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In that the concept of authority in terms of the creation of a literary work of art indicates a single creator or controller of a literary work, a delineated inscriber of the text who initiates the act of communication, writing for theatrical production can be described as a feminized art form, because it utilizes collaborative rather than independent creativity. The identification of a single creative authority controlling the movement between text and audience is complicated by the interpretations actors, designers, directors, and producers interpose between the playwright and the audience in the creation of a theatrical work of art. The necessity for interdependence among the artists replaces the independent I/my continuum of power and ownership with the interactive we/our.
Playwriting and Authority:
Collaborative Art and Feminine Production

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Elissa Hare  At least no merchants traffic in my soul.  -Browning
Linc Kesler  If we be a little obscure, it is our pleasure; for rather then we will offer to be our own interpreters, we are resolved not to be understood.  -Jonson
Marie Chesley  I think that looking at art . . . should be a kind of adventure where you make discoveries that are not explicable or immediately brokered into words.  -Trisha Brown
Stephen Chovanek  One by one we're all becomming shades; better to go boldly into that other world in the full glory of some passion than to fade and wither dismally.  -Joyce
Lance Christopher Walker Brown  The river is wide, I cannot see/ Nor do I have light wings to fly/ Build me a boat that can carry two/ And both will row, my love and I.  -Anon.
Karen Anne Walker Brown  This is the end of the journey and the beginning of all delight.  -Lewis
Enid Clarke  A lover's eye can stare an eagle blind.  -Shakespeare
Holly Knight  Whether the spirit of greatness or of woman/ Reign most in her, I know not, but it shows/ A fearful madness.  -Webster
Bregolas de Vindique  A dragon is no ilde fancy.  -Tolkein
Harry Anderson  And he cries, as they cry, Evohe!  On Bacchae!/ On Bacchae!  -Euripides
Dennis J M Brown  I thank whatever god may be for my unconquerable soul./ My head is bloody but unbowed.  -Henley
Julian P R Brown  No prisoners, no mercy and no crybabies.  -Brown
Cat Edwards  Golden dreams cannot outwiden those blue eyes.  -Edwards
Frank McConnell  Paradoxical mixture of culture and violence we call the Renaissance  -Donnington
Chris Anderson  Why let the stricken deer go weep/The hart ungalled play:/ For some must watch, while some must sleep/ Thus runs the world away.  -Shakespeare
Mary Lynne Brown  Desire of greatness is a godlike sin.  -Dryden
Dennis J M Brown  Virtue's his path; but sometimes 'tis too narrow for his vast soul;  -Dryden
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INTRODUCTION

In the following pages I will argue that playwriting, as the beginning of a larger artistic endeavor which involves many artists who collaborate together to produce the work of art received in many different forms by many different audiences, is collaborative, interdependent and multiple in nature and describable as a feminine art form.

I explore Edward W. Said and Roland Barthes's definitions of author which refer to an author as a single person who is in control of the meaning of what is written. This definition suggests that there is only one correct meaning of the writing, that the reader of the writing uncovers the meaning and the extent to which a reader understands what the author wanted understood is the extent to which the reading is correct.

I apply principles of reader response criticism, and deconstruction to this definition to show how other areas of literary criticism work with the concept author. Reader response criticism supports the validity of the interpretation of the reader even when it does not reflect the ideas of the author. Deconstruction argues that no writing has only one correct meaning, that language itself has an element of uncertainty to it
which allows for many interpretations of both individual words and words combined in various types of writing.

I use the theory and practice of live theatre to show how the postulated control of the author is less applicable in the case of the playwright. In practice, the playwright has little control over the production of a play; control resides with the director, or is divided between director, producer, designers, cast and crew. In theory, the study of language and the making of meaning -- semiotics -- identifies many languages on the live stage: spoken language, languages of movement, visual languages of line and color, for instance. All these languages interact to create the work of art the audience sees and the playwright has control over only the written language of the script.

I apply principles of deconstruction and linguistics to the practice of theatre, pointing out how the cycle of production and re-production of a play create many contexts in which audiences may see the play, and the many possible meanings this produces.

I explore current feminist theory which identifies certain characteristics as feminine, for instance, plurality or multiplicity, interdependence and collaboration, in opposition to the more masculine characteristics of independence, singularity and control -- all aspects of the initial definition of author.

I take a feminist stance in conclusion, and claim that playwriting can be described as a feminine art form, that it opens
the definition of terms like author, writing, playwriting, control and power to feminist definition.

In the first appendix, I have included two essays indicative of directions my thinking about composition theory took me in terms of the work of two playwrights. The ideas which I have been exploring opened a space in which I could approach and discuss plays differently, approach the specific position of the playwright within the playscript or in relation to the playscript with another understanding of the authority structure.

To this theoretical exploration of plays and playwriting, I add (as Appendix B) a discussion of a play which I wrote and in a production of which I collaborated and a copy of the playscript, because that experience was the basis for, and the start of, my thoughts on the theory of playwriting: I am a playwright and I believe that the script of Excommunication presents my ideas of feminine art and morphology as effectively as the theoretical discussion does.
PLAYWRITING AND AUTHORITY

I was not meant to be alone and without you who understand.
-Lorde

In the essay *The Death of the Author*, Roland Barthes defines the author as the reference point of explanation: "The explanation of the work is always sought in the man or woman who produced it, as if it were always, in the end, through the more or less transparent allegory of fiction, the voice of a single person, the author, confiding in us" (143). This establishes a interesting parallel between defines and kills. There are two essential points here: the author's authority over the meaning or explanation of the work, and the establishing of author and authority as a single voice -- the one person to whom the reader can turn and ask for the answer.

Edward W. Said in his *Beginnings: Intention and Method* finds in the connections between author and authority not just control of the writer over the meaning of the text, but the continued authority over the text's meaning based on the right of creation. Said begins by exploring definitions, the term "Authority suggest[ing] . . . a constellation of linked meanings" (83). Beginning with the OED definitions ("a power to enforce obedience," "a power to influence action," or "a power to inspire
belief") Said moves through the "connection as well with author -- that is, a person who originates or gives existence to something, a begetter, beginner, father or ancestor, a person also who sets forth written statements," to distill four ideas central to the concept authority:

(1) that of the power of an individual to initiate, institute, establish -- in short, to begin; (2) that this power and its product are an increase over what had been there previously; (3) that the individual wielding this power controls its issue and what is derived therefrom; (4) that authority maintains the continuity of its course. (83)

The connection here between the status of the authority as progenitor, creator and authority's right to "control its issue and what is derived therefrom," is very strong. In terms of writing, the author's position as writer, and thus owner yields the right to make meaning. From authority to author, the power of creation is linked with ownership and continued control; the relationship between author and writing is thus defined in terms of creation, ownership, and control.

Somewhere between the theories of Barthes and Said, the definition of author implodes. The interaction among the components of authority is circular. The initial linear reasoning (the creator is the owner, the owner is the agency of control, and the agency of control is the source of meaning) turns back on itself. The association of creation with ownership and control is also based on the image of the author "confiding" in the reader. If there is a single meaning to a piece of writing which moves in a
communicative arc from author to reader, the author informing, the reader being informed, the reader’s reliance on the author stems from the author’s position as writer, creator of the work. The creator is the source of meaning and thus the owner and controller. This turns the text/author relationship into an enclosed inward spiral: the author is the creator; and if creator then owner, if owner then controller, if controller then maker of meaning and if maker of meaning, then owner and controller. Every line of inquiry folds back in on itself with the author at the center.

The emphasis which attention to production places on the beginning -- author as generator -- associates writing with speaking and the moment of speech. Just as the spoken word fades into silence meaning something only the instant it is spoken and heard, the meaning of the written word is inscribed in the moment of writing. The search for meaning becomes the search for what was in the author’s mind during the writing. This conception of author as creator of meaning encloses the meaning of the text in the moment of writing, placing the control over the meaning of the text in the intention of the individual whose creative power brought the work into being. This makes the position of the reader of the written word (or the hearer of the spoken word) less consequential. If the author is in control of the meaning of the text, if the writer is the ultimate authority on what the text means, then the meaning is fixed, there is no possibility that the reader
will see something the author did not intend or such readings will have no validity. The ability of the reader to read, to interpret, is removed from the communicative arc.

The definition of author as one writing, one confiding and thus one to whom the reader turns for clarification of the meaning of the writing is troubling on two counts. The first involves the reader because the idea that the reader asks the author for an explanation which the author then supplies, doesn’t account for the reader who doesn’t ask. The creation of meaning must happen both in the mind of the author and the mind of the reader and the only constraint the author has on the reader is the writing itself. Even the image of the author confiding, that “transparent allegory of fiction,” has an association with the reader’s interpretation of the reading process, part of the obvious fallacy of mistaking the narrator’s voice for the author’s.

Further, the idea of the one author is more specifically problematic because of that one-ness. The emphasis on independence, like Wayne Booth’s portrait of the scholar “alone and increasingly lonely,” writes out the interactive, communicative and even collaborative aspects of writing (117). Barthes places the author in the modern world, “a product of our society insofar as, emerging from the Middle Ages with English Empiricism, French rationalism and the personal faith of the reformation, it discovered the prestige of the individual, of, as it is more nobly put, the
'human person'" (Death, 142-143). Barthes' association of the creation of the concept author with the rise of individualism is telling, postulating as it does the complete separation of the author from society: not in that an author works outside a social context but in that writing is defined as the action of the individual, in the dismissal this makes of collaborative writing.

Barthes connection of the power of creation, of origination, with explanation and interpretation, functions, in the act of killing the author, to confirm authority simply by identifying the extent to which the idea of interpretation, of the meaning of the text, is commonly seen as residing with the text's originator. In order to redefine the parameters of the author's power, Barthes begins by defining the power of the author as near absolute, thus potentially conferring more power on the author than even the proponents of the author as maker of meaning would. From assessing the author's power, to questioning the reader's control of the text, is a short step and the problematic position of the reader is in the center of Barthes' essay. The assumption of a single, fixed meaning resident in the intention and control of the author destroys the sense of possibility that is present in language and thus in any linguistic endeavor -- the possibility of multiple readings from multiple readers, of writing as interactive communication as much formed by the reader as it is by the writer, the possibility that a work can mean more than one thing, that it can be read differently by different readers.
This theoretical position, which, according to Nelly Furman, insists that "because it is the result of a dialogical process of exchange between reader and writer concerning the signification provided by the materiality of this linguistic medium, each and every reading is unique," represents not merely the championing of the powers of the reader of the text, but and undermining of the concept of an authoritative interpretation (69).

Wimsatt and Beardsley's contention with the search for author-intended meaning, "The Intentional Fallacy," presents the extent to which the "intention" of the author is inaccessible to the reader, that "critical inquiries are not settled by consulting the oracle" and, argues that in any case, the author's intention would have little bearing on such questions even if it were accessible (344). Barthes goes beyond this, finding even in the identification of the author the circumscription of the meaning of the text, the erasure of the space of reading. Barthes argues that "to give the text an Author is to impose a limit on that text, to furnish it with a final signified, to close the writing" (Death, 147). According this sort of wholesale control to someone or something identified as the author narrows the potential readings to a single choice, a single correct interpretation.

Rather than accepting the idea of writing as fixed in the thoughts of the author, Barthes maintains that "we know now that a text is not a line of words releasing a single 'theological'
meaning (the 'message' of the Author-God) but a multidimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash" (Death, 146). Both Barthes' Author-God and Wimsatt & Beardsley's oracle figure the power of the author as single, as quasi-divine and thus unrealistic, apocryphal, an avoidance of reality. The space which the elimination of the one voice, the author, opens up between the text and the interpretation, between writer and reader, is the space of the reader placed in opposition to the idea of the single I, the author's authority.

In "The Politics of Language," Furman further points out the potential in deconstructive reader response criticism:

> When a textual reader steadfastly ignores an author's presumed intentions or the assumed meaning of a literary work it is a serious act of insubordination, for it puts into question, the authority of authors, that is to say the propriety of paternity. (71)

In describing the ultimate overthrow of authorial power -- willful misreading -- Furman, in true post-structuralist fashion, presents not only the idea of working outside the world of the author but of creating out of language and literature a structuring system based on multiplicity, lack of structure, lack of definition. Furman quotes de Beauvoir's non-definition of woman, "she is the incidental, the inessential, as opposed to the essential. He is the Subject, he is the Absolute -- she is the Other" (64, xvi). De Beauvoir figures woman in contrast to the absolute, essential, the
one phallogocentric principle of the universe, the woman, not one but many, presents not merely an alternative to the absolute, but many alternatives in the same way that multiple readers may provide multiple readings of a single text. The possibilities that being other represent to the reader, the author's other, allow for the questioning of reading for authorial control.

The status of writing as communication, of writing as a movement between writer and reader, lessens the authority of the author. Barthes' image of the author "confiding" in the reader functions importantly here because of the dependence it implies -- dependence of the author on the reader as well as reader on author. The desire of the author, not as an individual, or as a human being, but as beginner of a communication movement, originator of a message, in effect, the desire of the text (even this one), for a reader, for the attention of the reader, leaves the author/text powerless in the reader's absence. The author is dependent upon the will, the desire, the ability of the reader to read the text (a process implying both submission to the will of the author and violent overthrow of the will of the author). The relationship of author to reader, text to reader involves not only the power of the author as creator, confider, confiner of the reader's attention, but of author as confined, left behind trapped in the text while the reader, defying control, leaps free to pursue individual readings over which the author has only limited influence.
So within the area of interpretation is negotiation. The extent to which the author can influence or persuade the reader to be complicitous in the author's creation of meaning, to hear and understand the word spoken before silence takes it from the speaker's control, the extent to which the author can circumscribe the text from subversive readings is always in question. The ability of the reader to read the text independent of any sort of authorial intention is based on the desire of the author/text for the complicity of the reader. The author needs the reader and that need allows the reader to read, to interpret. A writing authored not for reading (is this possible?) or never read is thus not removed from the control of the author, from the prison of the meaning inscribed in the moment of writing.

Interpretation, reading texts, is not the simple process the conception of author as authority implies it is. The power structure within interpretation is based on the idea of the movement, the play of language between not merely non-passionate definitional structures -- author or reader as theoretical concepts -- but between the passionate wills -- an author/a specific reader -- people who create and inhabit the definitional structures. The reliance of interpretive power on interaction is a specific limitation of that power, an inherent circumscription.

Into this context of the tension between author and reader, I would like to introduce the concept of the playwright and what I
would term the questionable status of playwright as author. Playwrights write plays. There is an intoxication in the movement between the Derridian concept of linguistic \textit{play of difference} and the idea of the theatre: the physical space of play, the area of serious social frivolity, of cleansing through catharsis the hidden, anti-social (in the sense of being uncontainable by society) impulses, urges, necessities, of the human psyche. Thus the play -- the writing attendant upon the area of outsiders, the liminal, empty space not merely of the physical theatre, but of the theoretical place of theatre within society -- likewise participates, if for no other reason than simple linguistic association, in the concept "play" and the movement that implies. It recruits the full sweep of interpretive possibility. Just as the linguistic concept of \textit{difference}, based on possibility rather than certainty of definition, indicates the extent to which the single definition/meaning is apocryphal, it is the nature of the play to beg interpretation, to resist the definition of a single correct interpretation.

The difference between theatre and other written communication or art forms the basis, in fact, of Barthes argument for the nonviability of the author: "in ethnographic societies the responsibility for a narrative is never assumed by a person but by a mediator, shaman or relator whose 'performance' -- the mastery of the narrative code -- may possibly be admired but never his
'genius'" (Death, 142). If even this primitive theatre -- the storyteller -- indicates the author's absence, the author's death, how much more must the live performance, with its multiplicity of storytellers, operate as a specific sign of the author's absence, encoding the absence, bodying it forth so to speak.

To return to Barthes' definition of author, and the association of the "explanation of the work [with] the man or woman who produced it," it is interesting to note that the very words used to express this in English (trans. courtesy of Steven Heath) deconstructively protest the application of this concept to theatre because the theatre in its technical jargon establishes distance between the author of the play and the "man or woman who produced it." The playwright is one person, the producer another, as often as not. This play of definition, arbitrary as it may be, none the less displays the extent to which an act of communication, a movement between writer and audience, is a series of tasks which in the specific context of the theatre are not subsumed under the agency of a single person, but are distributed to the powers of several artists/artisans, thus fracturing the "self" at the center of the writing process, the I, the author, into collaboration.

In terms of the reading/writing communication process, the relationship between the author of a novel and the reader of a novel differs in intensity from the relationship between a
playwright and an audience. Plays are not written to be read by theatre audiences, but to be seen by them. The readers of the play are artists who will interpret, perform the play. It is the performance to which the audience will respond.

Barthes distinguishes between a literary work -- an object, "held in the hand" -- and a literary text -- "existing only as discourse . . . experienced only in an activity, a production" (Work, 75). His definition for text sounds uncannily as if it could refer to a playscript: experienced as discourse, activity, production. The play is the truly producible writing, writing intended to be experienced in production. The playscript is work only when masquerading as something other than a script -- only when it is simply read (and even reading is performance, by Barthes' definition). Unlike the novel, which by its very nature is destined for distinguished leather binding and "the end of a library shelf," which demands those conditions for its production, the play is initially enclosed in a grimy sheaf of papers or an Elizabethan finger roll only as a temporary stop on its way through minds, voices, bodies to the audience (Work, 75).

The playwright writing for performance, that is, for multiple, active interpretation -- the script/reader relationship only one part of a larger movement of communication -- is involved in a task essentially of collaboration. In such a context, the power of the author to influence the audience is mediated by the intervening interpretations of many artists, the intervening wills of many
interpreters. The interaction between the performers, designers, theatre craftspersons, and the script/text is qualified by the control of director and producer whose vision the production is communicating, even when this may specifically contrast with the vision of the playwright.

In the timeline of production, control over the meaning of the text is taken out of the playwright’s hands when the script is. Control over the production of both the play and its meaning is divided between producer, director and the artists they hire to collaborate with. Any meaning inscribed in the moment of writing is thrown into instability as literary space is transformed to physical space, as written word is converted into spoken word, the transitory, fluctuating nature of the text in performance (as performance) allowing for the almost spontaneous generation of meaning. Certainly in many production situations, the performance differs night to night and the chance inspiration or improvisation of the actor creates interpretations not dreamt of by the playwright, but possible within the confines of the script.

It is this variable nature of production which defines the playscript not as a finished act of communication, of art, but as only a single production element. Sue Ellen Case’s Feminism and Theatre explains this as lack of “aesthetic closure around the text, separating it [the playscript] from the conditions of its production” (116). The work of the playwright is not in the manner of a
definitive statement, a discrete act of communication, an action begun and carried through, authored. It is, rather, the beginning of an action, the proposal of a relationship, the wooing of a company, the first step toward a collaboration. The foreseeable end for the playwright is not control of the communication product, but the ceding of authority to numerous other artists and interpreters.

Playwriting involves not the making of meaning as such, but making the beginning of what meaning can be made from, breaking ground on which meaning can be built with the help of numerous other artists. The original product of the playwriting process, the script over which the playwright can claim some sort of ownership, some sort of authority, is only (with the exception of closet drama, not intended for production), the beginning of what the production will be, only the beginning of an act of artistry and communication. The movement between the playwright’s script and the reception of the audience is filled with other people.

Because of the encoded dependence of the playwright on other artists and the ceding of control this entails, writing for theatre seems to escape the definition/conception of authority as presented by Barthes and Said? I would argue that in the same way that the idea of “play” in the making of meaning slides delightfully, seemingly alluding to the world of the theatre in which the play is played in both senses, continually re-constructed, re-produced and thus subsequently de-constructed with the ‘closure’ of the
production, the wright making plays is separated from the
authority Said finds resident in the concept author. The authority
over even the initial production of the play -- physically different
from the production of writing -- involves control over everything
between the actual writing act and the play's reception by the
audience. The author of the playscript is, because of the necessity
of working with other artists for realization of the script, never
fully in control of every step in the process and often not in
control at all.

Barthes claims that the author's demise creates "the necessity
to substitute language itself for the person who until then had
supposed to be its owner" thus making use of the uncertainty of
establishing meaning inherent in language, replacing the search for
a single concrete meaning with the pursuit of the non-closure of
the writing, of the possibilities for multiple interpretation in the
writing (Death, 143). If it is to language that the reader must turn
and ask for the answer, then the dubious association of language
and fixed meaning, the arbitrary connection between sign and
signified, creates potential in the place of restriction. Within the
theatre, the movement from writing to communication, which is
from playscript through the variable of production to audience,
fractures the idea of the control of the writer over language, and
thus the meaning of the text, still further. The stage actors
replacing by physicality what in an entirely written communication
would be words, move beyond replacing author with a language into replacing verbal/written language with other languages: words with presence, words with movement. This however involves not merely interpretation of the words and replacement of language with movement, but often a specifically creative inscribing, filling in the thematized silences in the text. Where there are no words from the playwright to interpret, the work of the actors, directors, designers is absolutely creative, rather than simply interpretive translation.

The playscript is not merely the short form of the novel. Playscripts do not just leave out description, narration, inflection (aside from the brief interventions of the author in the world of the director, the stage directions) but rather encode an authorial, a linguistic silence in their place, inscribing not only the possibility/potential but indeed necessity for collaboration. Even editions of playscripts published specifically for reading such as those used in academic situations, require the collaboration of the reader, the performance by the reader for the reader, of the script -- an idea no doubt applicable to any form of writing but obviously and pointedly in the case of the play.

It is in fact the very presence of stage directions which signals the authorial silences, the need for production, because they, rather than representing the one true reading of the play, encode performance because of their disposable nature. It is
common theatrical practice for a production director to disregard the playwright's stage directions, an editing which Jiri Veltrusky locates as centrally important in the semiotics of theatre:

One of the fundamental oppositions within drama as a literary work is between direct speeches and author's notes and remarks, usually though somewhat misleadingly called the stage directions. In theatrical performance these notes are eliminated and the resulting gaps in the unity of the text are filled in by other than linguistic signs. This is not an arbitrary process but essentially a matter of transposing linguistic meanings into other semiotic systems. (96)

That theatre performance utilizes several semiotic systems or, as Veltrusky later states, "the semantic construction of the play relies on the plurality of contexts that unfold simultaneously, relay, interpenetrate and vainly strive to subjugate and absorb one another" is a function of the intrinsically multiple nature of theatre -- as text and performance -- based on the fact that "its language is rooted in dialogue, while lyric and narrative derive from monologue" (93, 95).

This essential plurality of voices in drama is important not merely in that the writing thus becomes distinctive, but in that, as Betsky and Koenig voice it: "The playwright does not, as does the novelist, relate story through narrative, dialogue and imagery alone; the playwright's narrative is related through the animation and interaction of bodies in space" (11). But not their own bodies, note. This "playwright's narrative" relies on the presence, cooperation of others, on many levels of interpretation and
understanding. Like Barthes' conclusion "it is the language which speaks, not the author," in theatre is it the actors who speak not the playwright (Death, 143). And not only do the actors speak the playwright's lines, but they are themselves elements of language, are signs in theatrical semiotics. The actor on stage communicates not only through spoken language, but by presence as well, a human being on stage communicating something different than a piece of furniture.

Yet this language of presence is not, as might be supposed, more susceptible to enclosure within rigid definitional boundaries than verbal language. The interpretation of the human body in the empty space of the theatre is no less complex than the interpretation of the sign human written on this paper. Feminist theatre semiotics makes this point quite clearly in terms of the female actor representing the sign woman. Sue Ellen Case suggests that since "the conventions of the stage produce a meaning for the sign 'woman', which is based on their cultural associations with the female gender," cultural diversity "brings into question the entire notion of how one knows what the sign 'woman' means. At this point, the entire gender category 'woman' is under feminist semiotic deconstruction" (118). Thus the influence of cultural (and no doubt historical, political, religious, personal, et. al.) associations sway the interpretation of the language of human presence to the same extent as they multiply interpretational
possibilities in verbal, written, gestural, costume, spatial languages.

The status of actor not as not merely using language -- speaking, moving, gesturing, wearing a costume, but as a component of language, actor as sign -- is complicated by the extent to which the actor both performs and generates discourse. Levi-Strauss’ discussion of woman in cultural semiotics finds that “woman could never become just a sign and nothing more, since even in a man’s world she is still a person and since in so far as she is defined as a sign she must be recognized as a generator of signs” (496). In the same way that a woman, however much she may function as a relational sign between men, is a human being and a generator of signs, the actor is not merely a tool of the director, producer or playwright, a performer of someone else’s vision, but an artist as well, sharing with Levi-Strauss’ woman “a particular value arising from her talent...for taking her part in a duet” (496). And thus actors create with, as well as perform with, language.

The examination of theatre semiotics involves the evaluation of the systems of language employed by the theatre, the constitution of theatre involving many languages, moving through and surpassing simple written languages. Actors collaborate with the playwright’s author not only as interpreters but as authors themselves, manipulating languages the playwright has less
control over, or functioning themselves as language, as sign and symbol components of the theatrical semiotics under the control of the artist/author/director. The playscript becomes only one linguistic component in the communicative act, one language in the play of many languages, one voice in a harmony/cacophony.

The multiple nature of theatrical production is a key element in both the production (writing) of the script and the reception of the script -- both ends of the communication channel. The multiplicity of voices within the script, each voice or character represented by an individual actor creates, emphasizes the pluri-contextual nature of drama to the audience, differentiating dramatic communication in reception from other types of written and spoken communication. Veltrusky comments:

When a separate actor stands for every character, the spectator continuously perceives all the participants in a dialogue, not just the one who says something at a given moment. This leads him to project each semantic unit into all the competing contexts immediately without waiting until the other characters react one way or the other to what is being said. Yet this is precisely what distinguishes dramatic dialogue from the ordinary kind. The mere presence of the actors representing all the participants signals the coexistence of several contexts. (96)

The several contexts of the play in performance are further multiplied by the essentially plural nature of performance. The cycle of production and re-production, of the script being the beginning of many different theatrical works of art participates in
the linguistic play of repetition, a concept important in Saussurean linguistics. Nelly Furman's discussion of Saussure is very illuminating in this context:

In Saussurean linguistics, both reproduction and repetition participate in a chain of oppositional differences. Thus, for example, when Gertrude Stein writes "A rose is a rose is a rose" the signifier 'rose' takes on a slightly different meaning or signification according to its place in the series. While the first time the signifier 'rose' appears it may refer only to the flower, its subsequent mentions may evoke a whole gamut of connotations, from botany to poetry to woman. But, aside from its meaning in the referential context of representation, the mere repetition of the signifier 'rose' puts into motion a displacement which ushers in the play of difference -- that is, the process of signification. (68, italics mine)

In the same way, the repetition and (interestingly enough there is the theatrical word again) reproduction of the playscript illustrates both the status of the script as simple sign, single sign within theatrical semiotics (as well as fully-formed document) and the necessity of this sure knowledge influencing the composition process -- the playwright writes/scripts with the idea of multiple productions in mind; scripting is the process of writing once what is to be infinitely repeated.

The playwright writes specifically both for the original, first night audience and for the audience who has seen the play many times, in multiple productions. In terms of semiotics, the variation in the audience is crucial to the making of meaning. Case, in fact
identifies the signified as "the meaning or message which is derived from the signifier by the 'collective consciousness' of the audience" (115). As the audience changes, reception of the signifier changes and thus so does the signified. The participation of the audience in the creation of meaning interacts with the repetitive, reproducible nature of the script allowing for audiences who have seen the same play in many productions or the same production several times or both. They receive a meaning influenced not merely by the ideas and intentions of the playwright, or the vision and interpretation of the director, producer, cast and crew of a specific production, but by every variation, every interpretation of the artist in all the productions which the audience members have seen.

Thus all scripting recognizes the play not only of language, that productions and interpretations may vary widely, but of the document: that written once, it is written into repetition and reproduction, each production adding layers of possibility, of meaning, to the text so that the various meaning of the words will, rather than being cemented by enunciation, only grow more playful, more various in the lifetime of the play.

This inherent lack of closure -- the play closes to open again -- identifies the playscript with Barthes' definition of the text, "approached and experienced in relation to the sign," and thus with the indication of potential meaning, as opposed to the work
"clos[ing] itself on the signified" and fixed in meaning. Closure on a signified, a meaning, implies stasis, the ceasing of movement but in practical theatrical terms, even a definitive production eventually closes and then becomes the foundation on which to build other productions, a template which other productions respond to, comment on, and thus the discourse, the dialogue which is the work of art, never closes.

The implications of this emphasis on the plural which influences dramatic theory, include the need to recognize the complexity of concepts and metaphors before thought straightforward. Katie King in "Producing Sex, Theory, and Culture," has challenged the conceptualization of expression as movement between two individuals maintaining that "the exchangeable product with a single, valorized author/actor is the visible and venerated metonym oversimplifying the intersecting systems of production and reception" -- that oversimplification overtly demonstrated in the example of theatre (89). This recognition of intricacy is a position which dramatic semiotics would appear to support.

Sue Ellen Case spends a great deal of the seventh chapter of Feminism and Theatre discussing semiotics and semiotic theories of drama, identifying "constructing woman as subject [as] the future, liberating work of a feminist new poetics." Case goes on to define "subject" as "that which controls the field of signs" and
associate the concept subject with the Cartesian I (121). The semiotic association of I/subject with control brings into play the status of author as subject, as I in the corruption I say of the Cartesian I think. Although Case mentions that “new theories no longer perceive the subject as the discrete basis of experience” even in her conclusion that the subject is a “cultural construction and a semiotic function . . . an intersection of cultural codes and practices,” there remains the association of subject with control which creates a problem when applied to drama (121).

Who controls the play? Does anyone? Who can claim ownership of the play? It is the nature of production that almost everyone involved can claim some sort of ownership, that everyone can say “my play” -- the playwright, the producer, the director, the designers, the actors. Where does the ultimate control, the position of subjectivity, lie? Who is the I behind the phrase “my play”? The answer is not necessarily the playwright as it would be the novelist or the poet. The very suggestion that the identity of the subject, even the paradigm of candidates, alters with each production illustrates a tendency toward chaos which places the concept of control over the play outside a realm in which ultimate authority can be understood. The phallogocentric I, the dramatic climax of literary theory seems missing from the authority structure of production. The question who is behind the I? becomes what replaces the identification of individuation and
autonomy inherent in the I when the authority of the individual is called into question? In a collaborative art, who is in control?

Case, earlier in her book, works with the term playwright, integrating the origin of wright (maker, artificer) into more modern definitions, to conclude "a playwright is a maker of plays, not necessarily a writer of plays" (29). In Cases' terms, the category maker of plays includes those who have nothing to do with pens and paper; improvisational theatre has playwrights as much as written theatre, and in the same way, those who make the production, the artists filling in linguistic silences, are as much playwrights as those who write the scripts. If improvisation is wrighting, so then is performance of written materials.

Thus, the concentration on the subject in a discussion specifically of playwriting may be misleading. The fracturing of the concept of self/subject/I possible in dramatic theory and practice is a movement away from paradigms of power and production associated with single authority, independent creativity and unity as a means of control, toward a pattern involving interaction, collaboration. Rather than creating woman as subject, there is a space for replacement of the concept subject, just as, in terms of playwriting, there is room for the replacement of the concept author.

The possibilities that theatre, as an art form, represents for the re-opening of definitional walls around concepts like control,
authority, writing, wrighting, and interpretation, associated as this freedom is with theoretical inquiry in semiotics, linguistics and composition, also recalls much of the area current feminist theory maps as feminine. Many characteristics of playwriting and play production (practical and theoretical) -- collaboration of artists and artistic collectivity; the explosive plurality of artists, of contexts, of languages, of audiences, of productions/enunciations; interaction among artists, between artists and audiences, among audiences as communication and making of meaning; interdependence as artistic strategy; the very status of playscript as literary art form written into transformation from script to production, of the writing attendant upon liminal space, associate playwriting with areas and characteristics within femininity.

In claiming that playwriting, as a component in the art of theatre, can be described as a characteristically feminine art form, I assume that feminine is a concept which can have characteristics, can be used to describe an art form. Like Case, I am searching for a "new poetics," a "distinctly feminine morphology," and I am wary of participating in too rigid a definitional extreme, in marking off too much or too little ground as the territory of the feminine and thus stopping the multiplication of alternatives, of possibilities, of infinite otherness (114, 34).

All the many that is not one surely cannot be codified into a
short list of characteristics because the *play*, the potential to be any- and every-thing is one of the movements I would argue plays share with femininity. Nor would it be useful to refuse to distinguish places inside gender theory, descriptors of behavior, experience, ideology, like *masculine* and *feminine*, from descriptions of biological difference (*male* and *female*), to assume that the experience of all women and men regardless of race, class, ethnicity or belief system can be described with two such words. In addition to which, the association of the former ideas with the latter physical descriptions is (to borrow Katie King’s assessment of the concept of the single “author/actor”) an oversimplification.

And yet, some of the area has already been mapped. There are concepts and ideas which the discourse of gender studies returns to in explanation of feminine experience, employing these reference points to distinguish physical difference from ideological difference, and differences of gender, culture or choice from differences of quality or value. Karen A. Foss in “Feminist Scholarship in Speech Communications: Contributions and Obstacles” plunges into areas of definition, including in her exploration of “women’s reality” such features as a sense of interdependence and connection with others and with the world; a recognition of the inevitability and value of a subjective approach to knowledge; an acceptance of self-questioning and paradox -- that the world does not need to be ‘fixed’ in place and fully resolved in order to have an understanding of it; a fusion of
the public and private realms; an egalitarian use of power; and a focus on process rather than product. (2)

Ironically, even the codification of the feminine results in what is more like a musical theme and variation than a series of distinctives. The word “subjective” emerges central to the paragraph physically and conceptually, notable in that it is used without attempt at definition and to describe knowledge, as if figuring with its use the concept and movement it signifies. That image of movement, opposed to stasis “be[ing] ‘fixed’ in place,” interacts with the idea of process -- a movement opposed to a product or goal. In the same sweep, definitional boundaries -- between “private” and “public” for instance -- become permeable, so the concepts interact, become indistinguishable. And the reassessment of definitions extends to “understanding” and “power” as well, pushing both these ideas beyond the limits ordinarily imposed, allowing definitional play into what is signified by these words.

The importance of this movement, the centrality of movement as opposed to stasis links the feminine to the dramatic. Both a “subjective approach to knowledge and the "self-questioning and paradox," describe the atmosphere of playwriting -- the art of creating texts designed to move through many arenas of production and performance without becoming so entirely fixed in meaning that no further interpretation is necessary, the meaning of the work of art bound up in the process of interpretation, the
script itself having little status as an object (or *work*) during production. The association of concrete meaning with text as object, with a "fixed" signified, results in the playscript, which undergoes constant movement, is, in fact, realized as movement, necessitating the re-definition of meaning, of understanding.

And the transitory nature of performance, its variability, its susceptibility to inspiration, innovation, improvisation and chance which creates multiple performance texts, indeed the status of script as only partially realized in non-performance form reveals in drama as a whole, but playwriting especially, "a focus on process rather than product," the extent to which live theatre never produces a stable product calling into question what, or rather, which, the playwright's product is. Case identifies "several texts within a performance situation":

- the text printed in a book and read as literature,
- the text the director reads preparing for rehearsal,
- the rehearsal text the actor uses, and
- the production text the audience receives as it watches the play (115)

asserting that "each of these texts is different and discrete, retaining an equal status with the other ones and representing appropriate material for a critical response" (116). The sheer multiplicity of possible products, each discrete in itself and also functioning as a step in the process of production, which in itself is neither stable nor lasting but a process generating response rather than product.
This argument brings us to the initial entry on Foss’s list, “interdependence and connection” and the question of power. As it has been important to my argument throughout that playwriting is an art not for the independent artist, but an essentially collaborative writing involving dependence on, and collaboration with, many other artists for full realization, the arrangement of interdependence over and against independence on the feminine side of the gender continuum is important. Although this oppositional arrangement no doubt expresses only an aspect of the relationship between these terms, the opposition here is useful.

The inclusion of ‘interdependence’ as a characteristically feminine source of power can be traced through various feminists who agree with Foss. Rosemarie Tong describes “nurturance . . . affiliativeness, cooperativeness” as “traditional female qualities”* (31). Mary Vetterling-Braggin includes “supportiveness, . . . nurturance, . . . unselfishness” in her list of “feminine psychological traits” (6). Audre Lord, radical lesbian feminist poet and woman of color, claims interdependency as the source of power, of creativity:

For women, the need and desire to nurture each other is not pathological but redemptive, and it is within that knowledge that our real power is rediscovered. . . . Only within that interdependency of different strengths, acknowledged and

* Her association of masculine with male, feminine with female is a more essential reading of humanity than I can make since I perceive differences among and between the sexes, both sexes displaying masculine and feminine characteristics and behavior.
equal, can the power to seek new ways of being in the world generate, as well as the courage and sustenance to act where there are no charters.

Within the interdependence of mutual (nondominant) differences lies that security which enables us to descend into the chaos of knowledge and return with true visions of our future along with the concomitant power to effect those changes which can bring that future into being. Difference is the raw and powerful connection from which our personal power is forged. (111)

Behind and around all this discussion is Carol Gilligan's revision of Kohlberg's study in moral development, In a Different Voice, an important influence in feminism's valorisation of interdependence. Gilligan distinguishes between the moral development of the young boys Kohlberg based his study on and that of young girls, and thence between masculine and feminine moral development. Differentiation between independence and maturity, reclamation of interdependence and relationship as viable, indeed, necessary options for feminine maturity provides options for a philosophical reassessment of value centered around freedom from masculine ideals and judgements. The validation by Gilligan of the differing moral development in Kohlberg's female subjects has allowed for the creation of separate standards of good and right, of power and position, based upon gender-related moral development. The acknowledgement that the difference in position represented may be the result of a different index of needs, desires, goals and standards of good allows for the freedom from evaluation/perception inequities based on the theory of a
single index. It also defines a set of characteristics of what is feminine that is based on the assumption that the distinctly feminine is comparable in use and importance to the distinctly masculine.

Gilligan’s work liberates theories of value from the tyranny of the single index. Kohlberg’s original findings define the masculine as the standard and the feminine as the deviant, thus devaluing the moral development of his female subjects when it departed from the standards based on male subject responses. This division operates on principles of binary opposition which participate in self-other dichotomy. The monumental philosophical statement “I think; therefore I am” postulates self as the sole detectable item in the universe, centers the creation of reality conception around that assumption, and thus alienates other selves from the reality of the integrity of self.

Gilligan bases her work on the revision of Freud by Nancy Chodorow who postulates that the centrality of separation and individuation in masculine moral development is based in the formation of masculine gender identity as separate from the gender identity of the mother (107). Thus, the immediate source of gender identity is based in a definition of self as other, as separate, the instant inversion of which leads to the alienation of the environment, the wholesale consignment of everything not self into the amorphous category “other.” The feminine experience of
self as like, of feminine gender identity as integrated with that of the mother creates a definition of self based on relationship, on sympathy and perception not of self and other, but of self and like (126).

Gilligan's conclusion that "the elusive mystery of woman's development lies in its recognition of the continued importance of attachment in the human life cycle" emphasizes the importance of relationship, of social/relational systems that characterize feminine experience, that are defined as feminine experience (23). This emphatic claiming of attachment, relationship as feminine is important to the conception that theatre, as artistic, communicative collaboration, in valuing the we over the I, is a feminine art form. Masculine gender formation privileges independence. Feminine gender formation privileges interdependence. Thus the necessity for collaboration, and interdependent work can be identified as a feminine aspect of theatre. The work of the playwright breaks away from the masculine standards of authorship and authority, based as they are in the valuation of independence, autonomy and separation.

Another feminist critic, Sherry Ortner, on the subject of differentiation between masculinity and femininity, places the case squarely in the center of my argument, distinguishing between concepts such as authority or autonomy and dependence on the basis of their association with gender (179). This specific
association of authority with masculinity plays neatly into the
division I perceive between author and playwright because it
postulates that the generic sweep of the concept "authority" is less
monumental or perhaps only monumental -- that the concept is
not the only way in which power can be conceived, but a masculine
description of power which can be weighed against feminine
descriptions. This conceptual fragmenting of descriptions of
power -- not only authority, but dependence as well -- opens
playwriting to other theoretical options beyond authorship. In the
same way that dependence can be powerful without participating
in authority hierarchies, playwriting can be writing without being
authoring, in fact, that the power of the playwright can likewise be
separated, be described differently than as authority.

Recognition of the value of the feminine allows the critic to
claim feminine standards and characteristics as not merely based
in feminine experience, but the base upon which feminine aesthetic
and theory can be constructed. Case applies feminist vision to her
study of the first known European woman playwright, finding that
"Hrotsvit relies on the contiguity and interdependence of all things
in the universe to draw the necessary relationship among scenes.
This principle of contiguity rather than linear development has
been hailed . . .[as a] distinctively feminine morphology" (34). And
the possibility of this distinction is coupled with other possibilities.
The association of principles of interdependence and contiguity with a feminine aesthetic on this practical level opens the discussion of feminist theory to the potential to trace the roots of theatrical practice to feminine preference of interdependence, which results in collaboration. Perhaps the half-life, qualified reputation of art/entertainment that theatre has continually enjoyed is based on this uneasiness. The personality cult of the theatre emphasizes individuation and independence, but actual practice colors the theory of independence with the reality of the reliance of the solo artist on the cooperation of at least the audience.
Works Cited


Appendix A

Staging Authority in Two Plays by Women Playwrights
INTRODUCTION

It was the writing and production of Excommunication that started me thinking on the theory of playwriting. In the same way, the theory, as it was being written, started me thinking about individual, specific plays. The experience of having a play I wrote produced let me into the world of the active playwright in a way that influenced my reading of other plays, my understanding of the movement between script and performance. The concepts and conclusions I drew from my experiences and my readings in theory focused my ideas about playwrights, not merely as theoretical constructs, or simply in terms of myself, but as theatre professionals. I opened a window into their world and saw new things. Perhaps I should have made the play the preface to the theory, and these essays the epilogue to put them in chronological order.

In reading Cloud Nine, I found the patterns of colonization, tyranny and violence which are thematized in the play, blending into my ideas of authority and power. Definitions of authority became a theoretical apparatus for analyzing the presence of the playwright as authority within the text. The mirroring of the tyranny portrayed on the stage and the tyranny of the playwright over the stage let me see the play in production as meta-theatrical, plays within plays, inscribed upon plays, plays about plays, all connected by exploration of the meaning of power.
The same multiplicity of plays, the metaphorizing of writing plays caught my attention in Rachel Crother’s *When Ladies Meet*. The warping of a traditional dramatic structure -- building toward a climax -- involved invoking, portraying, the authority of an author/playwright, while subverting that power. The play centers around an act of writing which figures the writing of the play. The limitations of the power of the writer, the thematising of misreading, of the difficulty of portraying any sort of reality is underlined and contradicted by the strides Crothers was making in escaping formal requirements, in imposing her ideas of form on the play.

Both of these playwrights are women. Both are writing about women. Both are exploring concepts of power applicable to their own power as playwrights, and to the power of women, writers, people, in general. By exploring their authority over the stage, over what they have written, on the stage, they open definitions of authority and form for the characters within the plays and also, possibly, for themselves.
Authors In and Out of the Text: Caryl Churchill and *Cloud Nine*

In the context of the uncertain application of the concept *authority* to playwriting, the Churchill play *Cloud Nine* is specifically interesting because the playwright places an idea seemingly central to the thematic movement of her play in the stage directions, where the power of the playwright is at its least practicable. Churchill suggests that the first half of *Cloud Nine*'s be cross-cast, a man as a woman, a woman as a young boy, a black man as a white man, and the implications of the suggested casting can be seen as crucial to the meaning of the play. Because the control of the playwright over the meaning of the script is mediated by the intervening interpretations of many artists, and the intervening wills of many interpreters, Churchill's confinement of some of her ideas to extra-dialogical text is problematic.

The unmediated interaction among performers, designers, script and audience is qualified by the control of possibly both the director and the producer acting as editors of the playscript. The interpretation, or idea that guides the production based on the director's reading of the script can either serve the idea of the script or bring the script to serve it, an area of potential which Churchill's almost thematic interventions in the script seem designed to control. The "stage directions" the playwright offers are the often least respected portion of the script in practice.
Ideas presented in the stage directions are used to inform production decisions, but the specifics of the playwright’s written directions almost never govern the production, that being the responsibility of the director. Yet it is not in the text -- the lines which a playwright can, until death, legally compel productions to render faithfully -- but in the nebulous world of playwright usurping production director’s voice that Churchill places some of the most important thematic innovations of her play.

The highly celebrated cross-casting of the initial act of Cloud Nine, functioning as it does at the heart of the audience-persuasion process, is not and cannot be mandated by the playwright -- an almost inexplicable oversight on the part of Churchill, whose idea it is represented as being. Churchill confines an idea central to her playscript in an area of the script in which she has little authority. The casting ideas, although presented as central to the production, are located only in the playwright’s production suggestions, and thus are extra-textual, a function of annotation. The choice of a director, more powerful even than the choice of the reader, to disregard the intention of the playwright could leave Cloud Nine in interpretational jeopardy.

As an example of the struggle for control by the playwright, the play thus stands at an interesting crossroads. The work of a woman, of a member of that nebulous category “the other” in relation to the unified, masculine self, the play nevertheless
represents, both within its text and as a textual artifact, the struggle of the woman to be self, to attain the position of control which the masculine represents itself tenuously as possessing. This is a re-creation of an initial fallacy, a movement, in Nelly Furman's terms, toward "leav[ing] unquestioned some of the prejudices which create the authority of tradition in the first place" (63). This attempting to fix interpretation, rather than liberating the text for interpretation, is a movement away from the feminist ideals of deconstructing the structures of authority which trap the other, often the feminine, within masculist definition. It is also a working-against of the collaborative, interpretationally plural nature of theatrical production.

In attempting to establish control, to claim for the playwright the position of self, of subject, Churchill becomes identifiable with the central, controlling figure of the play's the first act, Clive who claims to have, possibly believes he has, control of the environment and activity of the first half of the play. The suggested casting participates in representing a point of view which supports and exonerates Clive's position of control. Casting a man as Betty, a white man as Joshua, a woman as Edward, a doll as Victoria introduces an ill-placed note of humor or absurdity to the presentation of abuse and subjection. The appearance of a cross-dressed man on stage involves the use of a sign, not merely different from the sign woman, but communicative of something
entirely different, from what is communicated by the presence of a
woman on stage -- the actual use of the sign woman. Thus what is
communicated is not the violence of the man against the woman
(perhaps it is the violence of the man against the feminine, a rather
different point). The vulnerability of the subjected, the
seriousness of the violence is distanced from the audience by the
spectacular casting, by the humor it provokes. Thus the impact of
Clive’s behavior, of the behavior of any of the abusers portrayed
could be lessened, the carnival atmosphere of inversion, the feast
of fools ethos evoked by the casting dissipating the force of the
audience response to the represented violence.

However, the playwright, like Clive, is revealed as ineffectual
in attempting overtly to limit the definition of the characters on
the stage, even within the script itself. Like Clive, the text/author
of the play struggles against the tendency of the dark overtones of
the play to “swallow [him/it] up” (277). Betty’s insistence on her
own powers -- to replace Clive with Harry, to be “wicked” --
disconcerting as it is to Clive, also threatens the playwright’s
control over her in that it makes exciting the idea of seeing Betty
played by a woman (277). The energy and passion of her words --
while a potentially comic device -- also make attractive a non-
comic reading. Betty’s struggle against subjection, as it is
representative of many women’s experience, gives the role great
potential for the actress.
The possibility of subverting the stage directions, of not-cross casting, or perhaps re-cross casting the play lies at the heart of the struggle over the authority of the author. The range of interpretations this script, as is the case for any script, offer the actor and/or the reader, obscure initial stage directions -- mentioned once and never again. Arguably, for the script's reader, the initial impact of the stage directions fades in the reading: well into the first half of the play the reader may have forgotten the casting directions. The performer may have chosen to disregard them. The audience may be restive, the control creating a desire to be out from under that control, the casting creating a desire to see the play not cross-cast.

The movement of the characters through the play, through their search for self-awareness places them beyond the control of the author, the patriarch, and both, seemingly together, fade from control in the second act in which Clive does not appear, and the cross-casting suggestions are limited to a single part. The joint absence in the latter half of the play of Clive and the controlling voice of the author evidenced in cross casting is scarcely coincidental. The exploration of sexual/cultural boundaries by the characters in the last half of the play interacts thematically with the absence of authoritative voice. The reverberations of the cross casting can be felt in the tendency of the second half toward part-doubling, the ensemble cast shuffled to fill the parts, allowing
for interesting relationships and conjunctions to be suggested, the tendency away from rigidity and order, toward chaos.

For the reader/audience, the playwright thus almost becomes a character in the play whose voice is enscribed, but whose ability to influence the reader comes and goes. This textualizing of the struggle for control over the script and production is available directly to the reader (as a conflict between author and reader), and to the audience within the production-reproduction cycle. It carries the play outside the realm of simple text into meta-textualization and liminal authorship.
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Recognition Scenes: Rachel Crothers’
*When Ladies Meet* and Form

Case’s call for a “distinctly feminine morphology” is the basis on which evaluation or criticism of drama can be revised, re-invented, providing options for exploration of already existing plays. In the same way, the re-definition, and re-examination of the idea of playwriting provides avenues, lines of sight into the work of the playwright through the script.

In 1932 Rachel Crothers opened a play on Broadway on the subject of a meeting between the wife and the mistress of a publisher and that meeting’s consequences. The play was titled *When Ladies Meet, a Comedy*. The subject, on the stage of 1930s, from a female and arguably feminist playwright, could not help but be an exploration of the position of women within social restrictions and frameworks, of the possibilities women are offered and the choices they make. But, in that context also, it was an artifact chronicling the possibilities a woman and a playwright was offered and the choices she made.

The form chosen by Crothers -- comedy, and theatrical comedy at that -- represents not only an intimate conversation on women within the context of women’s movement, but an open representation of women to an audience diverse in gender and viewpoint. Here, then, with a vengeance, is not only the spectacle of wife meeting mistress, but that of a professional, theatrical
woman exploring the "woman question" in full public view. The "woman question" on the public stage becomes the feminine question in terms of specific dramatic analysis as interest is piqued not merely by what a woman represents of the space and thinking of women, but of how such representation is organized, the conventions, rhythms, definitions used.

The reductive plot description I gave earlier -- wife meets mistress -- both obscures and illuminates the dilemma at the heart of the play: that relationships among women are never as simple as such stereotyping indicates. By referring to the play's central characters central in terms which identify their relationship to a man, wife and mistress, I participate in a movement characteristic of the play: undermining stereotype through use. When Ladies Meet concerns itself with presenting the stereotypical definitions/conceptions of wife and mistress and then reveals them to be much less interesting, less truthful, in fact, less dramatic, than the reality.

The "meeting of wife and mistress" is an idea so old as to be impossible, a vaudeville sketch, a bad joke. Crothers is careful to present to the audience the typical reading of that scene: the wife responding with violence and abuse. In contrast to the portrait of a typical mistress which Crother's allows a man to voice: "some of the loose ones are the best ever -- because they're honest. If a
woman pretends to be decent and isn’t she’s the worst kind of a-- . . . If a woman’s good -- she’s good -- and if she isn’t -- she isn’t,” allowing her female protagonist a chance at rebuttal: “a man’s idea of women”, Crothers puts the standard description of the meeting between wife and mistress in the mouth of her other female hero, the wife herself (13). When asked how she would respond to meeting her husband’s mistress, Claire Woodruff responds, “I’d loathe her with a deadly hate that would shrivel her up. I’d call her a vile, brazen slut I suppose -- and tell her to get out” (114). That this is Claire’s prediction of her own reaction is interesting because not only does it fit into what might be a standard audience expectation, it reveals Claire as trapped by the stereotype, seeing herself choosing to follow the pattern.

Opposed to this take on the situation is the scene Mary Howard, the novelist and Claire’s husband’s lover, describes from her novel. The novel, written on the subject of a love triangle which hinges on the meeting between the two women, figures Crother’s play inside the world of the play. The play by the woman and the novel by the woman mutually reflect each other, obliquely representing the play as the playwright’s personal experience, allowing Crother’s to explore her experience as playwright, her struggle with the authority of her own ideas in the full view of the audience.

The novel’s confrontation scene is the topic of much of the
conversation in the play. The play opens with Mary discussing the scene with her unrequited lover, Jimmy; Mary questions Rogers Woodruff about it, then later asks Claire Woodruff for her opinion. The scene from Mary’s novel is so often the topic of conversation that it becomes as much the reason for the title of the play as the scene in the play itself which presents the same material. The play is not so much about representing *Ladies Meet*[ing] as it is about the endless repetition and variation of the single theme, creating an object of view, a theoretical construct from a dramatic situation.

The constant mention of the scene from Mary’s novel, its continual discussion throughout the play, focuses the attention of the characters and the audience around that specific dynamic, builds the tension in the play to that particular climax. Yet, in a particularly feminist movement, the constant allusion to, representation and discussion of the title scene subverts the build toward the climax by presenting the single scene in a series of fragments. The title scene -- the meeting of the ladies -- aside from being constantly discussed in one form or another, is played three times, and is never really climactic any of the times.

The first *meeting* takes place in the country house of Bridget Drake, a figure of moderation, both *wife*, of a husband now conveniently deceased, and *lover*, of a man ten years younger than she is. Mary enters hurriedly, and unexpectedly, and is introduced
to Claire in a scene straight out of farce. Jimmy, in an attempt to bring Claire and Mary together so that Mary will see the human behind the wife, pretends that Claire is his new lover. Jimmy’s ineptness at perpetuating a lie becomes the focus of attention, specifically Mary’s attention. The meeting which should bring the house down doesn’t, and becomes Mary interrogating Jimmy, rather than Mary meeting Claire.

At the same time, Claire’s role of pretended rival makes the scene a mockery of the traditional wife/mistress meeting -- Jimmy the husband, Mary the suspicious wife and Claire the affectionate lover -- a ploy designed as far as Claire knows, to make Mary jealous. Dramatic tension is created not by the proximity of the two women, but by the fear that Jimmy will prove the weak link in the chain, will be unable to maintain the masquerade which keeps Mary and Claire from actually meeting each other with the words wife and mistress between them. The attention of the audience is focused first on Mary’s questioning of Jimmy, and then on Claire’s playacting, grandstanding in the part of Jimmy’s illicit lover -- again a farce with Jimmy, the husband-figure, as its butt.

Into this situation is introduced the topic of Mary’s novel and in the meeting of Mary Howard and “Clara Claire”, Claire Woodruff’s pseudonym, the tension is quickly replaced by the beginning of a friendship between the two women -- a meeting
point found, so to speak, in Mary's work. Still preserved from seeing each other as *wife* and *mistress*, they meet as author and reader, two other roles which both free and confine them, the imposed relationship allowing them to penetrate each other's anonymity and converse as equals, learning to respect and admire the other as human beings, and as women.

At this point, in the timeline of the play, the tension of probable discovery is so dissipated that it becomes necessary for Crothers to re-introduce and re-hype the threat by bringing to the audience's attention the probable return of the husband. This casts Rogers Woodruff, Claire's husband and Mary's lover, as the villain whose return will rupture the relationship being built between the two women -- an interesting inversion of expectation.

Moreover, it is Mary who mentions Rogers' plan to come to Bridgie's for the weekend, throwing the information at Jimmy's head when Jimmy rebukes her for the foolishness of her affair. That the argument between Jimmy and Mary centers not, as it conceivably might have, on the inclination Jimmy might feel to deflate Mary by revealing who Claire actually is, but on Rogers' potential return is a masterly stroke on Crother's part because it indicates that it would take the re-appearance of the husband to actually set the two women at odds -- as if the simple revelation of their identity might not be enough to fracture the mutual respect and liking the women feel for each other.
And it is that note which the second “meeting” scene, played in Mary’s bedroom, strikes over and over. Mary and Claire are alone, talking before going to bed. Jimmy -- the husband figure -- intrudes on the intimacy of the two women, like Nemesis bringing with him the threat to their friendship, a threat no longer looming by virtue of their mere proximity. The second act, first scene curtain came down on Mary and Claire singing *Ich Liebe Dich*, the love duet suggesting that the true love story of the play is, ironically, that of the two women. The intimacy of the bedroom scene, its concentration on feminine details of clothing, decoration, face tonic, seems almost fulfilled when Mary, admiring Claire’s feet, uses a phrase Rogers used earlier when admiring Mary’s feet and, for a moment, identity lines blur, Mary figures Claire’s husband, and Claire, Mary’s lover.

The conversation in Mary’s bedroom revolves around the confrontation scene in Mary’s novel, paralleling the scene Mary and Claire are then playing. Mary discards the word *mistress* in favor of *lover* -- an ambiguous, genderless word which could describe her relationship to Claire, as well as to Rogers. The reality of the meeting being played stands in contrast to the meeting Mary wrote. In Mary’s mind, the confrontation would be ruled by the relationship of the woman to the man, rather than the women to each other, their conversation would be about him. Claire also admits to this attitude at the play’s close: “I’ve always been glad to
get you [Rogers] back before -- and thankful it was over -- always thinking of you -- never of her --" (133). The scene in the bedroom is dominated by the feelings of the women for each other, the interest of the women in each other, the moment at which the women, apart from their roles and in the fullness of their roles, meet, and the truth that moment actually contains.

The actual moment of meeting, the play’s gesture at recognition scene, takes place interestingly enough between Claire and the audience rather than between Mary and Claire. Mary’s inadvertent revelation of her relationship to Rogers is noticed by Claire and by the audience watching Claire for a reaction. The casualness of it undermines its stature as play’s climax, as does Mary’s obliviousness to it and Claire’s controlled reaction. The meeting of the women -- happening before, after, and around the moment of revelation -- is too much, too huge, to be contained in a single shattering, climactic moment. The entrance of Rogers into the scene is anti-climax, postponing of climax. Immediately prior to his entrance, Claire, knowing finally who Mary is -- her friend and her husband’s lover -- turns to Mary halfway in between understanding, pity and malice, only to be interrupted by Rogers’ entrance. The meeting of the ladies, when Claire introduces herself to Mary as Rogers’ wife, is mediated by the presence of Rogers. Rogers’ presence seems to distract the women from each other and aside from that one moment, neither addresses the other
in the brief remainder of the act. Mary does not respond to the introduction; Claire addresses herself to Rogers and then exits. Crothers brings her own predictions true, allowing the return of the man to disrupt the relationship of the women.

This leaves the actual meeting of the women for the third act, both trying to escape the house unnoticed and both turning to Jimmy, the erstwhile husband figure, for help and thus meeting, again accidentally, unexpectedly. But even here, the move toward climax, toward confrontation, is subverted. Having already discussed how they might hypothetically play the scene during the conversation in Mary's bedroom, they make a pretense of playing the scene from Mary's novel:

CLAIRE
And you think the wife ought to have the intelligence to give him up.
MARY
Is that what you're going to do?
CLAIRE
Is that what you expect me to do? (129)

But Mary is not able to sustain her ideas in the face of Claire and has to admit their inadequacy: "It isn't -- just as I thought it was going to be" (129). Her discomfort centers in her realization that Rogers position in the triangle is not nearly as important to her decision as Claire's, that her ideas are limited by her assumptions about what a wife would be: "I thought you were quite different somehow. I don't know why I did -- but I did" (129). In the end,
Mary's conclusion is that Claire's humanity makes Claire's desires of equal importance with the desires of either Rogers or herself:

MARY
... If you still--
CLAIRE
If I still want him.
MARY
Yes.
CLAIRE
That has nothing to do with this.
MARY
It has everything. That is what will make all the difference in the world -- to me -- now that I've seen you. (131)

Claire's resistance to the idea of her own importance to Mary's decision is balanced by her acknowledgement that Mary has changed her ideas about her husband's lovers:

MARY
... I'm sorry Jimmie did this ridiculous thing.
CLAIRE
I'm not. If he hadn't I never would have known the kind of a woman you are. I never would have seen it from your. . . (131)

And the insight of that moment is not destroyed by Rogers' second interrupting entrance. The revelation that Rogers does not mean to leave her for Mary leaves Claire unmoved. "It never mattered before who it was." she explains to Rogers, "... but now -- I've seen her -- and something has happened to me. I've seen all of her -- her whole heart and soul and self" (134). The wholesale disintegration of the triangle -- Mary dismissed by Rogers and
Rogers by Claire -- is based on that moment of recognition between the two women.

The question that the play begins with, "Loneliness is something we can't help. If nothing comes that completes us -- what can we do?" is answered at the same moment (9). The decision of both women to value the other over the man between them allows them to choose each other over men.

The movement of the play away from the standard, formal rise toward climax is emphasized in the emphatically drawn out "falling action." Crothers leaves the play's focused on Bridgie, who throughout the play is belittled for being foolish, aging, boy-chasing, and yet can be seen as making the world which so desolates Claire and Mary, work for her. And, although both Walter and Jimmy try to dissuade Bridgie from speaking to Mary about Rogers, Mary turns to Bridgie in the end, for companionship and comfort: "No, don't go Bridgie. . . .I like to have you around. Let's watch the sun come up together in the same old way -- over the same old hills -- old girl" (143). The languor of the final moments of the play, Mary's casual dismissal of Jimmy's part as instigator of the plot, "You hadn't anything to do with it really Jimmie. . . .I should have known sometime just what she was like." which Walter seconds, and Rogers' de-emphasized exit and conspicuous (but unlamented) absence from the play's final moments, distances the play from the sphere of masculine forms,
powers and privileges (147). The closing scene between Bridgie, and Mary is the title scene, as much as any of the scenes in the play, Mary and Bridgie really recognizing each other as women and as potential allies. Between women, *When Ladies Meet*, Crothers implies is the dramatic loci, where drama takes place, when the real play happens, and the universal of unrequited love, of necessary loneliness is made bearable. The subtitle, a comedy, advertises the play as life affirming, valuing society over solitariness -- in this case, it is the society of women, and the relationship of women as life-giving that Crothers affirms. And her conclusions about human nature, and the nature of her women characters -- the need for interdependence, relationship -- become a metaphor for the structure of the play, the titular meeting scene proliferating, becoming a series of interlocking, repetative dramatic moments which mirror and vary each other.

The complexity of the form stands in opposition to the simplicity, familiarity advertised in the subtitle, *A Comedy*. The implied identification of the author-character, Mary, and the real playwright Crothers, articulates the struggle of the playwright with the definitions attendant on her profession, not only the formal guidelines of the traditional theatre, but of what it was to write, to playwrite, to author. That her conclusions contain the evasion, even the spoof of the ideas she represents as traditional, typical, is a gentle critique of the authority of the writer in the face of the
reader, of the complexity of experience. The tenuous position of Mary, the author-figure in the play, in relation to the readers of her novel, and the events of the play, the extent to which her ideas, the scene she wrote, was as in error about the reality of the situation as represented in the play call the position of the author, the authority of the writing voice into question.
Works Cited

Appendix B

Excommunication, Eight Scenes
INTRODUCTION

I am not just a theorist. I am also an artist. For this more than any other reason, I am including a playscript with my exploration of theory. There is no line to be drawn between the two; it is the same urge at the base -- to think, to do, to write. It isn't that the playwright (who is me) talks with the theorist (who I am) about drama and how one goes about writing plays. We -- both of us -- are me and I write plays and think about that and write theory and think about that and then write. And all of that, all at the same time.

So, here's more of the same, perhaps more to the point. I wrote *Excommunication* when I had the opportunity to have it performed. Rather than an act of creativity caught somehow in time, a play written in 1991, it is about how I see -- writing lines on top of what happens to and around me. Writing history, or myth and mostly drama to correct, counterpoint, cadenza what can't be seen, can't be understood, can't be recognized without some safe distance. I sort through what I do, and think, and see and make dreams and castles and conversations out of it all. In this, I am in collaboration with artists I have been, who created scenes in my memory without writing them down. In writing *Excommunication*, I also collaborated with some of my favorite playwrights, poets, putting their words into drama in something similar to the way a film director puts a musician's song into a drama in a music video.
Foremost among these is my brother Lance, my collaboration with whom was much more interactive than with, say, Shakespeare or Byron and whose active creativity I could call upon when I needed it.

Because of this, because it was my friends, my idols, my memories, my ideas, my work, I assumed that the script was mine. It all went through my mind before it reached the paper. This is what started me on this idea, this essay: I was proved mistaken. The image that the director had of the playscript was what shaped the production almost to the exclusion of my ideas and the result was breathtaking at some points and heartbreaking at others, a malaise that most playwrights complain of, no doubt. In my discontent with the subversion of my authority over the play began my thinking about the nature of control, of collaboration and of what and how meaning is created.

I think, I have thought before, that writing isn’t communication nearly as much as it is expression -- one person writing to one person who are the same person in the end. I write what communicates to me; I balance my writing against my own judgement. At the very beginning (ἐν ἀρχῇ) when I only had a few grimy papers with my lines scribbled on them, I read Excommunication through with the man who was to be my director. Just two of us read all the parts to an audience of one. But even with that, even having heard how I did it, how I wanted it -- so he wasn’t relying simply on the static words, but had my
physical, vocal example -- the play became the director's and what I wanted became unnecessary (not even unimportant). I wanted my play to say, something specific. And yet I knew, post-structuralist that I am, that it isn't as easy as that, that language isn't that controllable. That's what the play's about, if it's about anything: not communication, out of communication, *excommunication*. What comes?

Came, on opening night, a play that wasn't mine. And was. Came the desire to recapture the moment of me performing my own words so that I would be in control. Came a desire to see what a woman director would do with it. Came a sense of amazing intimacy with everyone who was a part of it. Came the knowledge that of anything I had done, communication wasn't it. Even I betrayed myself, as costumer designing for Gerald's play rather than for my own because it was Gerald's performance that I was working with rather than my script.

But what was central was that it had happened, it had been and because of it I was, I am, an artist, for a moment, incandescent. It is still my play; here I am putting it in my book. Just then it was my play. I went to rehearsals as the playwright, and later as a designer. I went to performances as a playwright (my play). But it still belongs to Gerald, Joe, Tammy, Renee, Kendra, Eileen, Eric, Julyana, and Barbara. They have done as much
with it as I have. It was/is as much their expression as mine. We are, all of us, the playwright. And there will be others after us, hopefully, who will wright my play also.
CAST OF CHARACTERS

Note: This play is designed for ensemble performance, and may effectively be done with only eight actors. The characters are largely flexible as to age, sex, physical characteristics. Relationships among characters within the scene are more important than character individuation. Therefore, characters in some scenes do not have names and the names of characters in other scenes may be adjusted to fit the director’s casting decisions.

Scene (page 73)

Doomsayers: Respondents in the excommunication ceremony

Anathematician: Leader in the excommunication ceremony

Prisoner: A criminal who is being excommunicated

Scene (page 75)

A: Relationship partner to B;

B: Relationship partner to A;

Scene (page 81)

Sophia: Beloved of the boy

The boy: Beloved of Sophia

Rule: An 18th century adventurer, relationship partner to de Valme

de Valme: An 18th century adventurer, relationship partner to Rule
Scene (page 84)

Note: Names given within the text do not necessarily represent the character's names as such, and may be adjusted to fit the cast at the director's discretion.

A: An assassin
B: An artist; relationship partner to C
C: Relationship partner to B

Scene (page 90)

Poet: A poet, no relationship to Suicide implied.
Suicide: A person contemplating suicide, no relationship to Poet implied
Bystander A: A relationship partner to Bystander B, no relationship to either other implied
Bystander B: A relationship partner to Bystander A, no relationship to either other implied

Scene (page 93)

Note: The names given in the text may be adjusted to fit the cast at the director's discretion.

A: Relationship partner to B
B: Relationship partner to A
C: Develops relationship with D
D: Develops relationship with C
Scene (page 96)

A, B, C, D, E, F, G, H Relationship partners

Scene (page 103)

**Bacchante:** Occupies a position not unlike a Greek chorus leader

**Bacchae:** Occupies a position not unlike a Greek chorus

**Scene**

A space of communication

**Time**

A moment of communication
SCENE

SETTING: A cathedral. One door.

AT RISE: Black
A door opens into darkness
Enter a file of DOOMSAYERS, carrying
lighted tapers on staff candlesticks
followed by the PRISONER
followed by the ANATHEMATICIAN

ANATHEMATICIAN (chants)
Hic vir exsecrationem pronuntamus. Membrum putridum et
insanabile. Ferro excommunicationis a corpore ecclesiae
abscidamus. Non pro Christiana sed pro pagana.

DOOMSAYERS (chant)
Non pro Christianum sed pro paganum.

ANATHEMATICIAN (chants)
Magem orationem eo non permittemus.

DOOMSAYERS (chant)
Ei non loquamus.

ANATHEMATICIAN (chants)
Eum inter nos exsecamus.

DOOMSAYERS (chant)
Est non nostrum.

ANATHEMATICIAN (chants)
Eum exsecramur.

DOOMSAYERS (chant)
Eum exsecramur.

ANATHEMATICIAN (chants)
In voci tintinabuli deo patri eum exsecramur.
DOOMSAYERS (chant)

Deus eum exsecretur.
(The bells ring.)

ANATHEMATICIAN (chants)
Deo fili eum exsecramur. Ex libro eius nomen exsculperetur.

DOOMSAYERS (chant)
Christus eum exsecretur.
(The book is closed.)

ANATHEMATICIAN (chants)
In luce candeli spiritui sancti eum exsecramur.

DOOMSAYERS (chant)
Deus eum exsecretur.*
(The doomsayers extinguish their candles by driving
them into the ground.
They file off.)

(END OF SCENE)

*This man we declare anathema. No longer Christian, but pagan.
No longer Christian but pagan.
We admit no more discourse with him.
We speak not to him.
We cast him out from among us.
He is not of us.
We curse him.
We curse him.
We curse him by God the Father in the voice of the bells.
God curse him.
We curse him by God the Son. May his name be marked from the
book.
Christ curse him.
We curse him by God the Spirit in the lights of the candles.
God curse him.
Scene

SETTING: The common room of a private house. One door.

AT RISE: Black.
Lights up on B reading in an armchair.
The door opens.

A
(enters, humming a theme from The Magic Flute)
Ah! Hallow!

B
Hi.

A
What are you doing?

B
Reading.

A
What are you reading?

B
A book.

A
Is it an interesting book?

B
Yes.

A
Are you busy right now?
Yes.

A

Will you play with me?

B

No!

A

Why not? Don’t you want to play with me? Isn’t it fun to play with me? Don’t you like to play with me?

B

No!

A

But - but I thought you did - I thought you liked to play with me - I thought I was fun to play with... Don’t you love me?

B

No.

A

But you do love me. You say it all the time. You do love me; you must love me. I’m Marion - you do love me.

B

No, I don’t. Go away.

A

Well Charles, I can only thank you for having made your position abundantly clear. After all this time I can’t say that I’m surprised or even disappointed. I have suspected from the start that you were motivated by less-than-respectable impulses and I felt at the time that I should have nothing to do with you. But I allowed myself to be won over by your charm, your wealth and your looks. I do not despise myself for it: any woman would have been deceived in you. But, now that you have finally and irrevocably declared yourself, I can feel myself free to confess what has long
A (Cont.)

been in my mind to tell you. Charles, I do not and have never loved you. either. so there!

Oh.

Will you take me out to a movie?

What?

Will you take me out to a movie?

What?!

A movie?

When?

Now.

What are you talking about?

A movie. I’ve wanted to see it for ever-so-long and it’s in town now - but it won’t be here forever. Tickets are half-price tonight. It got wonderful reviews.

So?
A
So if we go tonight we won't miss it and we won't spend reservoirs of money.

B
When does it start?

A
Soon.

B
How soon?

A
We'd have to leave in a few minutes for the first showing.

B
And you want me to take you?

A
Yes.

B
No!

A
Why not?

B
Because I'm reading right now!

A
Well! Then you will have to choose between that book and me.

B
I choose the book.

A
George! I have only one thing to say. If you prefer a book over -
over me! I can't stand it. I won't! George - I want a divorce!
No Martha, not a - - - divorce!

Yes, George, I've had it! I'm leaving you!

No, Martha, you can't leave. I won't let you. I will restrain you forcibly-

Unhand me, you knave! How dare you? Cad! Boor! Release me, I say!

You'll never get away! (Heh-heh) I will keep you here 'til you die! You will never see him again!

He will come and rescue me. And then we shall see who is laughing!

He will come and I will kill him! Ha-ha!

No-not kill him! I . . . love . . . him . . . ah . . .

No-don't die! I didn't mean it! I didn't do it! I won't do it again!

Such feeble protestations are useless. They nauseate me. Your miserable person has intruded itself on my plans for the last time. You now bear the punishment of -

No! not that! anything but that!

Yes! The Vogon power-exchange!
(They perform the Vogon power-exchange)

A

The shadows where the Mewlips dwell

B

Are dark and wet as ink.

A

And slow and softly rings their bell

B

As in the slime you sink.*

A

Now will you take me out to the movie?

B

Oh, all right.

A

George? George, I’ve reconsidered. I don’t want a divorce.

B

Oh Martha!

A

Oh George!

(BLACK)

(END OF SCENE)

* J. R. R. Tolkein, *The Mewlips*
Scene

SETTING: A large room with a window and one door.

AT RISE: Black.
A single candle is lit.
The girl weeps softly in a corner.
de VALME has lit the candle.

Hold your tongue.

(She does not.
The door flies open.)

de Valme.

BOY

Sophia!

I am for you.

(Draws)

BOY

Cur! damned cur!

SOPHIA

(Shreiks)
They must not -- they cannot!

Hold your tongue.

BOY

You, sir-
de VALME  
(gently, with his sword point under the BOY's chin)  
Shall I be rid of your whining?

RULE  
On guard.

de VALME  
I am at your service.

(They fight. Rule is touched.)

SOPHIA  
(Shreiks)

BOY  
You must not watch.

RULE  
-hit.

de VALME  
Bind it up.

RULE  
Damn you.

(They fight.  
The children escape out the window.  
de VALME falls back.  
RULE lunges. Pauses.)

de VALME  
What!

RULE  
We are alone.

de VALME  
So soon?
RULE
They have been apart some hours now and beyond doubt there are matters they wish to discuss.

dé VALME
So we play cupid now, do we? Claret?

(Pours)

RULE
Thank-you. We have, for one evening, made them gods. We exercise our wrists. It is enough.

dé VALME
Breathe. Almost we grow too old for this.

RULE
No. They have now been bourn away in a romance of the highest - Radcliffe could not equal it. Drawn into circles of passion, outrageous gamble, undoubted villainy.

(de VALME bows)

RULE
Oh, my sweet, have you not always - now confess it - always longed that two men, oh of an insanity, should fight to the death for your love, to protect your honor? They fly us now, but for ever after they will remember that once they lived, were incandescent. And we, we have done this for them! It is almost too much.

dé VALME
Goddess excellently bright.*

(Not without irony)

(BLACK)
(END OF SCENE)

* Ben Jonson, Queen and Huntress
Setting: The common room of a private residence. The Portrait of the Assassin prominently displayed. One door.

At rise: Black
The door opens.
Lights are turned on. A is revealed in the room; B in the doorway, entering.

A
Good evening.

B
Oh. My dear, my sweet, my love, you have come at last, have you?
I had almost given you up. It's been nearly a year, hasn't it?
Gracious goodness, a year. Won't you sit down?

A
Thank you. I will stand.

B
No, but really, please sit down. We musts have champagne. May I offer you champagne? There are moments in life, lengthy, portentous moments which require solemnity coupled with something dank and sober and capable of relieving you quickly of all sense and then there are moments in which any thing but frivolity and the rainbow shimmer of light refracted off the edge of a wine glass is not mere absurdity - because absurdity can always be tolerated - but utter humorless stupidity ungilded by the effervescence of despair, horror or tragedy!

(Makes to toast)
I give you Life! But, no, perhaps that is cruel. I give you Art!
(She toasts)
You do not drink.
A

I am sorry.

B

Allow me?

(tases’s A’s champagne)

Perhaps you are right. Perhaps there is that which the exuberance and naivete of my pallet glosses over, but presents insuperable and insupportable obstacle to yours. I beg your pardon.

A

I do not insult your taste.

B

You gratify me hugely. But, how charming. I live by my taste. An entire wall of the Gallery (Cecil wing, third floor) is now a monument to my taste, my eye and my lense. I am an artist, by God!

I hope I do not importune you too horrendously in inquiring if you prolong your stay until the week-end? My wall opens Sunday afternoon. Hence the champagne. Come to the opening and bring roses?

A

I will no longer be here.

B

Alas. Too cruel to keep me waiting an entire year and then simply not come. But I do not suppose it matters so much because I will no longer be here either, I apprehend.

A

I am sorry.

B

Nonsense. What could be more tragic than to miss my own opening, more delicately mysterious and romantic than to be the absent artist, present only as a self portrait in white against a window open to a view of the sea: face in shadow, hair dishevelled in the wind? It sounds lovely; I wish I had a print of it.
A

Excuse me, your show?

B

Allow me to apologize. Your concern is just. And my neglect of that concern, tedious. But you see law forbids me to hang a portrait without the subject’s consent and I was unable to reach you for your permission.

(indicates a mounted photograph on wall)

This remains the single print of your portrait and it is yours to do with as you will.

A

It has hung there?

B

Since I finished it, yes. But my subject contracts stipulate that ownership of each portrait reverts, on my death, to that portrait’s subject, to be recovered at their effort and expense. Do take it.

A

You honor me.

B

Not at all. It was an honor to shoot you. And I apprehend you will reciprocate that honor?

A

No. Something much less ugly.

B

Ah. More champagne.

(The door opens. C is in the doorway.)

C

I’m home.

B

O my Corinna, and o the delight of my eyes!
My soul.

My own one. Allow me to introduce Mr. Craig, our guest for champagne. Celebrate with me: my wall opens Sunday!

Wazoo! We are now infamous?

Infamy incarnate. To Art!

To genius!

(They toast)

Mr. Craig— but you’re -- the Portrait of the Assassin.

I do not understand.

(to C)
Your perception dwarfs Holmes. I am privileged to have lived with you!

And I with you.

We must have another toast. Mr. Craig, will you pour for us?

As you say.

(A pours. Laces the wine.)
I feel a spurt of poetry coming on. I feel compelled to declaim.

Resist. Resist the urge.

It is useless to resist. Quatrameter:

Hear my vow before I go
By love's alternate joy and woe
Can I cease to love thee? No.

ζων μου σας αγαπω

(B hands around glasses. Throws C's full glass into the fireplace, produces clean glass, fills it and hands it to C)

We toast Corinna's genius!

(They toast)

(to C)

Now you should go.

(C goes)

But.

No. I will not have it. Hold me. Don't let me fall.

(A holds B.)

* "My life, I love you" George Gordon, Lord Byron Maid of Athens
Wait, no wait. I've just had the funniest thought:

(Dies)

(BLACK)
(END OF SCENE)
Scene

SETTING: The edge of a cliff.

AT RISE: Black
Lights up on POET and SUICIDE
attempt at cliff edge

POET
And they brought him to the place called Golgotha, the place of the Skull.*

SUICIDE
The Skull beneath the skin. My bones itch. I ache for the never-ending tomorrow of oblivion. At the core, my mind is empty of wine. I am being hollowed into an oubliette. I should have eaten lunch. My soul stretches out to the horizon of anguish but fights against the wind, pulls back from the edge, the wasp-waisted crux of space and time shattered with a single philosophical question: How shall we then live?

POET
Here hung those lips that I have kissed, I know not how oft.**

SUICIDE
I seek the land beneath, the nether region in which only dwells those horrors which haunt the nightmares of the lunatic. So this is what waits for the unrepentant: continual, perpetual, hopeless nonexistence crawling through each mind-wrenching hour, each malicious minute of pain an identity-denying recitation of proscribed terror.

POET
And the third angel poured his bowl into the rivers and the fountains of water and they became blood.***

* The Gospel of Saint Mark
** William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*
*** The Apocalypse of Saint John
SUICIDE
The poison at the bottom of the drained chalice, cold and hard among the dregs, laughing up at the drinker's wasted seconds of staring, of consciousness glittering on the intricate carved rim of death, its very decoration a sciorating insult to the innocent soul trembling at the wine spilt among the blood, the body abandoned - but no, it was poison.

POET
the wormy wintry woeful wind clasps us all to its sour bosom

(Enter two BYSTANDERS)

Bystander A
Have you got the train tickets?
Tell me you haven't forgotten the train tickets.

(The two BYSTANDERS pause and search for the tickets.)

POET
twixt sheets of papery colored ice,
off we go to paradise.
tooth-wrapped pigeon mushrooms tall
though graceless aardvarks halt and fall.
clattering silently in the hall.

(The two BYSTANDERS conclude their search, move to exit.)

Bystander B
Was that the telephone ringing?

Bystander A
No.

(The two BYSTANDERS exit)

POET
to which the mist encircles strong
POET (Cont.)

and happy babbles clear the long
day through, the weary bewildered throng
parts to view without recourse
    Chaos astride a silver horse.*

SUICIDE

And row upon row of tragedies, pruned to bear dark blossoms
weeping blood. Shadow vines of temptation and degradation
crawling through the roots of civilization and society on which
feed huge turtles bearing worlds on their backs, the black despair
of space stretched out before them lit by candle flames of pain and
blindness. Why do turtles swim so slow? Why turtles at all?

POET

If you stay in the center
and embrace death with your whole heart,
you will endure forever.**

SUICIDE

(Screams)
Hothouse malice delivered to your door by sniveling sycophants
with viper's breath. The poisoned kiss of blood roses whose
perfume is madness. The violence of the fragile: shards of beauty
stabbing the eye, the sliver cut welling pain. Huge, tremulous,
overblown petals falling to strew ice points of failure along the
garden path.

POET

In Xanadu did Kubla Khan
A stately pleasure dome decree***

(BLACK)
(END OF SCENE)

* Christopher Brown, Perception
** The Tao
*** Coleridge, Kubla Khan
Scene

SETTING: A garden

AT RISE: Black
Lights up

(Meeting B)

A

Excusez-moi?*†

[B]rench]

B

Mi dispiace?‡‡

[Italian]

C

(meeting D)

J'aime son chapeau.#

[French]

D

Mi dispiace? ‡‡

[Italian]

C

Chapeau.##

[French].

(Removes his, proffers it)

D

Mio capello? Grazie. Anche il tuo è bello.###

[Italian]

(They exchange hats, go off together)

* The scene depends on the use of varied languages. The languages suggested can be modified at the whim of the actors or director and nonsense languages can be used.
† Excuse me
‡‡ I beg your pardon.
# I like your hat.
## Hat
### My hat. Thank-you. And yours is also lovely.
(Meeting B)
Verzeihung?†
[German]

B
Omforladelss??††
[Norwegian]

(C and D enter, singing on nonsense syllables, in close harmony, pass over the stage and exit.)

A
Dispenseme?†
[Spanish]

B
Scuzati-ma??††
[Romanian]

(C and D enter, dancing together, possibly a Viennese waltz, pass over the stage and exit).

A
Izvinite?†
[Russian]

B
Przepraszam??††
[Polish]

(C and D enter, passionately embracing, pass over the stage and exit)

A
Desculpe?†
[Portuguese]

B
συγγάμη??††
[Greek]

† Excuse me
†† I beg your pardon.
(C and D enter, fighting furiously, - physically, not verbally - pass over the stage and exit).

A  
(Meeting B)  
Excuse me?

B  
I beg your pardon?

A  
Why Genivive, I knew that it was you!

B  
Suzanne, but it has been such a long time!

(BLACK)

(END OF SCENE)
Scene

SETTING: A kitchen and living room visible. Two doors.

AT RISE: Black. Lights up on H seated, reading The door opens.

Ritual is the husk of true faith
The beginning of chaos!*

Embrace anarchy!

Stroke!

What's for dinner? Hullo, sweet.
(to H, who rises and submits to the embrace).
There's a head of lettuce in the refrigerator.

Chief! Champion!

Yes?

Not you.

Rejected.

A large salad?

---

* The Tao
D

Or what you will.

(D begins to unload refrigerator)

C

(to H)

Shall we dance?

(H & C begin to dance)

A

Fresh lettuce ripped by expert fingers to Spanish doubloon size leaves, red onion, white onion diced, green pepper, red pepper sliced, papery rounds of radish, strips of carrot, small broccoli stroke cauliflower flowers - cauliflower stroke broccoli flowers, bean sprouts-

(B, C, D, H silently writhe their bodies in shapes of extreme agony like Michaelangelo's late sculptures escaping from their stones.)

A

(continuing smoothly)

No bean sprouts, rose leaves, grated orange peel, currants, red grapes, garnished with a cinnamon and pesto in olive oil! Have we any Soave?

(Enter E, other door)

E

Merriment?

A

(to D, censoriously)

Far too frolicsome with that orange!

C

Ah, Vincent!
My angel?

(to E)
No. Dinner.

Not you.

Crushed again.

(firmly)
Merriment.

Stroke dinner.

La vie est tragique. Il n’ya plus d’amour.*

(Knock. All pause.)

Door.

(at door)
To beg to enter, bearing welcome and celebration.

(F enters, carrying G who is in a swound.)

Oh dear, oh dear?

---

* Life is tragic. There is no more love.
Foot pads?

Highway men?

Fustian! She took a toss.

Would you?

(F hands G to H who places G gently on a divan.)

Always warned her about the high blooded ones, but she would ride and without a saddle too, I'll be bound.

Cold cloths?

Vinaigrette.

(Producing one)

Beast! Beast! I am fine. I am fully recovered. Get that away from me.

Bad day?

(Exit B)

(to F)

Lift me.

Do we have any bread?
*Arabesque.* On my count.

\(\text{G} \)  
(to D)  
Worst possible. Purgatorial punishment.

\(\text{F} \)

One, two, *Plie* and-

(he lifts her)

\(\text{A} \)
Ta-da!  
(no one is watching.)

\(\text{F} \)
And recover.

\(\text{G} \)
(to D)  
The artist who does my coiffure--

(Enter B with wine)

\(\text{B} \)
Corkscrew?

\(\text{D} \)
(to G)  
He shall die instantly!

\(\text{E} \)
(to C)
What was that?

\(\text{F} \)
Now, a fish.

\(\text{C} \)
(to E)
No butter.
Alas!

(to H)

May I?

(takes the knife H is chopping vegetables with)

- uh-

(C throws a towel over his head)

Stay the course. On my mark.

(with wine for G)

Soave?

That my keen knife see not the wound it makes, nor heaven-

(C & E scatter before him)

Help, someone, he's got a knife!

Two, one, mark.

(He lifts her)

Ta-da!

(En arabesque, right - sings)

Dum!

(En arabesque, left - sings)

Dum!

* William Shakespeare, Macbeth