are promising, Miss Foster. Really quite promising.

Do you like it?

Just what do you mean?

My book?

Now that is a hard question.

I mean do you like it. Does it mean something?

Well, if you please, I am not here to tell my personal point of view. I am employed by the Herbert Chatham publishing company to express their views and not my own. Every book has to be in keeping with their policy, of course. Now, if you please, your manuscript is having careful consideration and you can expect very little more than that. As a first novel I would call it promising. I would advise you to wait—

What—Oh what?

You are in deep water. I would advise you to wait four years or say ten or fifteen years until you have become mature enough to handle your theme and then go at it with all the richness of your maturity.

Oh, give me my book. I want it. Let me take it away.

Just one moment. This manuscript is being carefully considered. I am not in a position to tell you whether the decision will be favorable or not. I would advise you to rewrite it. Put it away and rewrite it. In the meantime, write a couple more . . .

Give it to me now. I want it now.

You will be notified about your manuscript, Miss Foster.

*

‘And While We Eat, It Eats Us’

For months she had been writing to her parents—‘I love it here.’ Then she would put something in about her book and how she knew it would be published soon; only one half of the publishers had declined it and there were still some left to show it to and anyway—‘Everyone is so polite about it. I don’t mind. Oh, I saw a big car yesterday and I’ll buy it for you—some day.’ Sometimes she wrote at the end—‘I am lonely, I am sad,’ but she always scratched it out and wrote: ‘It is hot or cold’ over it. Once she drew a large kiss on the page. Then she dropped ink on it and blotted it out.’

*

Oh Ronald, come to me, save me, come, come, carry me away, help me.

I can’t go back now. I’ll see him again.

If he really loved you, he’d come.

Don’t say that! Don’t! Don’t!

What did you expect?

No, he’s going to be a great poet!

He’s not coming.

He’s going to marry me.

Expelled for being immoral. Expelled from college for being immoral!

We’re revealed to each other.

Why do you have to pretend all this? Why do you put up so many defenses all the time?

He was right—he was right that time—we had to separate—something was wrong.

Now you have no home.

Now I am facing life. I'm free. I'm not frightened anymore.

*

Ah, yes, Miss Foster. Do sit down. Yes. I've read your book with quite a good deal of interest. Very interesting. Yes, indeed. I like your book. When I read it I decided that someone ought to talk with you. You are perhaps the one young writer in this city who needs to be talked to and encouraged and put on the right track. Now how old is this hero of yours?

Thirty-one.

Yes. Well, you've made him too young.

No.

How old is the—ah—well, I might say—the vampire, the spinster, you know?

Fifty-three.

Yes. Well. You've made her too old.

Did you like the book?

Now that is what I'm coming to, Miss Foster. That man of yours is too young and the woman is too old. Just reverse it—make the man the woman's age and the woman the man's age—thirty-one—and you'll have something quite different. Well, that is a minor flaw. You do show talent and it is a good book. What work do you do in the city, Miss Foster?

I do typewriting sometimes. I type books—but I don't make it look awfully nice.

I see.

I have a hard time.

Well, yes, we all did. We all have to go through it. Now that book of yours shows promise and I'll wager the next one will be excellent. This book as it stands will be published when you already have a name for yourself. In any case, I hope some time in the future to have the honor of publishing you.

Bring Miss Foster's manuscript, Miss Bell. Now, Miss Foster, do let me see anything else you might have.

Oh, I hope I never see you again.

I beg your pardon, Miss Foster; I didn't catch that.

Miss Foster, wait one moment. Miss Foster, I have something to say to you. My dear, you must cultivate a more philosophical outlook. You're entirely too personal, too . . .

Oh, let me alone.

*

He's had his trousers pressed.

Just for you.

Why was he mad at me?

He's forgotten. Honest.

We have a room! We're going to live in it!

Now he's your slave.

I'm almost happy.

Almost?

I have to give him all of me before I can be really happy.

But what if he means what he wrote to you, Maggie? That he doesn't need you any more?

He loves me now.

Listen Maggie, listen! He's learned to walk. Before he couldn't write for anyone but you. Now he writes for everyone!

No!

He could get along without you.

Don't say that!

You shouldn't have gone.

No!

Fine. Let's talk about something pleasant. Are you going to get married?

Why?

He thinks you're great.

I want to be generous.

Well, you mustn't have any reservations.

None.

If you get a baby you'd better marry. I guess you won't though. You trust him, don't you? You're not defending any more, are you?

No.

*

You look radiant.

I'm happy. I want to do something for him.

All he wants is to spend the day in bed.

But it's beautiful. I want to see the outdoors!

You see, you never really want what he wants. He doesn't like outdoors. He hates to walk in the daytime.

Oh, come on.

Let him alone for one hour and he'll do anything you say. Go away for one hour and then come back.

Please, can't I wake him up now?

You run along the way I told you.

I won't. I don't want to. I want him to walk with me now.

So you don't want him to be himself, do you? He's put up with a lot from you that he won't forget very soon. Damn it, can't you let him sleep in peace?

Yes. You're right. I'll let him alone.

Ah, but see? Now he's calling for you Miss Muffet. He needs you. He wants you. See how he kneels to you, presses a cheek against your knee...

Angels are flying out of me. They're flying out. They're in my arms. Everything in me is flying out into the world . . .

Don't talk about heaven.

He's given me a body. I have a body.

He told you so a long time ago.

I have a body.

He's hungry.

Isn't he going to take a bath?

No.

Oooooo, I hate that. Doesn't he bathe every day? I can't bear that.

Can't you just let him be? He's feeling wonderful today. Why do you have to ruin it?

He feels wonderful too! Of course!

Must be the weather.

What?

Sure.

You really think it's the weather?

You don't object to that, I hope.

Then it isn't me— Oh, what shall I do? This is all something tremendous to me and to him it's like—eating—eating breakfast.

Little Me-Me. You still have to be the center of everything, don't you?

I'll go.

No you won't.

I will. I won't love him so much anymore. I can't. I'll go.

He's really your slave. He's just pretending.

But he used to be humble about it and now he acts—as if he has power over me.

Oh yes, he has you in his power now, doesn't he? Doesn't he? He'll strangle you—he'll—Good Lord, what are you crying about? Can't you see a joke?

I want to be in his power. I want him to own me and tell me what to do and never stop loving me . . . My virginity was nothing. I must give more—more—

Lord. You know, he needs to get a job. A guy can't be happy without money.

Why not?

Has to eat, has to have a good time, has to smoke, has to get drunk, has to go to the concerts. You don't know anything about men. But you're his now.

And he's mine.

Yes. He's going to make you happy. You watch!

Oh, he will, he has, he does.

You wait. This isn't anything. You wait.

We will be alive when we die. Nothing can kill us. Nothing can put us out of the world. Oh, I am being fed. Everything feeds me now.

Don't get transcendental on him, Maggie.

He's always fighting my conception of things. He tries to laugh at me and make me over. He doesn't want me to believe what I believe. He tries to make out that it's all crap and he beats against me all the time—but I don't care!

That's right. But his only quarrel with you is that you distort the most obvious things.

Then I don't know reality?

No—well, I guess you do know a little now.

But—

Darling, you're always feeling something eccentric. Nothing common pleases you. Everything has to have meaning. The poor guy can't just read the paper and enjoy it, or just smoke, or just walk. Everything has to be significant and he can't enjoy it if it is. He doesn't like stuff trimmed up. You can't enjoy it unless it is. Honest, he gets tired of your angels and your fires and your immortalities all the time. He doesn't believe any of it. He wants things just ordinary so he can rest and relax.

Goosie—that's what he thinks I am—Goosie!

Yes.

I don't care. I have to see my own soul.

There you go.

He has to see what I am.

Damn it, can't you let him love you just plain?

People used to shove me aside but now they don't. I feel as if I'm just lying on them and they're carrying me along with them. They're like a big soft breast I can rest on.

I'll bet.

Now I don't fear people. Everything outside me is fire and I'm fire too. All the other people are fire. We're being poured into the fire-world and we mix with it. While we eat the fire-world, it eats us. Oh I am born.

Is this going to last all through breakfast too?

Now I am a little child. Now I am a little child.

*

Hi me, hit me! Yah, hit me again. Come home to Mama. Hit me again!

Ronald sits at the table with his hand over his white forehead. I can see his skin through the rent in his wet shoe.

Hit me again. Oh baby, oh, baby.

Ronald springs up suddenly, 'Where in hell is that lousy wood? I'm cold. God it's damn cold, this is unbearable.'

You and Maggie are soul mates. Wait till she gets home and you can send her out for some wood.

He wrenches down a large oil painting from the wall and knocks it out of the wooden stretcher. Then he takes a small axe and makes a pile of kindling. Grabs some papers from under the bed and lights in the black mouth of the fireplace.

Atta boy. There's the baby. Hit me. Jesus. Hit me again.

In a dark corner, a woman giggles. Her ragged coat with the soiled monkey fur has slipped to the floor and now she is all flour white. Flour seems to sift off her soft dough arms – you could imagine her in the morning not washing in good clear water but dusting flour over her with a sifter and patting it in. Now she is smiling brackishly, her head on one side.

Here's to Princess Oda! Hot baby! Hit me, hit me, hit me.

Hanging on the bedpost, there's my silk nightgown with the lace un-ironed. My satin robe lies crumpled on the floor.

Why don't you go in? Look at all you've brought him to eat!

I won't bother them.

Ronald's glaring at you. He looks like he loathes you.

I'll put these things in the alcove for later when the others have gone. They read their poetry sometimes if I ask them. Ronald won't, but they will.

Who is that extraordinary woman? She's like that marshmallow stuff – you know – you spoon it out.

Oh, that's Princess Odelliva. Used to be Oda Helfer. She's an ex-typist and switchboard operator – she changed her mind and got to be a princess one night in a Brooklyn moving picture.

Ha! Lord, that's grand. That's good.

I'm afraid of her. She knows everything I don't know. She knows tricks – she knows something.

You think she's a dirty whore. You want to put your hands on that putty flesh of hers and rip her apart like dough.

I'm frightened because of Ronald. If he sees how I loathe and make fun of Oda, he'll take her home. He'll make love to her because I hate her.

He'll leave you for her.

When a common prostitute comes in I can't compete. I might as well go about my business.

I'll bet she's a hot baby in bed.

And he says I'm worthless.

And you beg him to teach you. Lead you. You want to worship him. You want to be less than him. You want him for a master.

Don't! Don't, I don't want that.

He just wants you to be decent to everyone.

Oh I am, I am.

You're not. You're jealous. You act superior.

You mean Oda?

That poor thing has had a hell of a life.

I can't win.

You don't know what it means or what she's gone through. The struggle to eat, just to eat.

I do — I work — I typewrite- I —

Do you know what it means to get up early and steal bread from the crates when it's piled in back of the grocery store? Did you ever steal milk early in the morning or try to lift eggs? She's had to face reality all her life and you've never faced it.

Stop! Stop, stop, stop stop, stop . . .

Hit me. Give me another. Give me a hard one. Give me. Hit me.

Take everything I own. Take it all. Take my bed. Don't leave anything. My clothes. My pictures. My hats. Everything. My knives and forks and spoons. My books. Take it all. Take everything. Take this bed. Drag it out with you. Take the dishes, take every little thing I have . . .

You don't understand. You never have. You never really give yourself to him—you pretend to, but you don't— You're always putting your personality in his face. He doesn't want it. He doesn't want your ideas. He has better ones of his own. He wants to see you.

I never loved the way I wanted to until I was not myself anymore. My love is still locked up. My love is still iced over. I don't love. I don't love. I don't give everything, everything, that's why I don't love . . . I can't! I can't—

When he doesn't want you anymore he won't be able to tell you. It will be horrible. He'll have to stay because he can't hurt you and it will be hell.

Oh, my brightness, my self, my own—Oh I cannot give him, I cannot let him destroy, I cannot let go—No. I can't.

Lord, there you go. Always fancy. Always distorted. Never plain so a person can meet you simply. Always fancy.

Stop! I'm a woman. Stop. Don't you dare. I'm a woman—Oh, I am, I am. Ask anyone. I am.

He wants your flesh. He needs it—He wants it—then he'll love you forever.

He doesn't want me?

No.

He just wants my body?

Yes.

He doesn't want my love?

No.

My flesh—this flesh—

Yes.

I must die.

Yes.

Oh, I am frightened. Oh, my Father in heaven, what does it mean? My flesh. My soul. Oh women, women of the world, loved by men, tell me how you get so empty—so soft—so sweet.

I'm telling you the truth. He wants your body. Give him your body and he'll love you forever. He won't ever be able to leave you.

I can't!

Your body is all he has left in the world. The only reality.

*

Dear Mama, dear Papa, how horrified you would be if you could see me now. How miserable and wretched you would be. How—Oh, if you knew I could not be your child any more. I am going to have a baby and I hope you don't mind. I'm not married. Once I didn't believe in marriage but I do now. I would rather have a baby than anything in the world. I am going to have a baby . . .

I guess it isn't true.

It is true.

I guess it isn't.

Oh, it is.

Then do something now, for God's sake, stop it, do something.

You don't mean that.

I do. Ronald will go insane.

You just think that now.

I know it! He wants to be a great poet. He wants to stay in the world.

If he loves me . . .

He's a damned weakling.

I feel sick.

He'll say you're taking advantage of his bondage.

I want a glass of water.

You demand. You don't know how to do anything but demand.

I don't even know what slave means.

It means you expect everyone to wait on you all the time.

Ronald's a grand slave.

Listen, Maggie. You've got to cut out the scenes. You've got to promise not jump after him every time he wants to be alone. You think about yourself too much. It's indecent. It's weak of you. If you keep this up he'll wind up cutting his throat.

*

'Mother and Child'

Most children are born under world-laws, but hers would be heaven-born, like Leonardo. She would never marry. But she felt panic-stricken and sad. Then she saw herself on the top of the Presbyterian church at home, way up high near the church bell, clinging only with her toes to the slippery roof, her arms waving in the arched blue sky, her voice bringing all the people to her. They came running, some in cars, some came on crutches, in shawls, some had big baskets of eggs, some had candy. They grouped around the stone and listened. 'Oh, people, I love you. I shall die if you loathe me. I have to have this baby. You have to love me anyway! Oh people, forgive me if I'm wrong so my parents will forgive me. Oh love me so they can love me and have peace forever. Love my Ronald. Love my child.'

*

Do I look awful in my face, Maggie?

Oh Alice. Kind of.

I'm grey all over. My skin is. You look well Maggie. I've never seen you look more beautiful.

I've had to have an abortion. I'd wait out in his office for hours and his secretary just stared and stared and I imagine he told her I was pestering him. I'd just wait and wait. Sometimes he'd let me in and he's just look at me as if I was an ordinary student.

Oh, he's horrible!

He acted as if I'd been sent up for necking with some crazy boy or something. He'd set his glasses on and fold his hands and say: 'What can I do for you?' At first I couldn't hold up under it and I just said, 'Nothing, nothing . . .' And the next time I cried—'Oh listen, you just worship somebody and then they treat you like dirt, worse than that.' Well, what do you want to know about it? You know what an abortion is, don't you?

No. Oh, yes, but why did you, Alice?

An abortion is where a man won't do his part. He makes the doctor take it so he can go back to his wife and children and not . . .

Dean Sinclair. The dean. The dean.

I'm going to make someone marry me. That's why I came here. I don't care who it is but someone has to. I'm going to force it. I'm going to—

I think marriage is right. I used to think the opposite but now . . .

Lord, a woman learns from men how valuable marriage is. Lord, you certainly do. I wouldn't go. I wouldn't consent to it. I was horrified and terrified and everything and I told him I'd tell my father about it and he made me go to a doctor friend of his. He said he'd just examine me but they strapped me down and did it. Nobody knows what it was like. My God, I shrieked—I simply yelled myself to pieces. I didn't know what was going to happen. They took me in there. He pretended he was doing it for my father, that I had got in trouble with some student and he was being my benefactor. God. I don't think I like men at all.

We'll have him arrested. Ronald and I will send an officer after him. He'll be imprisoned.

I don't want him arrested and they wouldn't anyway. He'd tell a big lie. That's why he has the job. It's because he lies so well.

But he's vile, Alice. I want to hurt him. I want to do something horrible to him.

I don't.

I loathe him.

Oh, he's just cruel and stupid.

How could you let them, Alice?

I couldn't help it. I tell you they strapped me down.

I'm sick, Alice. I feel odd.

At first it was beautiful. Then when I got that way he was horrible. I always thought men were brave. My father is. My father takes care of all of us. I never knew before that men could be so cowardly. You know they take marriage so seriously; that's why they always try to get women without it.

Oh, Alice, I don't believe— I don't believe— No— I can't—

But they do. They'll marry a girl if she holds back. Of course. We're supposed to be smart enough to know that. Sure. This is a grand world.

But not all. Not all. Oh, they aren't all like that, Alice.

I think they are.

No, no, they can't be; they aren't.

Perhaps they aren't.

I know—I have faith.

I think I'll go to Europe. Daddy will give me the money if I can get someone to go with me. Would you, Maggie?

Oh, I couldn't.

Has Ronald asked you to marry him?

He did once.

When?

A long time ago.

Why in hell didn't you, idiot? Don't you love him?

I thought it was indecent to marry until you—you had given—everything—every part of you. That's the marriage. That's the wedding—when you give it all.

I guess it is.

Alice, you should have had the baby.

I tell you, dumb-bell, they strapped me down.

I won't accept this ugly world other people make. I won't live with them. Now I see what it is. It's dirty. It's shrewd. I'd rather be an outcast than one of them.

You'll have a sweet time of it then. I'm going to get a grand new dress. Something grand. Daddy told me to. You know we have laws just because men are so vile. All they want to do is go over the universe impregnating all the women and leaving them. Of course if they're forced, if you drive them into a corner with a broom handle, so to speak. I just say salt and pepper all the time to myself. Salt and pepper. Isn't that insane? Of course I sort of forced him into it and he never did anything like it before—with students. I really believe that. I do. If you drive them into the corner they will pray for their little lives even—

Oh, Alice, I don't believe . . . We can't live on a level with hogs. We have to exalt life. We can't let them degrade it and turn it into something to be shrewd and sly about—we can't—we mustn't—

Well, I'm going to. I'm going to chase one of them. I'm going to chase him with a broom handle and make him marry me and treat him like a dog so he will love me forever. Yes, I am. I don't care how vile it is. I'm going to.

But where would the love be? Where?

In your eye, darling. All the dean could think of to say to me was—'Be a thoroughbred, Alice dear. It will soon be over. That's right—be a thoroughbred.' But it's all so final, Maggie. You can't go back and you know that nothing, nothing can happen ever and you have to accept it. You have to take it and you know you can't ever get back again to where you were. Nobody asks you whether you can accept it or whether you want to, or anything about it. You have to. I want to work. I'd like to have a job and work terribly hard.

Yes.

But we're all nothing but rats. Even the ones that look awfully good. Rats. Don't you feel well, Maggie?

No, I feel awful.

What's the trouble?

Oh, if the world's like you say, Alice.

It is. I'm so sorry.

The world, reality—reality—

Listen, Maggie. I'll phone you this evening.

I haven't a telephone.

Then I'll stop by tomorrow morning.

Thanks a lot. I like you, Alice.

I'll see you in the morning, sweet thing. Good-bye.

Good-bye.

*

It's bad enough now but if you were married he'd eventually strangle you.

I want to be unselfish. I want to be different. I want to be—

You can't be. He can't be. This is life.

It doesn't have to be this way. We could be happy.

You're never satisfied. You want him to love you differently—he can't—he loves you as much as he's capable of loving anyone.

Please — I want him to want to marry me. I want a good life. Please, please, please . . .

He loves you as much as he can, damn it, and that's all he's capable of. Aren't you satisfied with that?

He can give me anything I want. He has it all. I'm not satisfied with this. I want a good life. I want it different from—my parents.

Oh, hell!

I want to give all my love—everything—I don't want to keep anything back—I want to show it all—give it all—

Yes, and he wants to work. Did you hear that for once in your life? He wants to work. He wants to get something done. He needs dough. He's hungry all the time. He wants new shoes. He wants cigarettes. He wants steak. He wants to write and you won't let him and you're always around stopping him from doing what he wants to do and I tell you he's a hungry man and he's going crazy and he will go crazy if you don't let him get some work done because he's—

I'll take care of him.

All right, get married.

I'll take care of him, I can, I want to, I will. I'm going to take care of him. I want to take care of everyone on earth.

For Christ's sake, can't you ever see anything? Don't you know yet what he really wants?

No.

You do. You can't help but know. Won't you get an abortion?

God, don't say that—I'm so happy—don't.

But you won't be. You can't be. He'd go crazy with a kid around. I tell you he'll run off and leave you, and that would be hell for you, all alone.

I feel brave.

Hell of a thing to do, but they're doing it all the time. But I'm sure he'll marry you if you say so.

I'll take care of him. I feel brave. I feel strong. I can walk forever and not get tired. I can do anything . . .

Then do what I say! I'm not influencing you. I know you want the baby. I don't know why in hell you do. God, no one on earth would have done for him what you've done. It's crazy—your generosity to him. The patience, you always try to understand and give.

I don't mean this crying. My eyes are crying. I'm not. I'm happy. I feel brave. I can do anything, I'm strong, I'm not afraid.

Where are you going?

Out.

What for?

Does my stocking show very much?

*

'Nellie Bloom'

Nellie looked around the room strangely and then down at the child in her lap. 'Oh god,' she said faintly, and stood up, but Bird had her baby in her arms before it fell.

That evening when Grandma Sweeney got home from old lady Anderson's, she found Nellie sitting with her back against the wall staring at the sea-shell doorstep. It is said that her face was stiff and terrible and that when she struggled to speak it was as if her throat was frozen. She looked up at Grandma Sweeney, but she did not try to talk, and no tears came into her eyes, but she put her hands between her breasts as if there was something she wanted to tear out and throw on the floor.

And once she sat down and looked at her body in horror, at her legs and arms in such a strange lonely fashion that Grandma Sweeney suddenly crowded her into her lap and they sat there without speaking as it grew darker and darker and the lights of Onnowac went out one by one. The night train came through with its monstrous churring and screaming, but Nellie did not sigh or speak. When it grew colder and the darkness was thick like felt around them, Nellie pressed her cheek against Grandma Sweeney's and put her arm around her neck. But she made no other sound or movement all through the night.

*

That was brave.

I feel kind of weak but I'm all right.

Was it bad?

Awful. I'm still shrieking.

It's over now. Are you sick?

No, I feel all right.

Loads of women do it, you know.

He used to say it all the time. 'I'm going to make you happy. I know how. I'm going to. You wait, you'll see. I'm going to make you happy.'

He loves you.

If he loved me he would have wanted a child, he would have wanted to give me something to keep forever. Now I haven't anything—a child is the only real gift from a lover—now I haven't anything. Now I've betrayed myself.

What did the doctor soak you?

Thirty.

(Whistles.)

Now I know why I hate that softness in women, why I loathe it, why I want to destroy it. I've got it in myself. I prayed for it. Now I've got it. I did what he wanted, I was empty, I followed him, I did what he meant me to do. Oh, rotten, rotten. Rotten, weak. I'm not a woman. No woman destroys life. Men do that. Women don't—they keep it, they protect it.

Don't let's talk. It's weak to talk about oneself all the time.

Did he ever want to marry me?

Yes.

Did he ever want a good life?

Yes.

Did he ever think of a baby?

God, yes, he wanted all of it.

Oh, when? When did he want it?

I don't know. A long while back. I don't know.

I must give. I have so much—I have so much.

Precious.

Oh, he'd leave me alright, he'd abandon me, let me give it all before he did.

You always have to be tragic, don't you? Little Me-Me.

I'm going.

Don't go now. It's late. You're not well. Wait until tomorrow.

I won't ever wait and wait on corners where he's promised to be and then forgotten to come. Oh, this crazy vile world. I'm losing my mind. As soon as you love someone then they stop loving you.

Your world is crazy.

Christ! What if he dies and I'm not here—?

Nonsense. You're going to be a great writer.

No.

Yes.

I want a baby. I want him. I'll go and he won't even hunt for me. This is a relief to him.

You knew it was true. You knew all the time. You have been boring him every minute for months.

*

For Ronald. For Ronald. Everything on this page is for Ronald. I love Ronald. Dearest, dearest, dearest Ronald, I am your wife, I am your child.

(Rips out the paper and tears it up. Puts in another sheet.)

Dear parents, I have moved uptown. It is a lot like where I lived when I was in college. It is clean. It looks just the same. Thank you for the stamps. Oh, I forgot to tell you—

(Stops typing.)

My parents, oh, this is my life and you aren't sharing; I'm keeping it from you; I dare not give it; you would loathe me, turn me away, shove me out further than I already am into the darkness.

(Looks out the window, then types.)

I forgot to tell you that my book is accepted and they like it and I bought you both presents the other day. I am so happy. I am wretched.

(Crosses it out, writes over it.)

It is cold here.

(Strikes that out too. Finally writes.)

I love the city. Love from Maggie.

THE END

MARGERY

Characters:

Margery – Margery Latimer (1899-1932), author of *This Is My Body* (1930)

Maggie – a ghost, she could be many things...

Megan – the protagonist of *This Is My Body*

Molly – a PhD student

Robert – her supervisor

Ronald – Megan's lover in *This Is My Body*

*A note on Margery and *Maggie* and their relationship to each other, and with Megan: while *Maggie* is more ghostlike, taking on multiple roles and/or serving as kind of an alter-ego to Megan, Margery also serves as a kind of omniscient presence/consciousness. Together, Margery and *Maggie* might be like Megan's fairy-godmothers, or benevolent (Margery) / antagonistic (*Maggie*) presences. That Margery is the kinder, more maternal presence makes sense – as the author of *This Is My Body*, she is both an older incarnation of Megan, and also her creator/mother. *Maggie*, however, is shiftier, not rooted to any particular point in time, identity or reality. To get astrological, *Maggie* falls squarely in the mutable category: she is adaptable, extroverted, analytical and versatile. She mediates change and changes her modes of expression frequently in order to meet this end; as much as she assists others through transitions, she can also be duplicitous, inconsistent and hypocritical. Margery, on the other hand, is Megan's older self; the 'real' woman versus the fictional character (the fictional character she created, based on herself); the woman still trying to shape, reach out to, save, come to terms with the girl she once was. As far as staging, *Maggie* engages more actively, physically with Megan, while Margery - no matter how involved she is in a scene emotionally or in terms of dialogue - always remains at a distance or certain remove from the others.

Megan, Margery and perhaps even *Maggie* at times address the audience, but Robert and Molly remain squarely behind the fourth wall.

Megan, Margery and *Maggie* exist in their respective places/spaces in time (Megan in the world of the novel; *Maggie* darting between various worlds; Margery 'outside' the novel, looking back).

Robert and Molly exist in the present and do not interact with/are not aware of Megan, *Maggie* and Margery – or at least, only insofar as Margery, Megan and *Maggie* are the embodiment of the play Molly is writing.

A slash '/' in the script indicates overlapping dialogue.

LIGHTS UP

MARGERY stands center stage in a dim light. Ghostlike.

MARGERY Girl that I once was, come out into the light. Let me look into your face, let me see your body.

(MEGAN enters, tentatively, dazed. Blinking as if she's been shut in the dark for a long time, the light hurts her eyes.)

MARGERY Come slowly out of me into the day.

(As MARGERY speaks, MEGAN looks out into the audience with awe, moves her fingers, touches her body as if she has just come back to life.)

MARGERY Now I see your eyes that found nothing matched your expectations, the young girl's body filled with joy and fright.

(MEGAN turns to look at MARGERY, but is distracted as MAGGIE and RONALD enter from the wings.)

MARGERY I see the world you expected to find, the perfect situations where you were always to emerge triumphant, the people who were to miraculously fit your images.

(MAGGIE and RONALD approach MEGAN from either side. MEGAN takes them in with a mixture of curiosity, fear, faint recognition and confusion.)

MARGERY O girl, how can I pity you?

(MAGGIE and RONALD circle around MEGAN. MARGERY takes a step towards them.)

MARGERY Now I can make you act, and I can feel my hands on your bodies, pushing you where I please.

You have no choice now. You are my characters. This is my story.

(MAGGIE, RONALD and MEGAN freeze.)

MARGERY You all belong to me.

(BLACKOUT.)

(In the darkness, we hear MOLLY. She speaks quickly, rambling, defensive.)

MOLLY I know I know I wasn't going to open with that the 'Invocation' from the beginning of the book too obvious I know it's stupid and cheesy now but still I feel like there has to be a way to make it work it's entirely personal I know I know I don't care it's how she told the story and it's how I want to tell it too/

(LIGHTS UP.)

MOLLY WAIT!

(LIGHTS DOWN)

MOLLY Fuck. How about this...

(LIGHTS UP)

(MARGERY stands alone again in the dim light.)

MARGERY 'This is my body, friends, world—Oh, take my body and eat—Oh, take my soul and do not be afraid—'

(LIGHTS DOWN)

MOLLY ARRRGH!

Sorry sorry.

(LIGHTS UP)

(Now MARGERY and MAGGIE stand off to the side, gazing at MEGAN who occupies center stage. MEGAN still appears awkward and lost. MAGGIE fidgets, impatient and slightly irritated.)

MARGERY She was rather large with a full sweet body and her hair fell to her dark brows in front in a curly bang. 'The gold will go out of it,' her mother always said. 'Your grandmother had red hair and dark brows and when she died it was raven black.'

MOLLY *(we only hear her voice)* Ugh – sorry/sorry

(LIGHTS UP on MOLLY and ROBERT. They sit at a table on the side of the stage opposite MARGERY and MAGGIE.)

ROBERT No, its okay – so, are you proposing literally placing the book onstage?

MOLLY Well...no, I mean-

ROBERT If you're interested in creating a *new* experience – reinterpreting –

MOLLY An adaptation.

ROBERT I think it would be more exciting, more interesting – particularly for the purposes of your dissertation, as your methodology - to push further.

MOLLY I know I know-

MAGGIE Show me something interesting.

MARGERY Such red cheeks, ripe like the mouth.

MOLLY So, the novel – you read it?

ROBERT Yes, yes, it's-

MOLLY You liked it? Not too girly?

MARGERY She resembles a cherubim, don't you think?

ROBERT Not at all.

MOLLY Okay, I just wondered if-

MAGGIE More like a deaf person. Those big eyes staring out.

MARGERY Her skin is so light/

MAGGIE Not sullen or petulant, just dumb.

MOLLY So you liked it?

ROBERT Of course!

MARGERY There is lightness all around her.

(MAGGIE huffs and descends upon MEGAN.

The time is MEGAN's first day at university and MAGGIE embodies a gaggle of sorority girls. She delivers the following rapid-fire. MEGAN stares at her bewildered, trying to back away but cornered.)

MAGGIE What are you taking? Haven't planned your course? Better get busy. You're from Portage? Oh, my dear, one of our darlinest girls was from there—Ada Perry? Her father owns the bank. Did you know her? A perfect whizz. Fine sport. Oh look that must be Dick Harper's sister. Why he took one of our darlinest girls to prom last year. Oh, yes, we all go to prom—it's a tradition now. Did you hear about her dress? It was perfectly darling—you know—just simple and lots of lace and underpart. Now you must meet the girls!

MEGAN I'm not homesick.

MAGGIE All you need to do is brace up and get to know everyone!

MEGAN This place is second rate. I knew the instant I got off the train.

MAGGIE *I say, you're taking the wrong attitude.*

MEGAN It's hideous.

MAGGIE *Well nobody asked you to come.*

MEGAN I'm not going to stay.

MAGGIE *It's the best university in the country. It's famous all over.*

MEGAN I'd rather be a failure in life than be a part of this. I think I have a sickness no one knows about. You can't tell. I've never been strong. Probably I ought to be at home right now.

MAGGIE *You won't get very far feeling that way.*

MEGAN I'm not homesick.

MAGGIE *You have your mother's pine pillow, don't you? She swears it's just marvellous for grief. You hold it like this and put your face right into it.*

MEGAN Oh god. I hate college. I am remarkable to endure this.

(BEAT.)

MOLLY The book is completely autobiographical. The protagonist Megan is Margery Latimer-

ROBERT No, that's clear-

MOLLY I can't believe I'm actually doing this as my PhD. Thank you.

ROBERT No, no. It's a fascinating area.

MOLLY But there's so much on adaptation, no? And modernism! I had no idea what I was getting into with modernism – I mean, that whole realm of study – it's so male, so intimidating!

ROBERT Right, well let's talk about the Margery Latimer book. The ah-

MOLLY *This Is My Body-*

ROBERT Right. As your methodology, your own stage adaptation-

MOLLY God, this is the dumbest question – I shouldn't be asking this- I guess I must have discussed it in my proposal but it just seems so vague. Jeesh, I feel so stupid asking this, but...what exactly is a methodology anyway?

MEGAN Oh, please like me.

(MEGAN stares into the audience – really looks at them – eyes pleading for some sign of tenderness or support.)

MARGERY watches her, anxious, perhaps even a little embarrassed. She too addresses the audience, in MEGAN's defense.)

MARGERY She misses her mother, pictures her as she stood on the train platform saying goodbye.

MEGAN *Please.*

MARGERY Her father told her to be a good girl, and reminded her that the Constitution of the United States was perfect.

MEGAN *Somebody like me...*

MARGERY Someone go talk to her, put a warm hand on hers.

(Instead MAGGIE appears. She approaches MEGAN.)

MAGGIE *Are you an only child?*

(MEGAN backs away.)

MEGAN Yes.

MAGGIE *Are you your mother's darling?*

MEGAN Yes.

MAGGIE *Who do you think you are anyway?*

MEGAN I'm, I'm, I'm

MAGGIE *You think we're rather a low-brow crowd, don't you? Not fine enough or intellectual enough for you to associate with. Well hooray for Saint Megan!*

MEGAN I – I – I feel as if I belong – somewhere else. On the moon or something.

MAGGIE *Of course we've recognized your superiority. We aren't much but we could see that at a glance. And we know you think you're just about the best looking girl in the crowd with all that hair and those eyes. Oh, yes, we're some all right, we are; we're too good, we are; we're too intellectual to live, we are.*

MEGAN I know what's perfect. I can feel it inside me. But this—this is wretched all through.

MAGGIE *Miss Foster, I am forced to read you an ultimatum prepared by the Sophomores of Elden Hall. Anyone who persists in an attitude of unwholesome lawlessness is always punished this way.*

'Megan Foster is denied the use of elevators in this hall during the first semester. No sophomore who cares to retain her standing in this hall will do more than speak cordially to Miss Foster. Until Megan Foster can learn to be a good sport she will merely be a visitor in this hall, not an outcast, but no one will befriend her.'

MEGAN I don't care what anyone thinks or how much they laugh. They can go to hell.

MAGGIE *Put her out! Put her out! Put her OUT!*

MOLLY A methodology is like the practice? What you do to prove your theory – or, um, thesis?

ROBERT Right. Your theoretical research will guide and shape your creative practice – writing your methodology is essentially a matter of documenting this.

MOLLY Oh, okay, yea, I guess I knew that, haha.

ROBERT The first question you're going to have to address is *why* this novel?

MAGGIE *Are you Megan Foster?*

ROBERT Why does it need to be a play?

MEGAN Oh, did my mother telegraph me?

ROBERT Why not simply tell people to go read the book?

MAGGIE *Your housemother says you're unhappy.*

MEGAN It's just that everyone's so miserable!

MOLLY I'm sorry, I—

MAGGIE *But you don't mix with the other girls. Come, answer! Do you mix with the other girls?*

MEGAN I don't know.

MOLLY I'm trying to follow, I—

MAGGIE *Well I know. I know that you're an extremely moody girl and that you think about yourself too much . . .*

MEGAN I have to like myself! No one else does. I have to. I would die otherwise.

MAGGIE *Nonsense. Rubbish. Get out and mix. Nothing is pleasant. I mean to say, nothing unpleasant is pleasant. We have to conquer!*

MOLLY I'm sorry, I'm feeling very thick.

ROBERT Going back to where we started – what would you say to someone who asked you why this book should be a play –

MOLLY But I told you-

ROBERT Beyond that, what is it *about this book*-

MOLLY To rediscover Margery Latimer! To bring her work to light –

ROBERT Yes, but couldn't that be accomplished other ways, if that's what this is about?

MOLLY Wait, wha? Why is this important? Isn't it enough that I want to use this particular novel for my *methodology* – do I have to have some fancy complicated reason for it?

ROBERT Well, it's something you will need to consider – if someone were to challenge you, if they said, okay, but *why*?

MOLLY I don't understand why you're harping on about this – I'd tell them – I'd tell them – I'd tell them to fuck off!

MARGERY Show them what you really are!

MEGAN Oh god.

MARGERY You can do it! Come out of yourself.

MEGAN Oh please, make them like my story.

MARGERY Go on. Show them what's inside you.

MEGAN The title is 'Voices.'

MEGAN (*addressing her story to the audience*) It was a day of sticks and stones with frisky sprites behind. A world of trees that sang their song in one voice and leaves that rustled like thousands of lips struggling to say the same word. A/ sun that -

MAGGIE (*cutting her off, mocking*) 'A sun that tried hard not to look wise.'

MEGAN The child lifted her face to the rays of light and tried to catch them to her. They were golden lanes that led up and up. On the table was a brown bowl with heaps of flour that made desert dunes, pools of dark molasses, and/ raisins—

MAGGIE 'raisins as brown as the thoughts of dwarfs.'

MEGAN 'Gizzie,' said the child in her serious way. 'God is in everything, isn't he?' The maid laughed. 'Lord sakes, what do you mean. Do you think God is in this here molasses and flour?' Now the trees sang their song in

many voices and the leaves looked down on the earth. The sun reached out for her rays and held them back. The child put her head on the table.

(MEGAN looks hopefully at the audience.)

MARGERY *(to the audience)* Well...?

MAGGIE *I object to little girls being wistful about God. They've been used so much in fiction.*

MEGAN But-

MAGGIE *Too jerky. I miss the steady flow of language.*

MEGAN It meant something!

MAGGIE *'Raisins as brown as the thoughts of dwarfs' is too much for me.*

MEGAN That's the best thing in it!

MAGGIE *Miss Foster's work appears to be divine to her but to me it's simply too foolish for words. I listen to it as I would to a curiosity. The symbolism is forced. I wish Miss Foster would tell us what she means by having a tree sing. I would honestly like to know—I am serious about this—and Gizzie is such an extreme name. Wouldn't Mary or Jane be better?*

MEGAN *(defiant, addressing the audience)* It's excellent! It means something. I wouldn't have written it if it didn't mean something.

MAGGIE *Don't be so personal.*

MEGAN It meant something!

MOLLY It's theatre—

MEGAN It had meaning!

MOLLY Is there something wrong with putting the book onstage – don't you think it would still be a profoundly new experience?

ROBERT Well, sure, on the most basic level-

MOLLY Basic. But I want this to be great.

MAGGIE *Would you rather be a great writer or a moral woman?*

MEGAN That's easy. A great writer.

MAGGIE *I'd be a moral woman. But I don't think any the less of you for your opinion.*

MEGAN Who's your favorite writer?

MAGGIE I think Dante's pretty good. What about you?

MEGAN Right now? Milton I guess. Oh, and Spinoza. And Spengler.

MAGGIE Who? I like books about sacrifice. I think if a woman sacrifices herself in some way for a man—you know—

MEGAN What do you mean—what is that?

MAGGIE Oh, I don't know. I think it's glorious. I think a woman who can really be noble enough to make a great sacrifice . . .

MEGAN But do you have any idea *what* you are?

MAGGIE Well, kind of. Anyway, I know I'm really different from what I think I am.

MEGAN How? What does that *mean*? Different from what you think. How?

MAGGIE We all think we're wonderful until we grow up.

MEGAN How do we show what we are? We're all covered up. We try to act one way and then people are so cruel we try to change. Oh I don't know. Why is it you're so different from me? You're so calm. You don't feel wretched because you really know things . . .

MAGGIE Puff, I don't.

MEGAN Oh, you do. You aren't scared. You go up to anyone and you aren't scared.

MAGGIE What are you going to do, anyway?

MEGAN I'm going to be a great writer. I don't want anything on earth but that. I want to talk to people.

MAGGIE What are you going to do about men?

MEGAN Oh, I don't believe in marriage. I don't like to think of homes and children and that. I don't believe in people owning one another. That's just for animals.

MAGGIE My dear, the animals are the only ones that are free!

MEGAN We must be like birds. We must fly through one another and make each other fly and be free and beautiful. We must make each other rise —

Why, you're laughing at me!

MAGGIE *I think you're charming. And marriage is kind of a nuisance I guess.*

MEGAN But what are you going to do?

MAGGIE *Oh, I don't know. Do you like men?*

MEGAN I have everything in myself. And anyway, there is no one here for me. I want to live differently from other people. I'm not satisfied with the life people like. I want something better.

MAGGIE *You silly. If you'd curb that sort of business you'd be popular around here in no time. Say, I just found out the name of the freshman elected to the literary magazine. It's a huge honour. They wrote a story about it. Do you know him?*

MEGAN Him! It isn't a man is it?

MAGGIE *Oh sure, it's Ronald Chadron. I knew all the time he'd get it. Awful snob, too. Gives me a pain. I'm as good as he is. I've had an A on every theme so far. Oh, hell, I don't care.*

MEGAN Let him have it. Who cares. All right. My time will come. Good.

MOLLY You didn't think it was awful? Oh good-

ROBERT No, I thought it was really interesting-

MOLLY I was worried-

ROBERT Yes- No, I think it's a good start.

MOLLY Oh phew! I was trying to play with the idea of these disembodied voices – suspended in time, or occupying multiple time periods at once – like a dream, sort of in the ether.

ROBERT Sure, I got that.

MOLLY I was trying to be all 'modern', haha.

ROBERT No, it's very -

MOLLY But first I wrote something that was like you said – simply putting the novel onstage – so it had like fifty million characters and came out, I don't know, kind of flat. Now I have Margery herself in there, but originally I loved the idea of having only two characters – just Megan, the protagonist from the novel, and Maggie –

MOLLY Maggie's like this alter-ego – the tormenter – this, like older, omniscient consciousness looking back on or reliving the moment.

ROBERT Right.

MOLLY But the thing is, when she plays other characters in the story, it should be clear that she's still *Maggie* playing them – it's not like, the actress playing *Maggie* stops playing *Maggie* and becomes the other characters –

She's meant to be like those Irish sea spirits, selkies or whatever, who take on different forms - does that make sense?

ROBERT No, yes, it does.

MOLLY But I feel – I just feel – like – like it needs some kind of *framing device* – just the three women, all of them kind of ghostlike characters – do you think that's enough to stand on its own?

ROBERT Actually, I think it might be a little long.

MOLLY Long? Really? It only runs about an hour and twenty minutes – so you think I should be writing a one-act?

ROBERT Maybe – maybe this draft is-

MOLLY Oh.

ROBERT You know - this is really only one of several drafts – adaptations that might be completely different plays that you'll write.

MOLLY So should I try something completely different for the next? Or do you want to read the horrible, tedious, ultra-realistic putting-the-novel-on-stage draft?

ROBERT No, no I don't think I need to read that. Although it might be something you want to include in your appendix.

MOLLY For the final dissertation?

ROBERT Right.

MOLLY Ugh.

ROBERT I have a few suggestions-

MOLLY Oh, great!

ROBERT What I'm getting at is more a matter of *narrative structure*.

MOLLY Oh.

ROBERT You need to give the audience a hint, I think, earlier on, of what the play is *about*.

MOLLY Plant some seeds, huh.

ROBERT Find a way to let them in to the underlying—

MAGGIE (*to the audience*) She's just so *tiresome!* All that talk about revealing what's inside her.

MOLLY Um... I think I see what you mean.

MAGGIE We have no sense of who she is. *Real knowledge* of her -

ROBERT What is the story *about*? What's at the center, the pivot-point?

MOLLY I guess that would be...

MAGGIE She's just so abominably *self-centered*-

MOLLY Her relationship with Ronald?

MAGGIE So childish, foolish and erratic!

ROBERT Maybe. It might be something else.

MARGERY (*to the audience*) It's meant to be like a fairytale. The prince who is sunk in a snakeskin and looks horrible from the outside. And the princess who faces his horror so that he emerges beautiful.

MAGGIE He is horrible!

MEGAN Is he?

(*MAGGIE turns on MEGAN.*)

MAGGIE He said your stories were nothing but 'the rattling of sticks and stones'!

MEGAN (*shakes her fist*) I'm a better writer than you, Ronald Chadron!

MAGGIE I suppose you've got some hate on him for saying that. Are you going to punish him now?

MEGAN I *am* a great writer.

MAGGIE He's just like the others – so many tiresome, diffident, highly critical young men.

MEGAN I *am* great, Ronald Chadron, you're going to see.

MAGGIE All of them dark-haired and sallow, in their black suits with bright neckties.

MEGAN I wish I hadn't come.

MAGGIE That's because he's not here.

MEGAN I don't know what you're talking about.

MAGGIE (*pointing into the audience*) Look! It's him! He's the one!

MEGAN Wait- who?

MAGGIE Ha! You can't stop looking at him! You see him with his arms around you, feel his lips on yours (*shouts towards 'RONALD' in the audience*) *CAN'T YOU SEE THAT SHE OWNS YOU?!*

MEGAN I have to know him.

MAGGIE Shall I introduce you? Miss Foster, our star performer, Ronald Chadron!

MEGAN Oh—

MAGGIE They're calling him up. He's going to read his poem!

MEGAN Do you think he brought a masterpiece tonight?

MAGGIE You like him. Your beautiful body and that bony . . . Sure! Sure. Ronald's a fine fellow. You two could have a beautiful child together.

MEGAN I never thought of a child.

MAGGIE You could have one.

MEGAN Last summer I was by the lake in Michigan and the children there were beautiful. Oh, they had such soft skin and ran without anything on and they were so beautiful.

MAGGIE What are you planning to do with your beautiful body?

MEGAN Be a great writer.

MAGGIE That is for homely women. You have that child. It won't cost you a cent. You could live near a lake and build a hut or something. Ronald could live there with you and write his poems. That could be wonderful.

MEGAN Yes. Oh, if we could!

MAGGIE Why not? You have the child and Ronald can write his poems.

MEGAN We'll be so happy and he'll see that I really am wonderful.

MAGGIE You *are* wonderful.

MEGAN He doesn't know yet that we love each other. He doesn't understand that I've chosen him and he can't get away.

MOLLY I guess it could mostly be about her issues with the guy – her lover, Ronald –

ROBERT As I said, it might be something else.

MOLLY Really I think it's more her struggles with society, fitting in as a woman artist who wants to be independent but also wants true love and marriage and babies. Don't you think that starts to come through in the early scenes? Not fitting in. Or how would I write that so it's more of a hook?

ROBERT I'm not saying-

MOLLY I like the earlier stuff, even if it kind of meanders – do you think it does? I want it to stay true to the novel as far as being a female Künstlerroman.

ROBERT Künstlerroman.

MOLLY Um, yea. Portrait of the artist as a young woman? But maybe that's going to be too hard to pull off – you know – not interesting enough-

ROBERT I don't think that-

MOLLY Like the way critics dismissed the novel. They said Megan was hysterical and egocentric.

MEGAN I want life the way it ought to be.

MAGGIE You are so young, so beautiful, so charming.

MOLLY The whole thing was a trifle, not *serious* literature.

MEGAN I know what it should be—I could write it all down—I know how people ought to look and act and how everything could be made perfect if—

MAGGIE But why don't you do all that instead of troubling other people?

MEGAN What do you mean?

MOLLY Simply focusing on the experiences of a young woman wasn't enough. It was too trivial. It wasn't *important*.

MEGAN They won't let me do anything here. I know what I want to study and they won't let me. I want to develop my highest faculties.

MAGGIE Yes, of course, we all want that. These courses were planned by men who had that very idea in their minds.

MEGAN But I don't like what I'm taking. It doesn't fit me.

MAGGIE Not good enough eh?

MEGAN You think I won't do anything great.

MAGGIE What do you write about anyway?

MEGAN I don't know. Oh, I want to change people so they'll be like me, so they'll be full of life instead of cold and polite!

MAGGIE Why don't you change instead of forcing others to change?

MEGAN I'm changed already. And when I want to change more—Oh please can you let me take what I want?

MAGGIE What is that?

MEGAN A seminar in Descartes, Spinoza and Leibnitz.

MAGGIE Seminars are for mature, serious-minded students. If you want to read the great Descartes, why not go to the library and read for an hour each day.

MOLLY I'm worried Megan will come off too – um, cosmic? Righteous? I found the character in the book so honest – she's real, especially for the things that might make her 'unsympathetic.' But the way she was savaged by the critics – Megan and Margery- I don't know.

MAGGIE I wish Miss Foster would have to live in a pig yard for one month. I think if she did she'd change her philosophy.

MEGAN They won't let me choose. I can't even pick out what I'm going to eat. That's a fact.

MAGGIE I think what she needs is to find out a little about reality instead of deliberately fogging it and messing it up so that a rational man wants to—yes, vomit. Such deliberate evasion is sickening.

MOLLY But I guess it does take awhile to get to Ronald.

ROBERT Also a lot of the scenes involve reaction or discussion of something that has just happened or is about to happen – you might consider actually showing these events. Having Ronald as a physical presence might solve – as the narrative progresses he's pretty much the focal point for Megan –

MOLLY Beyond her writing of course – which can't really be played by an actual character, haha.

ROBERT Erm, right.

MOLLY Oh god, of course – *show versus tell*. But I was so set on *not* having Ronald ever appear onstage –

ROBERT I see what you mean, but—

MOLLY You do?

ROBERT You might consider bringing him in.

MOLLY Okay. I just – I wanted this play to be all women, the women playing the male characters – but yea, it probably needs Ronald. More effective.

ROBERT We don't really know what the play is about until he enters the story.

(RONALD ENTERS.)

RONALD Oh, hello!

MEGAN I've been hunting you.

RONALD I've been trying to get you on the telephone.

MEGAN Honest? Honest?

RONALD I want to take you to a concert next week. Can you come with me? Listen, break it off if you've promised some other guy and come with me.

MEGAN But no one has asked me. Oh, thank you—Oh how long will I have to wait?

RONALD Then you'll come with me?

MEGAN I'd love to.

MAGGIE *You always love everything.*

MEGAN But does he like me anyway?

MAGGIE *Yes, I'm sure he does. Yes. Both of you shine sometimes but the others here don't shine any of the time.*

MEGAN Shine!

RONALD Say, what are you doing to me? Tell me. It isn't fair if you don't. Lord, I really don't care what you're doing to me. Are you mad about that letter I wrote last year?

MEGAN No.

RONALD You aren't falling asleep, are you?

MEGAN Perhaps I am.

RONALD God, this is a superficial age. It really is. That sounds like crap but it's absolutely true. Hey, are you laughing at me again? What the hell!

MEGAN Are we the same person?

MAGGIE *You wish.*

MEGAN But something is going to happen to us. Really.

RONALD I know how to take care of you. God, why am I saying this, Megan? Did you hear me say it? I said it for the first time.

MEGAN Oh, what?

RONALD Your name. I couldn't say it now, though. I'm dizzy. Do you mind my loving you? My God, I do love you. Your lips frighten me some . . . Please don't let me spoil this. I might, you know. Don't let me—don't let me get away. I can see you to your room, but I can't stay. I'm lonely. I'm damn desolate. I can't be interesting.

MEGAN Ronald!

RONALD Hello. *(Pulls out his cigarettes.)* Have one?

MEGAN No, no, no . . .

MAGGIE *What's wrong with you?*

MEGAN I feel—Oh, do you think he knows anything about me inside myself?

MAGGIE *What the hell? He's only seen you about twice.*

MEGAN Oh, that's not true. We know each other. I've lived with him ever since his letter and his picture in the paper—Oh, he hurt me—I'm hurt—I hurt. Everything is hard like this tree. You can't make it understand. You can't make it give or do anything but just be there like cement.

MAGGIE *You've always had your own way.*

MEGAN I haven't!

MAGGIE Yes, you have. You're afraid of reality. It hurts. You hate it because you can't make it your own – and you want to own everything. And you're afraid of facing the real world—

MEGAN I'm not. I have faced it. I went away—I worked—I have—I know I'm scared.

RONALD Well, what shall we do?

MEGAN Let's walk.

ROBERT So how much of this is directly from the book?

MOLLY Well, I've edited quite a bit and moved stuff around – it's more like a collage—like those posters teenage girls make of words and phrases cut out from magazines.

ROBERT Okay.

MOLLY The language is so wonderful – I wanted to preserve it.

ROBERT Sure.

MOLLY Let the characters speak as they do on the page – or off the page – because the book is like that, the narrative...like, speaks to the reader - it *performs*.

ROBERT Okay, so you've taken snippets and strips of dialogue-

MOLLY Well, yea – but it's all torn apart, shredded even, and then I've reassembled - with stuff added and changed and Maggie and Margery thrown in. So in that sense it's radical... maybe?

ROBERT I guess I'm still trying to get a sense of the narrative *structure* – sure, it performs, but the real *drama*-

MOLLY Right, I need to think conflict.

RONALD Damn that library!

ROBERT Think about what the climax is going to be.

RONALD Spent all afternoon trying to find Crane's 'Maggie, A Girl of the Streets.'

MEGAN About a prostitute?

ROBERT Work towards that.

RONALD Of course they didn't have it.

Hey, what is it? I've decided I'm giving you all my books.

MEGAN What? What did you say?

RONALD I'm giving you all my books. I like them better than anything I own. I'm going to write your name in every one of them as soon as I get back. I want you to have everything I prize the most.

MEGAN Oh, don't—don't—I don't want that.

MAGGIE You don't want him to love you, you don't feel happy knowing that he does. But my God, he does, he really—

MEGAN I am happy. I love him.

RONALD Try to dominate me. My god, I wonder if you could. Try to change me. I have to be changed by you. Make me over—make me stop smoking—make me do something— Oh, hell, try, try. I want you to change me into something—something— You probably couldn't.

MEGAN But I could!

RONALD You're beautiful.

MEGAN I will. I do love you—I love you.

RONALD You're beautiful. I'm your slave. Listen, I'm talking to you darling. Oh, I've said it, and I didn't feel self-conscious. Darling . . . My God, how am I going to make you happy? What am I supposed to do? Tell me, tell me what you expect. Megan, you're so beautiful, you're pure—I'm expected to know—I mustn't hurt you—what do I do—how—tell me—tell me— How clean you are, how good you smell! Oh, here you stand in front of me—what—God—hell—listen— Have a fag?

MEGAN Don't you know I don't smoke? Ronald, I have to tell you the truth!

RONALD Don't—don't you do it. I don't want it yet—don't tell me— I'm your slave, you mustn't—you won't—I'm your slave—we have to love each other—always—

MEGAN I won't ever forget this night or how I feel now.

MAGGIE How do you feel?

MEGAN I don't feel anything. I feel far away. I feel as if I—own him—and could do anything I wanted with him. Oh, it hurts me—I don't like it.

MAGGIE How else?

MEGAN Far, far away. Not happy or sad or anything—just far away.

RONALD You're beautiful—beautiful.

MEGAN I'm tired. I'm going home. Good-bye. Oh, I want to sit in the dark all alone.

RONALD Listen—listen, Megan—

MEGAN This ought to mean everything—everything to me and it doesn't. I want to go. I can't go and I can't stay.

RONALD But you'll walk with me. We'll walk for a while.

MAGGIE Oh yes, you're so sure of yourself. Nothing anyone says can touch you.

MARGERY *(to the audience)* She puts out stools and tiny chairs so that he will fall over them-

MAGGIE Of course you are doubly in love now. You don't know why. You try so hard to be honest.

MARGERY She likes to save him.

MAGGIE You tell yourself you still have room to love many others - all at the same time.

MARGERY *(to the audience)* She likes to throw out her arms toward him and clutch as he sways.

MAGGIE You don't think you're good enough for him.

MARGERY *(to the audience)* She likes the way he swears under his breath and then smiles shyly and pretends he isn't embarrassed.

MAGGIE How selfish it is to be honest. He seems so old to you. Mysterious. Strangely handsome.

MARGERY *(to the audience)* The way he sits deep in a chair without speaking, his tongue showing at the corner of his mouth as if he wants to push the room full of words.

MAGGIE There you go fooling again. Seeing the things you want to see. Seeing yourself see them.

MARGERY *(to the audience)* She always has to laugh.

RONALD There you go, Megan, laughing at me again. I don't see the joke.

MEGAN I can't help laughing. Sometimes we sit like this for so long without talking that I have to laugh.

RONALD What do you think about?

MEGAN I won't tell.

RONALD Please.

MEGAN No. *(Falls to laughing again.)*

RONALD You're cruel, Megan.

MEGAN What?

RONALD You're cruel. I like to pretend you're cruel.

MEGAN What does that mean?

RONALD Don't tease me. I haven't got used to you.

MEGAN Why dumb-bell?

RONALD I might kiss your feet. I think I could do that without feeling odd.

MEGAN No, don't bother.

RONALD I understand you, remember. I appear at a disadvantage because I'm intimidated by your flippancy; but I understand.

MEGAN I suppose so. I know you're very intellectual—

RONALD Don't! Stop using that high talk. Set your voice down. God!

MEGAN You like the *Maggies of the streets*. You like women who look like rats and keep bottles of booze under their beds and spit on the floor. You like women who know about life—reality. *Reality*. Listen, my boy, listen to your mother speaking; *beware of women without illusions*; my good boy, listen; Mama's—

RONALD For God's sake, cut it out! Say, do you hate me?

MEGAN (*throws herself at his feet*) No, no, I won't let you go into the world. You can't go; I won't let you go, it's too dirty, too hard and cruel, you can't go. I'll hide you behind me, I'll save you . . . No, no Ronald, I know what it is, I'm going to save you, shield you. (*Goes from weeping to laughter*) Why did I say all that crap?

RONALD God knows. Now you're stirring me up again. You look at me and your eyes are just like a fork stirring my insides. You tear my bones apart with them. Cut it out!

MEGAN Do I? Do I? Fine. Grand. Wonderful. Look how happy I am. God, Christ, Jesus, I never said those words before. Grand. Lovely. See my lovely world. Don't we love the world? Isn't it fine? Grand? Just the way we want it? Isn't it noble and honest and good and kind and full of love? Damn all love.

RONALD Don't look at me all the time and quit talking for publication. Say, stop talking like a book or I'll get mad. Let's talk for ourselves for a change. You're always talking for the public.

MEGAN We always talk as if someone is listening, Ronald.

RONALD You mean you do.

MEGAN Oh, I don't mean any of it. Oh, I mean all of it. Oh, what is life anyway?

RONALD There you go. All right. Life's a deep subject. Oh, yes. Deep.

MEGAN Is it a sin to mention life?

RONALD Just bad taste. Life isn't a subject for the young unless they can stand superior to it and kick it around a bit.

MEGAN I'm sick of you, Ronald.

RONALD You're just sick of yourself.

MEGAN But I'm a beautiful mother to you Ronald.

RONALD Why can't I go? God, this is nauseous. I want to sit down and tell you my life story. In another minute . . .

MEGAN Oh, go on, just leave. You're making fun of love and of me.

RONALD Don't be so free with that word love. It's bad taste to mention it unless you're joking.

MEGAN But there is such a thing. Love—more love—

RONALD Toenails of love.

MEGAN You aren't fooling me, Ronald Chadron.

RONALD Megan, for God's sake! How will this end? We can't stop talking.

MEGAN You're immorally serious. How I loathe this, how I abominate, loathe, despise, hate, hate—

RONALD I'm tied with a thousand ropes. You with those damned respectable pearls on and that respectable hair and—why can't I kiss you today?

MEGAN You can only hurt me.

RONALD Shall I go?

MEGAN Yes, go!

ROBERT So where is it *going*?

MOLLY Where is it going? Where is it going...

ROBERT It still feels—

MOLLY I know, I know! It was an attempt to *show* – not tell -

ROBERT Of course, of course-

MOLLY But the *conflict* – it's *too* light-

ROBERT No, I just meant-

MOLLY Static?

MAGGIE *My dear-*

ROBERT Not that-

MAGGIE *Why this is just grand!*

MOLLY Of course! *Narrative structure.*

ROBERT Just keep going. Keep going. What about the Arvia scene?

MEGAN Hello Arvia.

MOLLY AAAAAAARRRRGH!

MEGAN I saw you the other day and you didn't see me.

MAGGIE *Megan you look positively human today. You look just like anyone. It's grand. Where are you living?*

MEGAN Mrs. Glore's.

MAGGIE *Heavens! That's a terrible place. Watch out for her, she's positively vicious.*

MEGAN Aren't you living at the house anymore, Arvia?

MAGGIE *No, I'm not. Not this year. I could get you in easily. Don't you want to come? It gives you all sorts of privileges with the deans. You know Miss Holmes is a dean now. Yes, sir, Dean of Women!*

(Waves to boys.)

Hello dumb-bells. Say, all these young boys give me a pain all of a sudden.

MEGAN Did you ever think of me, Arvia?

MAGGIE Honestly, I did, Megan. Let's talk about life now. I like you lots more than I did before. Do you like me?

MEGAN Yes—Oh, I do, very much.

MAGGIE Shall I tell you my whole life?

MEGAN Oh, please. Then we can be friends!

MAGGIE Let's stand here. I want you to see someone. He'll be along in a minute. I've got a class but I don't care.

MEGAN So have I.

MAGGIE Look — look! See — there he is. Dean Sinclair.

MEGAN I've seen him before. I can't remember where . . .

MAGGIE Probably had a class with him.

MEGAN No, I'm sure I didn't.

MAGGIE He's been Dean of Men here for ten years.

MEGAN Is he really decent?

MAGGIE Why of course. He's a darling. I adore him. Oh, come on out of all this. Let's step out where we can smoke. I feel—I feel—miserable.

MEGAN I never smoke except in front of people like Dean Sinclair or someone who disapproves—Miss Holmes or someone like that.

MAGGIE He doesn't disapprove. He never minds when I do. And I do it all the time. He really doesn't care. I feel odd. Oh I'm alive—that's all I care about anyway.

MEGAN I wish I could feel the way you do, Arvia.

MAGGIE I suppose I don't really care so awfully. But, oh, I don't think it's decent to hide things all the time. I don't consider it manly to—Oh, I think people ought to be honest.

MEGAN So do I.

MAGGIE Listen, Dean Sinclair and I are having an affair. We're in love.

MEGAN Good heavens!

MAGGIE *You have to say he's nice or I'll loathe you, Megan.*

MEGAN But—but—I can't—I mean—

MAGGIE *He's really grand. He's never felt this way about anyone before in his whole life. I don't see why he doesn't get a divorce. Why doesn't he Megan? He loves me. He doesn't care for his family. He told me so. He . . .*

MEGAN But is he a human being?! I can't imagine him even eating a meal or combing his hair. He looks like a wooden man.

MAGGIE *Oh, that's not true. Oh, that's unfair. Oh, I wish I understood about it. I don't really understand. I don't. I don't know what it's about or what it means and sometimes I think it's going to end just—horribly.*

MEGAN But could he ever feel warmly enough to kiss anyone?

MAGGIE *Of course. I think you're horrid. He's terribly—warm. That's why he's a dean. He has to know all about everything like that or he wouldn't be any good in the job. He told me so.*

MEGAN But he isn't lenient with the students.

MAGGIE *Say, I'll hate you in a minute, Megan. I can't help it. It—just comes over me. You have to like him a lot now and persuade me he's grand. I'm weakening. Oh, sometimes when I see him the way we did this morning and he acts so distant I feel as if I'm going to end up horribly—kill myself or something.*

MEGAN But if you're really living does anything else matter? I know I would be frightened but other people seem so much braver than me and so much more used to things.

MAGGIE *Everything matters. I don't know—sometimes I think I'll just leave him and dash around with these young boys on the campus.*

MEGAN Do you suppose all these professors are human beings, Arvia?

MAGGIE *I imagine.*

MEGAN Then why do they look so frozen and dead?

MAGGIE *I don't know. Oh, he's—I can't tell you—he's—*

MEGAN He can kiss a girl. Dean Sinclair can really kiss someone.

MAGGIE *Oh, deans are particularly that way. He told me. And they all notice girls' legs too. He said so. I suppose he does too.*

MEGAN Oh, I'm sure he doesn't, Arvia.

MAGGIE Listen, if I ever telephone for you will you come right over because I might get just miserable some night—and oh, you will come, won't you, Megan? Please promise me. You're the only one here I've told. You don't know anyone . . .

MEGAN Oh, I wouldn't tell. Oh, I promise you, Arvia.

MAGGIE He'd kill me if he knew. And no one knows where I'm living. I have a different address in the directory. I'm in the Italian quarter near the station and it's grand. They have the sweetest babies over there and the cellars are full of wine and such funny little rooms. I love it.

(Arvia picks a blossom and sticks it in her dress, begins a Spanish dance.)

You be my audience, Megan. Tell me how you like it.

MEGAN I can't—I have to find someone—

MARGERY When I think of the men I have known and the experiences I have had I wonder what other women have had to endure.

MOLLY What struck me when I read her letters, were the relationships she had with women—in the end they seemed far more intense than anything she had with men – well, maybe not Kenneth Fearing and Jean Toomer.

ROBERT So the Ronald character is . . .

MOLLY The leftist noir poet Kenneth Fearing. Margery Latimer met him at the University of Wisconsin and he followed her to New York. They lived together in sin on Staten Island. She supported him and he gambled and boozed and slept with prostitutes. Then she got pregnant, had an abortion and left him.

ROBERT Interesting.

MOLLY Then she married the Harlem Renaissance poet Jean Toomer – he wrote that novel *Cane*. They were both involved with the Gurdjieff movement, that's how they met.

ROBERT I see.

MEGAN But reading her letters—it's like the men were secondary or examined from distance—her intimacy with her friends like Blanche Matthias and Georgia O'Keeffe was something else entirely.

MARGERY When I think of the women who by some magic, some inner aloofness and cruelty, stood aside with inhuman withdrawal and imposed her life on a man. It is all wrong and hideous, of course, but perhaps it is wise.

MEGAN It made me think a more interesting play might be about her and Blanche. I'm still fiddling with ways to bring the letters in.

MARGERY I don't want the past back again, I don't want to hold anyone. But I when I think of loving that boy and never the whole time being able to help him...

MAGGIE I know the kind of men you like. It's no compliment to be liked by you. You don't know a real man when you see one.

MEGAN I know them; that's why I never see them.

RONALD How many men have kissed you?

MEGAN I kiss them.

RONALD Can you count them on one hand?

MEGAN Don't be an ass. When did you get like this?

RONALD I don't know. I didn't know I was like this. Intellectually, I understand...

MAGGIE He thinks you're worthless. He thinks you're fooling him every minute.

MEGAN Don't be absurd.

MAGGIE You like freaks. Half-wits. You aren't satisfied until you get your hands on a person and know all his affairs and his whole soul—then—

MEGAN My legs are tired.

MAGGIE Oh, you're impossible.

RONALD Tell me you love me!

MEGAN Oh Ronald!

RONALD You don't care.

MEGAN But I love your feet, Ronald.

RONALD I do too.

MEGAN Ronald. Our souls want to know each other before our bodies. I think that's why everything is so hard.

MAGGIE Puff! He wants your body. You're full of talk about souls and mystics and impracticality. He despises impracticality. He hates mystics. He hates souls.

RONALD You won't let me near you at all. I have to take the little you'll give. You won't even let me kiss you in peace without having some argument about Spinoza or Plato or Frank Harris and Spengler.

MEGAN No. Oh, I'm not like that.

MAGGIE Can't you see he's not the same anymore? Are you blind? He used to get along by himself—

RONALD I'm lonely all the time for you. I miss you like hell when we're apart.

MAGGIE Don't you see what it means? No, you don't—you don't—

MEGAN I . . . I . . .

MAGGIE If you'd just let him get close to you. If you could just forget yourself and all your airs and ideas then—

RONALD Oh, hell, I'm a bawling baby about you. Maybe we should separate for good, Megan. I'm not the guy for you. Damn it, I don't know whether I can be in love or not. Maybe I'm not made that way. We'd better stop before I make you terribly unhappy.

MAGGIE He's not any good but you don't know it yet. It's hell, but it will be better—in the end—

MEGAN Why?

MAGGIE He's such an egoist.

RONALD I can't go on. It's hell.

MAGGIE He'll make you wretched.

MEGAN That's not true.

RONALD You're an angel. I love you. You don't know it yet, but I do.

MEGAN Then we won't separate! Oh, you didn't mean it.

RONALD I don't know. I just feel it would be best in the end.

MAGGIE You're so pure. He's full of that Sir Launcelot stuff yet. You know.

MEGAN But I'm not pure. I don't want to be. I don't want to be innocent. I want to know everything in the world. I want to be alive like others. I want the whole thing.

MAGGIE You're always so pure. Look at you—

RONALD How can I make you happy? Everything I do seems to affect you and I don't want to ever hurt you.

MAGGIE Lord, can't you see? Can't you understand what's wrong?

MEGAN No.

MAGGIE But he just told you.

MEGAN I don't understand. I'm not like you say.

MAGGIE You are. Look at yourself.

MEGAN I'm older than him. I'm twenty-three and he's only twenty-one.

MAGGIE But you're a child. You've got the mind of a child. He's so much older than you—really.

MEGAN I love you, Ronald.

RONALD (*holding up her hands*) Whose hands are these?

MEGAN Mine.

RONALD Whose body is this?

MEGAN Mine—mine—

RONALD Darling. See, I said it again. That's the second time. Only this time I was self-conscious about it.

MAGGIE When are you going to let him sleep with you?

MARGERY (*to the audience*) My dear landlady called me to her just after he had left.

'This boy comes all the time. I wish your mother was here. I wonder if she would approve of your seeing him so much – and in your room too. You are alone so much of the time and everyone is beginning to talk. I've thought of telling the Dean's office. I trust you, but it's just the looks of the thing. I know you're not a loose girl.'

I just looked at her. Then I wanted to laugh and say, 'Maybe I am. Don't be so sure of it.'

MAGGIE Won't you sit down? I want you to tell me everything as if I were your mother or your sister.

MEGAN My landlady was very rude to me last evening.

MAGGIE Indeed. And what was the provocation?

MEGAN He was calling on me.

MAGGIE *I don't believe I understand.*

MEGAN Mr. Chadron

MAGGIE *Tell me from the beginning. Was it after hours?*

MEGAN It was about eleven o'clock and it was in my room.

MAGGIE *I see. About eleven o'clock and in your room.*

MEGAN It's fixed up like a sitting room.

MAGGIE *I see.*

MEGAN Mrs. Gore's parlour is terribly stiff.

MAGGIE *Yes, I understand. And what were you and Mr. Chadron occupied with? I mean to say, what were you doing at the time she entered your room?*

MEGAN Sitting on the floor talking.

MAGGIE *On the floor talking. Oh, yes. And what had been going on prior to that?*

MEGAN Kissing.

MAGGIE *I see. I see. You were allowing him to kiss you. On the mouth?*

MEGAN I kiss him. But it hurts us to kiss. We want more than that. We want to know each other through and through and it's so hard, it seems so unnatural, we can't do anything, we are just helpless and it hurts—

MAGGIE *What kind of kisses are these, Megan?*

MEGAN I don't know.

MAGGIE *And what other lovely things do you do together—you and this young man—in your bedroom where your most intimate possessions are. What is there left for you two to do alone, locked in your bedroom at such a late hour—alone, the young man having kissed you, you having returned the kiss. I want you to speak.*

MEGAN I can't—I want to go—I feel odd. I'm sick—sick in my stomach.

MAGGIE *I don't doubt that for a moment, Megan. Usually young girls are sick in their stomachs before—before—I mean to say after such things as you intimate, a young girl would normally be sick at her stomach.*

MEGAN I'm going. I feel dizzy.

MAGGIE *Sit down!*

What do you mean? What do you mean by bringing down the standards of university women? The standards of womanhood and manhood? What makes you two feel that you are isolated members of society and not subject to its laws? This university reflects the high ideals of civilization. We have nothing to do but obey. Now, what right have you to deliberately tear down what someone else has built for the good of it all?

MEGAN We're ashamed, but not for what you think.

MAGGIE *I've had enough of this moral looseness. It's about time this university took a stand against conditions here. It's unspeakable. There's nothing but sex, sex, sex between students all the time. Their minds are full of it, they talk it, think it, eat it, wear it; sex is their soul and body, their purpose in living, their only means of expression. Look at yourself for one moment and if you have any shame in you, any fine breeding or conscience, then despise what you are doing every time you get out of sight of authority.*

MEGAN I don't want to live in your world. I don't want to make you understand. Oh, this is all I've ever seen. Just the dirt and meanness of people who don't want to love anything or be beautiful and—free. Yes, free. Free. If I didn't want to be free, after looking at you, then I ought to be burned at the stake, I ought to be mutilated until I can't walk or feel. I'm proud that we are lovers.

MAGGIE *What amazes me, is that affairs have gone so far that you will speak out this way. That impudence and self-assurance alone is enough to convince anyone that you are not desirable as a student in this institution. Or any institution. I have also had occasion to glance at your literary work. I understand that you cannot write anything without putting something suggestive of sex into it. I've had my eye on you. You can't get by forever, you know, but our best evidence against you lies in your very modern poems and stories.*

MEGAN Yes, I mentioned a breast and a navel in a story once.

MAGGIE *You're rotten. Rotten!*

MOLLY She's expelled and moves to New York City.

ROBERT Margery?

MOLLY Oh, I'm not sure. Megan.

MEGAN Expelled for being immoral. Expelled for being immoral.

MARGERY She walks alone, small and unseen by the side of the monstrous towers that rise in the bright blue sky, past hundreds of orange awnings and severe doormen with heavy coats.

MOLLY Ronald stays behind.

ROBERT The Kenneth Fearing character?

MOLLY Just like Kenneth.

RONALD Will you promise to come back?

MEGAN Oh you know I will. I couldn't leave you for good.

RONALD How do I know?

MARGERY See her, as she walks with the throngs-

MEGAN If I could fly up, up...

MARGERY The great office buildings all meeting there in the sky.

MEGAN I love the buildings. They make me feel big.

MOLLY Margery –

ROBERT Megan –

MEGAN I love the city.

MOLLY No matter how exhausted, how hungry, she-

RONALD Why do you have to pretend all this?

MEGAN Oh Mama, Papa!

RONALD Why do you put up so many defenses all the time?

MEGAN Oh they mustn't suffer for me.

MOLLY She works—

ROBERT You said—

MOLLY On her novel.

MARGERY Now she walks faster, swinging her arms more easily, finding a path for herself on the cement. Breathes as if at any instant something strange and startling will happen, making her life different.

MEGAN I am not afraid. I am not afraid. I am not afraid. I am not afraid...

MARGERY Waits for the throb of anguish, as if something might give way in her.

MAGGIE *You can't - you don't dare! You can't.*

MARGERY See her stand taller.

MEGAN It's as if I am on a bright cloud or stream that flows above all the darkness that once was.

MAGGIE Where will you go? What friends have you there?

MEGAN I'm going. I'm taking my money.

MAGGIE Will you want to take your winter coat?

MEGAN Yes.

MAGGIE Telegraph.

MEGAN I will.

MAGGIE Write.

MEGAN I will.

MAGGIE Don't forget.

MEGAN No.

MAGGIE I trust you.

MEGAN Yes.

MAGGIE You're all I've got on earth.

MARGERY A room that is just large enough for a bed and a table and a chair. Water bugs on the walls. One barred window through which she can see half of the sun setting every night.

MAGGIE Telegraph.

MEGAN I Will.

MAGGIE Write.

MEGAN I will.

MAGGIE You're all I've got.

MARGERY The noise of the city clanks and roars past. Lights from the street burn in her face all night.

MEGAN Mama, Mama...

MAGGIE You've grown thin. Your face is longer and not so bright.

MARGERY Her dresses hang slack on her body and the wind blows through her green coat.

MEGAN I need no one, nothing. I can live alone.

MAGGIE Can you bear the distress and agony of dark, dark stairs and night?

MEGAN How does a brave girl walk?

MAGGIE Is it honest to pretend?

MEGAN How does a brave girl feel?

MAGGIE You're weak inside and ready to cry.

MARGERY See the windows of food. Roasted chickens. Virginia ham surrounded by pineapple slices.

MEGAN Dearest Ronald, come soon.

MARGERY Windows of fruit. Windows of candy. Windows of perfumes.

MEGAN Why do you wait so long?

MARGERY Dresses, furs, coats, warm coats, shoes, hats, jackets, boots, typewriters, stockings. Baked apples, mushrooms—

MEGAN Why are you so hurt with me?

MAGGIE Are you Miss Foster?

MEGAN What have I done?

MAGGIE You are promising, Miss Foster. Really quite promising.

MEGAN Do you know that I am hurt at you? Why do you leave me alone?

MAGGIE Why don't you step into my office. Mr. Chatham is busy, but I'm the literary advisor and I've read your book.

MEGAN Did you like it?

MAGGIE Now that is a hard question.

MEGAN I mean do you like it? Does it mean something?

MARGERY To her parents she writes 'I love it here.' Puts something in about her book and how she knows it will be published soon.

MEGAN Everyone is so polite about it. I don't mind. Oh, I saw a big car yesterday and I'll buy it for you—some day.

MAGGIE *As a first novel I would call it promising. I would advise you to wait—*

MEGAN What—Oh what?

MAGGIE *I would advise you to wait four years or say ten or fifteen years until you have become mature enough to handle your theme.*

MEGAN Did you like the book?

MAGGIE *You do show talent. What work do you do in the city, Miss Foster?*

MEGAN I do typewriting sometimes. I type books—but I don't make it look awfully nice.

MAGGIE *I see.*

MEGAN I have a hard time.

MARGERY Sometimes she writes at the end—'I am lonely, I am sad,' but she always scratches it out and writes: 'It is hot or cold' over it. One time she draws a large kiss on the page. Then she drops ink on it and blots it out.

MAGGIE *We all have to go through it. Now that book of yours shows promise and I'll wager the next one will be excellent. This book as it stands will be published when you already have a name for yourself. Now, Miss Foster, do let me see anything else you might have.*

MEGAN *(to herself)* Oh, I hope I never see you again.

MAGGIE *I beg your pardon, Miss Foster; I didn't catch that. My dear, you must cultivate a more philosophical outlook. You're entirely too personal, too . . .*

MEGAN Oh, let me be.

MARGERY Her parents keep sending five-dollar bills in letters.

MAGGIE *You wish you had the courage to throw it into the street!*

MEGAN I want to stand completely alone in the world, depending on just myself.

MAGGIE *You don't dare.*

MARGERY She keeps the money in her purse and waits a long time before eating.

MEGAN I love it here! MacKnight and Green think my book is interesting. I'm going to hear from them soon.

MAGGIE Oh Ronald, come to me, save me, come, come, carry me away, help me.

MEGAN I can't go back now. I'll see him again.

MAGGIE If he really loved you, he'd come.

MEGAN Don't say that! Don't! Don't!

MAGGIE What did you expect?

MEGAN No, he's going to be a great poet!

MAGGIE He's not coming.

MEGAN He's going to marry me.

MAGGIE Expelled for being immoral. Expelled from college for being immoral!

MEGAN We're revealed to each other.

MAGGIE Why do you have to pretend all this?

MEGAN He was right—he was right that time—we had to separate—something was wrong.

MAGGIE Now you have no home.

MEGAN Now I am facing life. I'm free. I'm not frightened anymore.

RONALD Arriving Tuesday night. Grand Central. Love, Ronald.

MAGGIE Only a moment is left to you now-

MEGAN Oh, don't let me fail.

MAGGIE Only a moment more of peace that feels like chaos, only an instant left in the girl body, the girl soul.

MEGAN Go forever, let me live, let me be free.

RONALD All my worldly possessions. Gee, this is swell!

MEGAN You had your trousers pressed.

MAGGIE Just for you.

MEGAN Why were you mad at me?

MAGGIE He's forgotten. Honest.

RONALD I'm taking you to the opera tonight.

MEGAN I loathe it.

RONALD You have to go. I planned it on the train. It's all decided. If I don't take you on the first night you'll never forget it. You'll hold it against me.

MEGAN We have a room, Ronald. We're going to live in it.

MAGGIE Now he's your slave.

MEGAN I'm almost happy.

MAGGIE Almost?

MEGAN I have to give him all of me before I can be really happy.

MAGGIE But what if he means what he wrote to you, Maggie? That he doesn't need you any more?

MEGAN Do we really have to go to the opera, Ronald?

RONALD Yes. You'll hold it against me if we don't. I know you. You'll say you don't want to go and when we don't go you'll bring it up in three years' time and say I betrayed you.

MAGGIE Betrayed? What is that?

MEGAN He loves me now.

MAGGIE But don't forget you left him behind-

RONALD But don't forget you left me in a hell of a lurch that day. Lord, that was criminal.

MEGAN But do you mean what you wrote, Ronald? That you don't need me anymore and if I had stayed you would always need me?

MAGGIE He meant it.

MEGAN I don't understand.

RONALD I do mean it.

MEGAN Don't say that!

MAGGIE Listen Megan, listen!

RONALD Hell, before I couldn't walk alone.

MAGGIE He's learned to walk!

RONALD I couldn't write for anyone but you.

MAGGIE Now he writes for everyone!

RONALD I couldn't even—breathe—but now I do. I could get along without you but it would be hell. I could do it though.

MEGAN No!

MAGGIE You shouldn't have gone.

MEGAN Ronald!

MAGGIE Oh, and how you have suffered...

RONALD Let's talk about something pleasant. Shall we get married?

MEGAN Why?

RONALD I think you're great.

MEGAN I want to be generous.

RONALD Yes, and there mustn't be any reservations.

MEGAN None.

MAGGIE If you get a baby you'd better marry.

MEGAN If I get a baby?

MAGGIE You trust him, don't you?

RONALD You're not defending any more, are you?

MEGAN No.

MARGERY They go to the opera. They walk home without noticing the distance. They go up the four flights arm in arm.

MAGGIE Swallow your fear, force it down with all your dreams, choke them far down inside you, forever.

MEGAN Don't let me fail.

MAGGIE Good-bye to your girl body, your girl soul.

MEGAN Oh, I'm frightened!

MAGGIE Good-bye forever.

MOLLY Everything's falling apart!

MAGGIE You're alive. You're free.

ROBERT ?

MOLLY I've been doing this massive overhaul of the play the last couple weeks, and I had this awful thing happen where I showed it to a friend and they basically said it was awful, didn't work, made no sense—

ROBERT Ach! That's horrible.

MOLLY At first I was fine and figured I went too far trying to be all meta and modern. But now I feel like the whole bottom has just fallen out of my PhD. Oh God!

ROBERT You must NOT doubt the play.

MOLLY No, they're right – maybe it's *interesting* but it's also so muddled and confusing it's impossible to grasp what's at the heart of it. What's Margery doing in the play? Or Maggie for that matter? Maybe she seems functional taking on the voices of the others but what is her own voice, what's her position? What's the nature of her relationship to Megan and Margery? What's Margery's thought-line? What is Margery's world, her story? How is her presence in the play shaping it? The whole thing is pretentious and confusing and—DULL.

ROBERT Stop this. I mean it. You have some wonderful stuff in there—in places it really sings.

MOLLY I DON'T KNOW WHAT I'M DOING—seriously, I don't even know what the characters are talking about half the time! *My own characters!*

ROBERT I don't believe that.

MOLLY I'm fucked.

MEGAN I'm awake. I'm alive. I'm in the world.

ROBERT The Megan and Ronald relationship is really coming along—it's very recognizable.

MAGGIE You look different.

MOLLY You think?

MEGAN Now I am full of light.

ROBERT Yes. Now make it stronger, sharpen it a bit.

RONALD You look radiant.

MEGAN I'm happy.

RONALD So am I.

MEGAN I want to do something for you.

RONALD All right, let's spend the rest of our lives in bed. Well, a month anyway, or a week.

MEGAN But come outdoors – it's beautiful.

RONALD I don't like outdoors. I hate to walk in the daytime.

MAGGIE You see? You never really want what he wants.

MEGAN I do.

MAGGIE All he wants is to spend the day in bed.

RONALD What time is it?

MEGAN Fifteen of eight.

RONALD Don't bother me again until noon.

MEGAN Oh, come on with me.

MAGGIE Let him alone.

RONALD Go away for one hour and then come back. After that I'll do anything you say.

MEGAN Please get up now. I want to go outdoors with you.

RONALD You run along the way I told you.

MEGAN I won't. I don't want to. I want you to walk with me now.

RONALD Damn it, can't you let me sleep in peace?

MAGGIE You don't want him to be himself, do you? He's put up with a lot from you — and he's not going to forget it anytime soon.

MEGAN Yes, I'll let you alone!

(Megan turns to leave, but Ronald goes after her.)

RONALD Miss Muffet.

MAGGIE He needs you. He wants you.

MEGAN Oh, when he holds me I feel as if angels are flying out of me. They're flying out. They're in my arms. Everything in me is flying out into the world . . .

MAGGIE Don't talk about heaven.

RONALD Miss Goosie.

MAGGIE He didn't really mean to hurt you.

RONALD Your white neck and your innocent face—Miss Goosie.

MEGAN You've given me a body. I have a body.

MAGGIE He told you so a long time ago.

MEGAN I have a body.

RONALD I suppose I might as well get up now and dress. Hungry? Where shall we eat?

MEGAN Aren't you going to take a bath?

RONALD No.

MEGAN Ooooooh, I hate that. Don't you bathe every day? I can't bear that.

MAGGIE Can't you just let him be?

RONALD I feel wonderful today. Must be the weather.

MEGAN Do you mean that?

RONALD Sure.

MEGAN You really think it's the weather?

RONALD You don't object to that, I hope.

MEGAN Then it isn't me— Oh, what shall I do? This is all something tremendous to me and to you it's like—eating—eating breakfast.

MAGGIE Little Me-Me. You still have to be the center of everything, don't you?

MEGAN I'll go.

MAGGIE No you won't.

MEGAN I will. I won't love him so much anymore. I can't. I'll go.

RONALD Silly Miss Goosie. I'm really your slave. I'm just pretending.

MEGAN But you used to be humble about it and now you act—as if you have power over me.

RONALD Oh yes, I have you in my power now, haven't I? Haven't I? I'll strangle you—I'll—

MAGGIE Good Lord, what are you crying about? Can't you see a joke?

MEGAN I want to be in your power. I want you to own me and tell me what to do and never stop loving me . . .

MAGGIE Ha! And you thought all the uneasiness would go.

MEGAN No, I was always wild. This is peace.

MAGGIE Now it's multiplied a million times, it's close to the surface, it's no longer nameless and lost in the dark.

MEGAN My virginity was nothing. I must give more.

RONALD Lord, I'll have to get a job. Damn it all, a guy can't be happy without money.

MEGAN Why not?

RONALD Have to eat, have to have a good time, have to smoke, have to get drunk, have to go to the concerts.

MAGGIE You don't know anything about life. But you're his now.

MEGAN And he's mine.

RONALD Ready? I'm going to make you happy. You watch!

MEGAN Oh, you do, you have, you do.

RONALD You wait. This isn't anything. You wait.

MEGAN Nothing can kill us! We will be alive when we die - nothing can put us out of the world!

MAGGIE Don't get transcendental on him, Megan.

RONALD I mean it. I'm going to make you happy.

MAGGIE He will, if you let him.

MEGAN I know what I fight against in him.

RONALD My only quarrel with you is that you distort the most obvious things.

MEGAN He tries to laugh at me and make me over.

MAGGIE Darling, you're always feeling something eccentric.

MEGAN Then I don't know reality?

RONALD No—well, I guess you do know a little now.

MEGAN But—

RONALD Nothing common pleases you. Everything has to have meaning.

MAGGIE The poor guy can't just read the paper and enjoy it, or just smoke, or just walk.

RONALD Everything has to be significant and I can't enjoy it if it is. I don't like stuff trimmed up. You can't enjoy it unless it is.

MAGGIE He doesn't believe any of it.

RONALD I want things just ordinary so I can rest and relax.

MEGAN I don't care. I have to see my own soul.

MAGGIE There you go.

MEGAN He has to see who I am.

RONALD Damn it, can't you let me love you just plain?

MEGAN People used to shove me aside but now they don't.

MAGGIE I'll bet.

MEGAN Now I don't fear people. Everything outside me is fire and I'm fire too. Oh I am born.

RONALD Is this going to last all through breakfast too?

MAGGIE Can't you see he's tired of your angels and your fires and your immortalities all the time?

MEGAN I am a child. Now I am a little child.

MARGERY Why is it men are horrified and frightened at a woman who wants to be devoured, completely absorbed?

MAGGIE The way Eve came out of Adam's rib.

MARGERY So that she can rise anew, their creation.

MOLLY She wants self-knowledge at any cost.

MARGERY If I had to write about something not myself, I would suffocate.

ROBERT But is that feminism? Or narcissism?

MARGERY Words that cut through the darkness to reveal the soul.

MOLLY I wonder if she had been a man - laying bare her experiences - if she would have been subject to such attacks...

MARGERY Words like a bright light thrown on my roots and I am free to explore in my own way, and expand as I wish.

MOLLY 'To men a man is but a mind. Who cares
What face he carries or what form he wears?
But woman's body is the woman...'

MAGGIE Hit me! Hit me!

RONALD Damn.

ROBERT Yes, but the problem for me is that at moments the play seems to exist entirely in the mind and there's not enough sense of the body.

MAGGIE Yah, hit me again.

RONALD Hell.

MOLLY You mean on stage it's abstract - the body trapped in language –

ROBERT Because we can SEE bodies up on stage there seems so little connection between it and them.

MAGGIE *Come home to Mama. Hit me again!*

RONALD Jesus.

MAGGIE *Hit me, I said!*

(MAGGIE has slipped into the physical embodiment of 'Oda' here; she might dance suggestively or even straddle Ronald's lap as she mocks the poker players, calling out 'hit me' etc.)

RONALD Where in hell is that lousy wood? I'm cold. God it's damn cold, this is unbearable.

MAGGIE *You and Megan are soul mates. Wait till she gets home – then you can talk out your respective nobilities and superiorities.*

RONALD I'd like to be warm for one hour.

MAGGIE *Atta boy. Hit me.*

RONALD For cryin out loud.

MAGGIE *God, I'm gettin' horny.*

RONALD Damn hungry. Damn cold.

MAGGIE *Hit me.*

RONALD Wish I could fill this stomach for once.

MAGGIE *Here's to Princess Oda!*

MARGERY Look at all she's brought him to eat.

MEGAN I won't bother them.

MARGERY How he glares at her - like he loathes her.

MEGAN I'll put these things in the alcove for later when the others have gone. They read their poetry sometimes if I ask them. Ronald won't, but they will.

MARGERY And that woman. Princess Odelliva. Used to be Oda Helper.

MEGAN She's like that marshmallow stuff – you know – you spoon it out.

MARGERY An ex-typist and switchboard operator. Changed her name when she got to play a princess in a Brooklyn moving picture.

MEGAN There's something heavy and dense about her flesh - as if it has no pores, as if her spirit has never mixed with it.

MAGGIE Lord, that's grand. That's good.

MARGERY You could imagine her in the morning not washing in water but dusting flour over herself with a sifter and patting it in. Beneath the flour would be dough-flesh so soft it would keep every mark.

MAGGIE Hot baby! Hit me, hit me, hit me.

MEGAN I'm afraid of her. She knows everything I don't know. She knows tricks – she knows something.

MAGGIE You're jealous.

MEGAN You dirty rat, get out before I pitch you out!

MAGGIE Beat it, beat it, beat it!

MEGAN Get out before I put my hands in that potty flesh of yours and rip you apart like dough!

MAGGIE Yaah yaah, filthy whore!

MEGAN When Ronald sees how I loathe her, he'll take her home.

MAGGIE He'll leave you for Princess Oda!

RONALD What's going on in you? What's the trouble?

MAGGIE Hear that?

MEGAN When a common prostitute comes in I can't compete. I might as well go about my business.

MAGGIE Oda's one hot baby in bed!

MEGAN He'll make love to her because I hate her.

MAGGIE I'm ready to go. I'm leaving.

RONALD I'll walk with you Oda.

MARGERY What do you call it—intercourse with a corpse, there's a name for it.

MEGAN No, I can wander off, wander off.

MAGGIE Prince Ronald, has to protect the damsel in distress.

MEGAN Oh, what shall I be? Where is a face for me, a real heart? I have no real face, no strong noble body to rise out of.

MAGGIE Has to keep a close watch on his—

RONALD (*to Megan*) What do you mean by treating anyone on earth – Oh, I can't talk to you. How can you insult... Oh what's the use it? You cant—

MEGAN Tell me I'm worthless.

MAGGIE You want to worship him. You want to be less than him.

MEGAN Teach me. I want you for a master.

RONALD Don't! I don't want this.

MEGAN Show me how I should be.

RONALD I want you to be decent to everyone.

MEGAN Oh yes, yes—I want to!

MAGGIE You don't. You want it for him.

RONALD That poor thing has had a hell of a life.

MAGGIE You're jealous. You act superior.

RONALD You don't know what it means or what she's gone through. The struggle to eat, just to eat.

MEGAN I do – I work – I typewrite- I –

MAGGIE Do you know what it means to get up early and steal bread from the crates when it's piled in back of the grocery store?

RONALD She's had to face reality all her life and you've never faced it.

MAGGIE Did you ever steal milk early in the morning or try to lift eggs?

MEGAN Stop! Stop, stop, stop stop, stop . . .

MAGGIE Hit me.

RONALD Hell.

MEGAN Take everything I own.

MAGGIE Give me another. Give me a hard one.

MEGAN Take it all.

RONALD Got any coin?

MEGAN Take my bed.

MAGGIE Give me. Hit me.

MEGAN Don't leave anything.

RONALD I'm damn cold.

MAGGIE So am I.

MEGAN My clothes. My pictures. My hats.

RONALD I'm damn hungry.

MEGAN Everything.

MAGGIE Got any crackers?

MEGAN My knives and forks and spoons.

RONALD No. What the hell!

MEGAN My books.

MAGGIE Yaaah. Yaaaah.

MEGAN Take it all! Take everything! Take this bed! Drag it out with you! Take the dishes, take every little thing I have . . .

(MEGAN falls to knees in surrender. RONALD takes her in his arms.)

RONALD Sssh. Precious.

MAGGIE One day he won't want you anymore.

RONALD You're so beautiful.

MAGGIE He won't be able to tell you. It will be horrible.

RONALD Goosie. Little Me-me.

MAGGIE He'll have to stay—

RONALD I can't bear to hurt you—

MAGGIE And it will be hell.

MEGAN Oh Ronald...

RONALD It's hell.

MAGGIE You don't understand. You never have.

RONALD Oh God, what I mean is that you never really give yourself to me—you pretend to, but you don't.

MAGGIE Now you remember. Now you know —

MEGAN I never loved the way I wanted to until I wasn't myself anymore.

MAGGIE The brightness that he could never share.

MEGAN My love is still locked up. My love is still iced over.

MAGGIE It shimmers in him now. It is a city. It is a forest all clean and cool and virgin.

RONALD You're always putting your personality in my face. I don't want it. I don't want your ideas. I have better ones of my own.

MEGAN I don't love. I don't give everything, that's why I don't love . . .

RONALD I want to see you. I want to tell you where to get off occasionally and I don't dare.

MEGAN Oh, my light, my self, my own—

RONALD Lord, there you go. Always fancy.

MAGGIE Always distorted.

MEGAN Oh I cannot give him, I cannot let him destroy, I cannot let go—No. I can't.

MAGGIE Never plain so a person can meet you simply.

RONALD Always fancy.

MEGAN Stop! I'm a woman. Don't you dare.

MAGGIE Ask anyone. She is.

MEGAN Oh, I am, I am.

RONALD I want your flesh.

MAGGIE He wants your flesh. He needs it—He wants it—

RONALD Then I'll love you forever.

MEGAN You don't want me?

RONALD No.

MEGAN You just want my body?

RONALD Yes.

MEGAN You don't want my love?

RONALD No.

MEGAN My flesh—this flesh—

RONALD Yes.

MEGAN I must die.

MAGGIE Yes.

MEGAN Oh, I am frightened. Oh, my Father in heaven, what does it mean?

MAGGIE Your flesh. Your soul.

MEGAN Oh women, women of the world, loved by men, tell me how you get so empty—so soft—so sweet.

RONALD I'm telling you the truth. I want your body.

MAGGIE Give him your body and he'll love you forever. He won't ever be able to leave you.

MEGAN That's not true! It's not enough. It can't be.

RONALD Your body is all I have in the world. The only reality.

MEGAN Oh, I am helpless. I am alone.

MAGGIE *Run while there is still time.*

MEGAN I am surrounded by darkness. Oh but the light shines on him –

MAGGIE *Run! Run swiftly!*

MEGAN Good-bye girl, good-bye.

ROBERT I wonder if I am reading their relationship right? I think he's kind of using her. She's got some dream of complete immersion, of the intensity of a romantic-sexual relationship, but he's mainly in it for the sex – or at least he's just not ever going to completely commit in the way she is.

MOLLY Now – yes - but it wasn't always that way. In the beginning it was pure. Or, as pure as it can be, they're so young and naïve.

ROBERT Okay, but if my reading is a plausible example of what an ordinary audience member might think, it distances us from Megan because we understand what she does not. We are, in fact, in his position.

MOLLY We are? In the beginning he begs her to change him, to love him forever, to never let him go. He changes alright – or maybe he doesn't, it's that she's failed to change him. Maybe that was never possible, you can't really change anyone. But she's desperate and not ready to let go of her dream – and once it was his dream too. He's left her behind – maybe he is more mature, even if he's a cad and she won't accept it. You think that makes her less sympathetic? Or pathetic? There's no more *drama* then? I'm not sure I understand.

ROBERT I wouldn't say she's pathetic – it's just – I think it relates to my comments on Megan: when she talks worriedly or scornfully about the 'Maggies of the street' are we supposed to favor her? But those women - and Princess Odelliva too - seem to be bodily, physical women, which is something that Megan is aspiring to.

MOLLY Right, but-

ROBERT So why the scorn? Is it because they are what she doesn't dare to be? Or is it that they betray the intense truth of the body by using it for cheap sex? Is it that they evacuate love or the soul from the body?

MOLLY No—I mean, yes, it's all of those things, but it's also much simpler than that—it's a human—of course she scorns—

ROBERT What about class? She scorns these women for their lower class behavior, it seems to me. What do you think about that?

MOLLY No, it's not about class, I don't think – it's simpler – it's not about the other women really. It's more Ronald not loving her as she wants. The unfairness of life – it's *reality* she scorns.

RONALD God, what a nightmare! Precious, wake up!

MOLLY Or I don't know, maybe you're right. Who wants to watch a play about a dreamy, delusional girl who refuses to let go even though her lover is kind of an ass.

RONALD I'm an ass to tell this. I am. But I'm half asleep. Lord, I keep remembering those cats I used to have at home.

ROBERT No, maybe it's me: where I find the play hardest to get along with is when it seems to be very personal and in any way angsty.

RONALD One was black, part Persian. I just dreamed I sliced his head off with a silver knife and the head rolled over purring and the whiskers shook.

MOLLY Argh. I'm lost. Don't know what I'm writing about. Not smart enough. I'm so fucked.

ROBERT No, maybe - I'm thinking that this might be more about me than you. And the last thing I want is to steer you away from something that works well just because it's not to my taste.

MOLLY Oh god.

RONALD God. Listen. I never told you about those damned cats. The orange one had kittens and when they came out she just yowled all the time until I put her in a bag and tried to drown her but I couldn't. I wanted the pretty ones. She got uglier every day. I loathed myself for wanting to get rid of her and for not doing anything, but I couldn't. God damn it, I thought, a man has to have some stability even with cats.

ROBERT This is a process.

MOLLY Okay.

ROBERT Even the failures will serve your research—

MEGAN We have to make it.

ROBERT Maybe even more than the successes.

MEGAN We can. We must.

MOLLY I want to do the book justice—I want to serve Margery. I just don't think I can. I don't have it in me—I'm not skilled enough as a playwright.

RONALD There's something base in me. I don't love anything I own.

MEGAN Ronald...

ROBERT Molly...

RONALD It kills me to make you suffer. I love you and I always shall.

ROBERT I hate to see you like this. Of course you can do it.

MEGAN I want a baby. I want to marry you.

MOLLY I just want it to be good.

RONALD I'm hungry.

ROBERT Let's get another coffee and maybe a slice of that cake and have a proper dramaturgical discussion. Okay?

MAGGIE She's smiling like an idiot!

MARGERY Her eyes are sad but her body -

MAGGIE Oh yes — the red has returned to her cheeks. She glows.

MEGAN We're going to have a baby.

RONALD I'm freezing.

MEGAN The room is freezing.

RONALD I guess it isn't true.

MEGAN It is true.

RONALD I guess it isn't.

MEGAN Oh it is.

RONALD Then do something now, for God's sake, stop it, do something.

MEGAN You don't mean that.

RONALD I do. I'd go insane.

MEGAN You just think that now.

RONALD I know it! I'm hungry, I'm cold, I want to be a great poet, I want to stay in the world. I'm going for coffee. Can't you loan me a dime? You'll get it back.

MEGAN In my coat.

RONALD We ate all your fruit and stuff.

MEGAN I don't care.

RONALD Rogers was here again. I suppose he stole something.

MEGAN I don't care now.

RONALD Can I take this quarter? You'll get it back.

MEGAN All right. Why don't you work? Why don't you go out the way I do and break yourself apart typing books and earning two cents. For God's sake, grow up and earn your own bread at least.

RONALD I knew you felt that way about me. But I've paid back every damned cent so far and I will if I have to sell my blood. God, I won't ever borrow anything from you again. Take it back, for cripe sakes, I don't want it or anything from you. I don't want anything, did you hear me? You can keep all your precious....

MEGAN Oh Ronald! Ronald, I don't mean it—

RONALD Don't—

MEGAN I'm the child. I'm the child.

RONALD Precious. Goosie.

MEGAN Oh God, what do I do to you, Ronald?

RONALD I'm the damn weakling.

MEGAN If you love me...

RONALD Oh precious, I love you. I'll always love you.

MEGAN I'm the child. I am warm by you.

RONALD I'm your slave.

MEGAN I am safe.

RONALD Shall I bring you back a sandwich?

MEGAN Bring me a glass of water. I feel sick.

RONALD Why do you always take advantage of my bondage?

MEGAN I want a glass of water.

RONALD You never let me anticipate what you want. You demand. You don't wait and let me surprise you.

MEGAN Oh you never do. That's why. I know. That's why.

RONALD You don't know how to do anything but demand.

MEGAN Ronald, I don't know what slave means.

RONALD It means you expect me to wait on you all the time.

MEGAN You're a grand slave. I'm learning what it is to be loved by a slave.

RONALD Listen Megan, we've got to cut out the scenes and this messing around on the floor. You've got to promise to stay in bed and not jump after me every time I want to be alone. And I want you to quit tearing my knees out. Lord, I bet I'm black and blue. It's ridiculous for us to struggle this way and be messing things up all the time. We think about ourselves too much. It's indecent. It's damn weak of us. God, if anyone ever knew the way we flop around on the floor I'd cut my throat.

MEGAN No one must know, Ronald.

RONALD Well, cut it out. Promise me.

MEGAN Oh, I will, I will.

RONALD What shall I bring you darling? I've got a buck. I'm going to bring you something good.

MEGAN One of those cheese sandwiches with the pickle stuff.

RONALD Bye. I'll be back. Want anything else?

MEGAN No, thank you.

MOLLY Oh I forgot—there is something else.

ROBERT ?

MOLLY I stupidly submitted an abstract for this conference—basically presenting my research and addressing the question you hounded me about from the beginning.

ROBERT Why you are adapting this novel to the stage.

MOLLY Why I am doing this whole damn PhD.

ROBERT Relax.

MEGAN Dear Mama, dear Papa, how horrified you would be if you could see me now.

MARGERY She sees herself at the top of the Presbyterian church at home, way up high near the church bell.

MEGAN How miserable and wretched you would be. How—oh if you knew I could not be your child anymore.

MARGERY Clinging with only with her toes on the slippery roof, her arms waving in the arched blue of the sky, her voice bringing all of the people to her.

MEGAN I'm going to have a baby and I hope you don't mind. I'm not married. Once I didn't believe in marriage but I do now.

MARGERY They come running, some in cars, some come on crutches, in shawls, some have big baskets of eggs, some have candy. They group around the stone and listen.

MEGAN I would rather have a baby than anything in the world. I am going to have a baby.

MAGGIE People, I am your child. Don't hate me. Don't loathe me. I have to have this baby.

MEGAN Oh Ronald, why don't you defend me?

MAGGIE People forgive me if it is wrong so my parents will forgive me. If you don't care then they won't care and I can love and be loved.

MEGAN Why don't you say in front of them all—'I adore Megan. I would die for her'?

MAGGIE If you draw away from me, my parents will die and I will be an outcast. Oh love me so they can love me and have peace forever.

MEGAN Why aren't you proud of loving me the way I am of loving you? Why do you try to show me that everyone is more important than I am?

MAGGIE Love my Ronald.

MEGAN Please marry me, Ronald. Please *want* to marry me, please urge me, beg me, beg me now—

MAGGIE *Love my child.*

MOLLY (*standing at podium*) 'This paper seeks to explore narrative as performance in modernist women's fiction...'

MAGGIE *Hello Megan.*

MEGAN Why Arvia! How grand to see you.

MOLLY 'Dynamics that will be explored in American modernist Margery Latimer's novel *This Is My Body* and considered in the context of adaptation for the stage.'

MAGGIE *I wrote your mother for your address.*

MEGAN Oh come in! I want you to see my Ronald.

MAGGIE *I don't want to see any men. Can't you come out with me? We'll eat or walk or something.*

MEGAN Yes, of course.

MOLLY 'Today Margery Latimer is all but forgotten, remembered only in passing as Harlem Renaissance author Jean Toomer's first wife, the lover of Leftist noir poet Kenneth Fearing, or Georgia O'Keeffe's close friend; however her literary career, cut short by her early death, saw her published in the same journals as Katherine Mansfield, D.H. Lawrence, Gertrude Stein and James Joyce.'

MAGGIE *Do I look awful in my face, Megan?*

MEGAN Kind of.

MAGGIE *I'm grey all over. My skin is. You look well Megan. I've never seen you look more beautiful.*

MOLLY 'In her fiction, Latimer sought to combine the two opposing paradigms of womanhood on offer at the time—romance and family life, or that of the independent, sexually pure female artist.'

MAGGIE *I've had to have an abortion.*

MOLLY 'Female sexuality and other taboos such as unplanned pregnancy are foregrounded in a direct challenge to what was socially acceptable at the time.'

MAGGIE *You know what an abortion is, don't you?*

MEGAN No. Oh, yes, but why did you?

MAGGIE *An abortion is where a man won't do his part. He makes the doctor take it so he can go back to his wife and children and not . . .*

MEGAN Dean Sinclair. The dean. The dean.

MAGGIE I'm going to make someone marry me. That's why I came here. I don't care who it is but someone has to. I'm going to force it. I'm going to—

MEGAN I think marriage is right. I used to think the opposite but now . . .

MAGGIE Lord, a woman learns from men how valuable marriage is. Lord, you certainly do. I wouldn't go. I wouldn't consent to it. I was horrified and terrified and everything and I told him I'd tell my father about it and he made me go to a doctor friend of his. He said he'd just examine me but they strapped me down and did it. Nobody knows what it was like. My God, I shrieked—I simply yelled myself to pieces. I didn't know what was going to happen. They took me in there. He pretended he was doing it for my father, that I had got in trouble with some student and he was being my benefactor. God. I don't think I like men at all.

MEGAN We'll have him arrested! Ronald and I will send an officer after him. He'll be imprisoned.

MAGGIE I don't want him arrested and they wouldn't anyway. He'd tell a big lie. That's why he has the job. It's because he lies so well.

MEGAN But he's vile, Arvia. I want to hurt him. I want to do something horrible to him.

MAGGIE I don't.

MEGAN I loathe him.

MAGGIE Oh, he's just cruel and stupid.

MEGAN How could you let them?

MAGGIE I couldn't help it. I tell you they strapped me down.

MEGAN I'm sick. I feel odd.

MAGGIE I always thought men were brave. My father is. My father takes care of all of us. I never knew before that men could be so cowardly. You know they take marriage so seriously; that's why they always try to get women without it.

MEGAN Oh, I don't believe—I don't believe— No—I can't—

MAGGIE But they do. They'll marry a girl if she holds back. Of course. We're supposed to be smart enough to know that. Sure. This is a grand world.

MEGAN But not all. Not all. Oh, they aren't all like that.

MAGGIE I think they are.

MEGAN No, no, they can't be; they aren't.

MAGGIE Perhaps they aren't.

MEGAN I know—I have faith.

MAGGIE I think I'll go to Europe. Daddy will give me the money if I can get someone to go with me. Would you, Megan?

MEGAN Oh, I couldn't.

MAGGIE Has Ronald asked you to marry him?

MEGAN He did once.

MAGGIE When?

MEGAN A long time ago.

MAGGIE Why in hell didn't you, idiot? Don't you love him?

MEGAN I thought it was indecent to marry until you—you had given—everything—every part of you. That's the marriage. That's the wedding—when you give it all.

MAGGIE I guess it is.

MEGAN You should have had the baby.

MAGGIE I tell you, dumb-bell, they strapped me down.

MEGAN I won't accept this ugly world other people make. I won't live with them. Now I see what it is. It's dirty. It's shrewd. I'd rather be an outcast than one of them.

MAGGIE You'll have a sweet time of it then. I'm going to get a new dress. Something grand. Daddy told me to. You know we have laws just because men are so vile. All they want to do is go over the universe impregnating all the women and leaving them. Of course if they're forced, if you drive them into a corner with a broom handle, so to speak. I just say salt and pepper all the time to myself. Salt and pepper. Isn't that insane? Of course I sort of forced him into it and he never did anything like it before—with students. I really believe that. I do. If you drive them into the corner they will pray for their little lives even—

MEGAN Oh, I don't believe . . . We can't live on a level with hogs. We have to exalt life. We can't let them degrade it and turn it into something to be shrewd and sly about—we can't—we mustn't—

MAGGIE Well, I'm going to. I'm going to chase one of them. I'm going to chase him with a broom handle and make him marry me and treat him like a dog so he will love me forever. Yes, I am. I don't care how vile it is. I'm going to.

MEGAN But where would the love be? Where?

MAGGIE In your eye, darling. All the dean could think of to say to me was—'Be a thoroughbred, Arvia dear. It will soon be over.'

MARGERY To escape the fear and nausea – the great panic - catch hold of wood, earth, anything solid and clean, grip it with everything and never let go.

MAGGIE That's right—be a thoroughbred.' But it's all so final.

MARGERY Bind your arms around a tree, clench yourself close—

MAGGIE You can't go back and you know that nothing, nothing can happen ever and you have to accept it.

MARGERY When lightening comes hold the tree even if it splits apart and goes rolling down the cliff.

MAGGIE You have to take it and you know you can't ever get back again to where you were. Nobody asks you whether you can accept it or whether you want to— you have to.

MARGERY Even when the great tremendous floods of water come don't let go—

MAGGIE I want to work. I'd like to have a job and work terribly hard.

MEGAN Yes.

MAGGIE But we're all nothing but rats. Even the ones that look awfully good. Rats. Don't you feel well, Megan?

MEGAN No, I feel awful.

MAGGIE What's the trouble?

MEGAN Oh, if the world's like you say...

MAGGIE It is. I'm so sorry.

MEGAN The world, reality—reality—

MAGGIE Listen, I'll phone you this evening. Good-bye.

MEGAN Good-bye.

MARGERY Pressed as one with the sweet, firm wood, you will be borne into the dark sea.

MEGAN Oh Ronald, let me hang onto you, let me...

RONALD You're stifling me.

MAGGIE It's bad enough now but if you were married he'd eventually strangle you.

MEGAN I want to be unselfish. I want to be different. I want to be—

MAGGIE You can't be. He can't be. This is life.

RONALD I tell you I'm being eaten alive by you—if I drop some ashes or want to work, or—hell, what work can I do with you around all time?!

MEGAN It doesn't have to be this way. We could be happy.

MAGGIE You're never satisfied. You want him to love you differently—he can't—he loves you as much as he's capable of loving anyone.

MEGAN Please — I want you to want to marry me. I want a good life. Please, please, please . . . Let me have this.

RONALD You make me mad as hell. You try to. You like to do it.

MAGGIE For Christ's sake, can't you ever see anything? Don't you know yet what he really wants?

MEGAN I'll take care of him, I can, I want to, I will. I'm going to take care of him. I want to take care of everyone on earth.

MAGGIE You know what he wants. You can't help but know.

RONALD Won't you get an abortion?

MEGAN God, don't say that—I'm so happy—don't.

MAGGIE But you won't be.

RONALD I'd go crazy with a kid around.

MAGGIE He'll run off and leave you, and that would be hell for you, all alone.

MEGAN I feel brave.

RONALD Hell of a thing to do, but they're doing it all the time. But I'll marry you if you say so. Any time.

MEGAN I'll take care of you. I feel brave. I feel strong. I can walk forever and not get tired. I can do anything . . .

RONALD Then do what I say! I'm not influencing you. I know you want the baby. I don't know why in hell you do.

MAGGIE No one on earth would have done for him what you've done.

RONALD It drives me crazy—your generosity to me.

MAGGIE You always try to understand and give.

RONALD I can be a hardware salesman. To hell with poetry. I can live in a bungalow and sell bonds.

MEGAN I don't mean this crying. My eyes are crying. I'm not.

RONALD I can say to hell with poetry and the world and lock myself in the way you want and rot and die like a prisoner.

MEGAN I feel brave.

RONALD Megan, don't you know I'd do anything on earth to make you happy?

MEGAN I can do anything, I'm strong, I'm not afraid.

MAGGIE I know a girl who has to have an abortion.

MEGAN Oh, I can feel our child now in the darkness.

MAGGIE Isn't it hell? Go to Dr. Nitziski. Everyone in the city goes there.

MEGAN I can almost reach out and touch its cool, incredible skin-

MAGGIE He'll do it for thirty dollars. Wear old clothes, or he'll charge a hundred. Look, here's the address.

MEGAN Our perfect child. Perfect as my parents had wished for me to be perfect.

MAGGIE Wait here. It will take an hour to sterilize the instruments.

MARGERY Now there is a fiery twinge in your loins.

MAGGIE Are the pains coming again?

MEGAN I can see the tiny fingernails of the baby.

MAGGIE Turn over on your face. Close your eyes.

MEGAN The curling fingers, the fat bare bottom.

MARGERY Now a burning rod is thrust down your spine, cracking open the very marrow of the bone, then softly, finely scraping.

MAGGIE *Turn over on your back.*

MARGERY Grip the sheet to keep yourself –

MAGGIE *Jump out the window, drink a glass of poison, scream, scream until you fall down insane or dead, crazed, wild, unable to speak again in any language...*

ROBERT ‘Be a thoroughbred.’ Shit-fuck, what a line.

MOLLY I know.

ROBERT But it feels a bit odd to have the two abortions in such close succession. Of course they’re in the book but maybe do something with them. Do more with them. Intertwine and confuse them somehow.

MOLLY You said that of the last draft. I tried – I thought I layered things a bit - but not enough? You think Megan’s experience is somehow – I don’t know – lessened coming right after Arvia’s?

ROBERT The thing is, Megan chooses to have the abortion. Megan wasn’t tricked or forced, just persuaded. And – though this may be anachronistic of me – it all gets very pro-life rhetoric to me . . .

MOLLY That’s it though – I think many women – I’m totally pro-choice and I don’t think I ever want to have children. But if I got pregnant? I don’t know. I don’t think if it came down to it, I could go through with an abortion.

ROBERT So why does Megan do it?

RONALD For God’s sake, why do you always have to be so pathetic? I could talk for days and I couldn’t pound anything into you. Your head is closed. Definitely closed.

MOLLY The fact Megan has such a strong sense of her baby as she’s having the abortion—I don’t think that’s any kind of underlying pro-choice message on Latimer’s part!

RONALD I’ve been too good with you, too sympathetic, too everything.

ROBERT What I’m getting at – going back to – when she says things like ‘I won’t accept this ugly world other people make . . .’

MOLLY She says that earlier, but she’s a young unmarried woman in the depression era who’s pregnant and terrified and Ronald’s reaction when she tells him – he’s brutal, so verbally abusive –

RONALD Any other guy would have throttled you long ago. Anyone with an ounce of brains, anyone—Now with those teeth. Now with those tears. Oh, I can’t talk. You can’t understand with

that head of yours that's so fancy and full of beauty. I can go to hell for all of you. I can go to the devil.

MOLLY It's like in the beginning, the scene where her friend talks about how the noblest thing a woman can do is make a great sacrifice for a man.

MEGAN I'll take care of you. I feel strong. I can do anything...

MOLLY Ronald has just said he'll stifle and rot if she has a baby. And Arvia has just schooled her quite devastatingly in reality. It's impulse and naïve but she thinks she's being brave. Facing reality. Finally.

MEGAN I feel brave.

RONALD Then do what I say! I'm not influencing you. I know you want the baby.

MOLLY Sure, maybe the bravest choice would have been to have the baby – but it's not a *pro-life* thing. Arvia is physically forced to have her abortion – yes – but Ronald's reaction to her pregnancy is no less violent, as psychological abuse. But maybe that's not clear – I've gone too easy on him – I should make that clearer in the next draft.

RONALD My God, did you go alone?

MAGGIE *That was brave.*

MEGAN I feel kind of weak but I'm all right.

MOLLY I think it's also Latimer's swipe at that whole leftist movement. Ronald is so anti-bourgeois, spouting his bohemian/socialist ideas but he never *really* listens to her. The radical left was just as patriarchal as the bourgeois society it scorned.

RONALD Was it bad?

MEGAN Awful. I'm still shrieking.

MAGGIE *It's over now.*

MOLLY Arvia and Megan are both forced to have abortions because their lovers are unwilling to cede primary importance in the relationship – to make it public, to do anything to salvage these women's 'respectability', which they have trashed, to acknowledge the relationship as anything other than an illicit sexual liaison.

MEGAN Let me have your hand, your hand—

RONALD Are you sick?

MEGAN Just one of your hands. Please. Your finger even.

RONALD Here, sit down.

MEGAN No, I feel all right.

RONALD Do you want a glass of water?

MEGAN Oh say it again! Would you really give me something? Say it again, and again.

RONALD Loads of women do it, you know.

MEGAN You used to say it all the time.

MAGGIE I want to die for you Megan!

MEGAN You needn't do anything—just say it—just once—

MAGGIE Just the two of us, against the world!

RONALD Don't hate me. I'll die if you hate me.

MAGGIE Is there a man anywhere who would have wanted the child?

RONALD Don't suffer, please, it kills me.

MEGAN Is there a man anywhere—anywhere—who wants life instead of death?

MAGGIE Is there a man who would let you love him?

RONALD I love you.

MEGAN You don't love me!

MAGGIE Look what you've done.

MEGAN You've let me betray myself. If you loved me you would have wanted a child, you would have wanted to give me something to keep forever. Now I haven't anything—a child is the only real gift from a lover.

RONALD I'd do anything to make you happy, I swear I would.

MEGAN Think of one thing I want.

RONALD I never make you happy. If I thought I could it would be different.

MEGAN Comfort me.

RONALD I have to work. I'm not getting anything done.

MEGAN I've punished and violated and betrayed myself.

RONALD What did the doctor soak you?

MEGAN Thirty.

RONALD I'll pay half. I can wire my father for it. God, and you went all alone. Thank you for that.

MEGAN Now I know why I hate that softness in women, why I loathe it, why I want to destroy it. I've got it in myself. I prayed for it. Now I've got it. I did what you wanted, I was empty, I followed you, I did what you meant me to do. Oh rotten, weak. I'm not a woman. No woman destroys life. Men do that. Women don't—they keep it, they protect it.

RONALD Megan.

MEGAN I'm going.

RONALD Don't let's talk. It's weak to talk about oneself all the time.

MEGAN Did he ever want to marry me?

MARGERY Yes.

MEGAN Did he ever want a good life?

MARGERY Yes.

MEGAN Did he ever think of a baby?

MARGERY God, yes, he wanted all of it.

MEGAN Oh, when? When did he want it?

MARGERY I don't know. A long while back. I don't know.

MEGAN I must give. I have so much—I have so much.

MARGERY Precious.

MEGAN Oh, he'd leave me alright, he'd abandon me, let me give it all before he did.

MAGGIE You always have to be tragic, don't you? Little Me-Me.

MEGAN I'm going.

MARGERY Don't go now. It's late. You're not well. Wait until tomorrow.

MEGAN I won't ever wait and wait on corners where he's promised to be and then forgotten to come. Oh, this crazy vile world. I'm losing my mind. As soon as you love someone they stop loving you.

MAGGIE *Your world is crazy.*

MEGAN Christ! What if he dies and I'm not here—?

MAGGIE *Nonsense. You're going to be a great writer.*

MEGAN No.

MAGGIE *Yes.*

MEGAN I want a baby. I want him. I'll go and he won't even hunt for me. This is a relief to him.

MARGERY You knew it was true. You knew all the time.

MAGGIE *You have been boring him every minute for months.*

MOLLY I feel more confident.

ROBERT Good.

MOLLY Although I'm still not sure if I could answer the question—

ROBERT Let's let that go. Let's talk about the play.

MOLLY Do you think Margery's presence is still too vague—I want her to seem like more than just a narrator. Do you think she's active enough as a character in her own right?

ROBERT You mean her relationship with Megan?

MOLLY Yea, all of it—do you think it comes through enough, in the sense that she and Megan — and I guess Maggie too — are one? Should I try to work in more of the details of her 'real' life? Does it matter? I guess as long as the play stands on its own...

ROBERT How exactly did she die again?

MOLLY She died in childbirth. Less than a year after she married Jean Toomer. She was thirty-three.

MEGAN *(at a typewriter)* For Ronald. For Ronald. Everything on this page is for Ronald. I love Ronald. Dearest, dearest, dearest Ronald, I am your wife, I am your child.

ROBERT I know you mentioned at some point experimenting with some kind of framing device.

MOLLY Exactly! Like maybe the three women aren't enough.

ROBERT Well, now you also have Ronald in the play—

MEGAN Dear parents, I have moved uptown. It is a lot like where I lived when I was in college. It is clean.

MOLLY You were right – it makes a difference!

MEGAN It looks just the same.

ROBERT Having Ronald.

MEGAN Thank you for the stamps. Oh, I forgot to tell you—

MOLLY I could put myself in there!

ROBERT Perhaps.

MOLLY Yea, I dunno.

MEGAN I forgot to tell you that my book is accepted and I bought you both presents the other day. And I'm already well into my new one! I am so happy. I am wretched.

(Yanks paper out of the typewriter, puts a new sheet in.)

MOLLY And the ending.

MEGAN *(as she types)* 'I am...

(Strikes it out.)

'I was...

(Strikes it out.)

'She was...

MOLLY I was trying to do that thing, like with the self-begetting novel.

ROBERT ?

MEGAN She was... she was rather large with a full sweet body. Her hair fell to her dark brows in front in a curly bang...

MOLLY Where it ends and you know the main character is about to write the story that's just been told.

MEGAN 'The gold will go out of it,' mother always said. 'Your grandmother had red hair and dark brows and when she died it was raven black...'

THE END

Appendix C

A photocopy of Margery Latimer's *This Is My Body* can be accessed at the following link:

<https://www.dropbox.com/s/92fafsvzp2hdolz/This%20is%20My%20Body.pdf?dl=0>