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Reproductive Rights as Theatrical Counterculture in Women's Drama

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UNIVERSITY OF CALGARY

Reproductive Rights as Theatrical Counterculture in Women's Drama

by

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A THESIS

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Abstract

This dissertation engages with a critically neglected subgenre of dramas by women on reproductive rights, which emerged during the first two decades of the twentieth century, and resurfaced towards the end of the same century. Since these plays also intersected with the rise of feminist movements, women playwrights created feminist spaces of performance for their work, which had been thus far marginalized from canonical discourse. The first two chapters of this dissertation focus on the plays of British birth control pioneer Marie Stopes, and on dramatic texts by African American playwrights Mary Burrill and Angelina Grimké, which appeared in Margaret Sanger's *Birth Control Review*. These amateur works introduced scientific, eugenic, and racial concerns into dramatic representations of feminist issues. The third chapter features professional playwright Susan Glaspell's reproductive rights dramas, *Chains of Dew* (1921) and *The Verge* (1922), both written for the last season of the Provincetown Players. Glaspell introduced Brechtian theatrical innovations into the birth control rhetoric reinforcing a growing foundation of women's activist theatre. The second half of the research centers on a similar confluence of feminist rights and reproductive rights, which appeared with the rise of Assisted Reproductive Technologies (ARTs), such as in-vitro fertilization, stem cell research and cloning. These contemporary and recent plays pushed back against the use of artificial gestational procedures which sometimes effaced women from their central roles in natural, biological reproduction. Thus, Michelene Wandor's *AID Thy Neighbour* (1978) and Lisa Loomer's *Expecting Isabel* (2005) offer feminist counterpoints to man-made in-vitro fertilization policies. Wendy Lill's *Chimera* (2007) and Cassandra Medley's *Relativity* (2006) in turn tackle stem cell research issues from a matriarchal standpoint while also echoing some of the eugenic and racial concerns raised by the birth control plays. The last chapter takes the critical discussion to the

frontiers of reproductive rights technology and ethics through Caryl Churchill's *A Number* (2002) and Liz Lochhead's *Blood and Ice* (2003). Churchill's drama produced and reproduced a feminist science rhetoric that became a blueprint for female dramatic agency, while Lochhead's work reasserted women's standing as figures of scientific and literary authority. In summary, this dissertation traces how women playwrights deployed control of biological reproduction as a dramatic theme to revision and reassert women's often overlooked contributions to canonical theatre. By focusing on reproductive rights drama, women playwrights created a counterculture of independent, continuous, and retroactive feminist theatre.

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Dedication

To the determined women in my family who forged the path I now follow, and to the steadfast men who walked beside them.

Table of Contents

Abstract.....	ii
Acknowledgements.....	iv
Dedication.....	v
Table of Contents.....	vi
Epigraph.....	viii
INTRODUCTION.....	1
CHAPTER ONE: MARIE STOPES.....	15
1.1 Introduction.....	15
1.2 Becoming a Feminist Scientist.....	17
1.3 Translating Science into Birth Control Activism.....	21
1.4 The Emergence of a Birth Control Playwright.....	30
1.5 Transforming into a Feminist Playwright.....	37
CHAPTER TWO: MARY BURRILL AND ANGELINA GRIMKÉ.....	44
2.1 Introduction.....	44
2.2 Periodicals, Theatre, and the Race Factor.....	48
2.3 African American Drama in <i>The Birth Control Review</i>	52
2.4 Reproductive Rights and the Menace of Lynching.....	54
2.5 The Eugenics Agenda.....	63
2.6 The New African American Woman Playwright.....	66
CHAPTER THREE: SUSAN GLASPELL.....	71
3.1 Introduction.....	71
3.2 A Feminist Theatrical Community.....	73
3.3 The Stage as a Biological and Creative Womb.....	83
3.4 Creating a Dramatic Space through Biology.....	89
3.5 The Legacy of Modern Reproductive Rights Dramas.....	95
CHAPTER FOUR: MICHELENE WANDOR AND LISA LOOMER.....	97
4.1 An Absence of Reproductive Rights Drama: 1930-1970.....	97
4.2 The Return of Reproductive Rights Politics to the Theatrical Stage.....	103
4.3 A Feminist Theatrical and Scientific Community.....	106
4.4 Manhandling the Reproductive Process.....	112
4.5 Fighting a Feminist Backlash: The Rise of Women’s Drama in the United States.....	115
4.6 Dramatizing the Infertility Epidemic.....	119
CHAPTER FIVE: WENDY LILL AND CASSANDRA MEDLEY.....	129
5.1 Introduction.....	129
5.2 Understanding the Political Environment That Breeds a <i>Chimera</i>	132
5.3 <i>Chimera</i> : A Problematic Gendering of Science.....	135
5.4 <i>Relativity</i> : Proactively Merging Feminist and Reproductive Rights.....	143
5.5 Matriarchal Relationships as Sites for Discursive Authority.....	150
5.6 Women’s Evolving Roles in Science and Theatre.....	153

CHAPTER SIX: CARYL CHURCHILL AND LIZ LOCHHEAD	157
6.1 Introduction	157
6.2 Staging the Reproduction Process Without Women on Stage	161
6.3 Salter's Clones as Imperfect Replications of Gender	163
6.4 Re-inserting the Female/Feminist Gene	172
6.5 Women's Theatrical Legacy	179
CONCLUSION	182
WORKS CITED	192

Epigraph

One serious cultural obstacle encountered by any feminist writer is that each feminist work has tended to be received as if it emerged from nowhere; as if each one of us had lived, thought, and worked without any historical past or contextual present. This is one of the ways in which women's work and thinking has been made to seem sporadic, errant, orphaned of any tradition of its own.

— Adrienne Rich, *On Lies, Secrets and Silence* (1979)

Introduction

In performance both the performativity of identity and the efficacy of the live, speaking body *together* create a rhetorical effect in which a feminist performer might represent a theatrical image of reality while at the same time complicating the structures of narrative, identity, body, voice, history, and community that define her very presence onstage.

— Ryan Claycomb, *Lives in Play: Autobiography and Biography on the Feminist Stage* (2012)

At the end of the nineteenth century, women playwrights brought widespread attention to a woman's right to access public education, to vote, and to hold property by staging and debating these issues in theatrical forums. When women playwrights incorporated theatre techniques into a burgeoning feminist rights movement, they laid the foundation for a mutually transformative, beneficial, and ongoing relationship between theatre and feminism. With this alliance, advocates for women's rights also deployed a creative and activist resistance against a historically constructed gender binary often built on biological and cultural essentialism. In 1938, Virginia Woolf referred to this gender bias as a social conspiracy, where a "monstrous male" is "childishly intent upon scoring the floor of the earth with chalk marks, within whose mystic boundaries human beings are penned, rigidly, separately, artificially" (105). Fifty years later, theatre scholar Jill Dolan described gender preconceptions as endemic to the world of theatre where "mainstream criticism both shapes and reflects the ideological workings of the dominant culture whose concern it represents" (*Spectator as Critic* 19). She called attention to an academic and critical approach that often privileged men's work while ignoring, minimizing or dismissing women's contributions to the theatre canon. In an article she wrote for the 2010 special issue of *Theatre Journal* on the state of women's theatre, Dolan bemoans the ongoing lack of commercial and critical recognition for women's plays where "women playwrights — as a kind of discovered

species — seem to arrive over and over again every ten years or so” (562). Her assessment that the work of women playwrights needs to be dug up, to be unearthed from under the weight of the more critically and publicly recognized men’s drama, suggests that theatre is a cultural institution that still condones — and often exacerbates — gender divisions.

I agree with Dolan’s lament that women playwrights cannot succeed, nor be heard, while contained within this binary. My research addresses this quandary by proposing that women dramatists can successfully subvert the trappings of a biased theatre environment through the creation and production of dramas centered on reproductive rights. In my dissertation, I explore how these texts were part of an influential subgenre of reproductive rights drama, which first emerged between 1911 and 1922, resurfaced in 1979, and is still active today. For the purposes of my project, I consider reproductive rights drama as any play that addresses reproductive politics popular at the time when the work was staged and produced. Reproductive rights issues often addressed scientific innovations in biology and genetics, and included their practical applications and ethical implications. Consequently, reproductive rights dramas explore and represent all the players, quandaries, and components involved in public debates surrounding women’s reproductive politics.

Since the work of women dramatists emerged at historical intersections of gender rights and reproductive rights, I also contend that these plays incorporated and reflected elements of the first and second wave of feminism. When reproductive politics drama first emerged in 1911, there was no precedent for dramatizations of reproductive rights activism. Therefore, women playwrights had the opportunity and means to impress a new and gendered footprint in political, academic and theatrical circles. Labouring in an environment where feminist interests converged, these playwrights created dramas that were not meant to be produced, viewed, critiqued, or

received as a response to men's work. It is important to note, that for the purposes of this dissertation, I will only be addressing the work of British and American women playwrights because feminist endeavours originated in both these countries. I focus on the premieres of these plays as they aligned with, responded to, or reflected emerging feminist activism. With the earlier plays in particular, there is little recorded documentation of audience response. My study thus concentrates primarily on the texts themselves, but complements their close reading with critical reviews that give a glimpse into audiences' reactions to performances.

Although women's plays on reproductive rights were few in number, and have received little critical or scholarly attention, I believe these works should be heralded as important markers in the study of women's contributions to theatrical history. In effect, the main thrust of my dissertation is to analyze how women playwrights deployed control of biological reproduction as a dramatic theme to revision and reassert women's often overlooked contributions to canonical theatre. By revisioning these women's texts, as both social products and public commentaries, I show how reproductive rights dramas illustrated the possibility of independent, continuous, and regenerative female representation inside and outside dramatic circles.

When Dolan contends that women playwrights were rediscovered every few years as if they had not existed before, she is also calling attention to a lack of continuous historical recording of women's work. Addressing this disparity, Marlene LeGates states that women had trouble remaining fixed in history because "women thinkers were unable to build on the writings of their foremothers. Each one, working alone, not only had to reformulate the answers to questions that others had asked, and answered, but had to defend their ability to do so" (10). Moreover, as Elaine Aston notes, "without primary role models," it was hard to establish "a

tradition of women's dramatic writing as a 'norm' rather than as an 'alternative' or deviant offshoot of the 'canon'" (*Introduction to Feminism* 25). Therefore, organizing women's texts in thematic groupings, anthologies, or subgenres becomes an effective way of reinserting women playwrights into a historical, feminist and theatrical legacy. In *Plays and Performance Texts by Women 1880-1930*, for example, Maggie B. Gale and Gilli Bush-Bailey justify their selection of plays by defining the chosen texts as "material artefacts which can be worked – produced, read, critiqued – and re-worked through time" (2). The often overlooked work of women playwrights can now be "mapped either onto old histories or be part of the mapping of new ones by successive generations: so through time plays become embedded rather than 'disappeared'" (2). My dissertation extends on Gale and Bush-Bailey's proposal by arguing that grouping the work of women playwrights under a common time period and/or a shared thematic interest, such as reproductive rights, can be an effective methodology to show how women's drama has evolved into an activist force that reinterprets, represents, and responds to social concerns.

It should be noted that plays focusing on contraception and conception practices have received little scholarly attention. Some articles on reproductive politics can be found scattered in anthologies of feminist theatre, such as Elaine Aston and Geraldine Harris's *Feminist Futures? Theatre, Performance, Theory* (2006). A few texts related to representations of maternity on stage, like Jozefina Komporaly's *Staging Motherhood: British Women Playwrights, 1956 to the Present* (2006) and, more recently, Bailey L. McDaniel's *(Re)-Constructing Maternal Performance in Twentieth-Century American Drama* (2013), and Kirsten E. Shepherd-Barr's *Theatre and Evolution from Ibsen to Beckett* (2015) engage with some of the plays dealing with birth control and assisted reproductive technologies. Yet, by treating these works as isolated references, none of the scholars acknowledges each individual drama's relationship to

other women's work, and/or its link to an emergent subgenre of reproductive rights drama. To respond to this problematic positioning, I argue that the subgenre of dramas on reproductive rights sets a theatrical precedent for scholarship on feminist women's writing by establishing a clear chain of influence between women playwrights.

Hence, I embark on a research journey to recover and shed light on the production, reception, and historical context of these plays. Historian Mark Phillips notes the importance of thematic groupings by stating that "the so-called 'minor' genres often give us the best evidence of the force of the new agendas or the demands of new audiences" (213). I believe the subgenre of reproductive rights drama is ably positioned to transgress and straddle gender divides and interests because natural and assisted reproductive processes have the universal appeal needed to attract a variety of spectators to the work of women playwrights. Anna Furse, in her study of the performativity of dramas addressing reproduction issues, refers to this universality by arguing that "every person, whatever their creed, sexuality or environment, develops an attitude to having children or not" (150). I believe that by representing women's experiences, perspectives, and complex relationships to political and social forces, this subgenre delivers a feminist message to broader, not gender-specific, and non-niche audiences. By grouping these texts under a common subgenre, I hope to provide playwrights and scholars with references that track an overlooked feminist theatrical legacy, as well as call attention to texts which could work as blueprints in the development of future reproductive rights drama.¹

¹ Glaspell's *The Verge*, and Grimké's *Rachel*, for example, could be revived on stage today since the representation of reproductive politics in these two plays is not linked to a specific cause, like gaining access to birth control. These two dramas analyze reproductive rights through broader feminist issues that are still relevant to today's audiences, such as women's roles in public and private spaces, as well as race profiling.

I believe twentieth-century dramatists writing plays on reproductive rights were in fact looking back and learning from the New Woman dramas that had emerged years earlier. New Woman dramas first appeared on American stages in 1890 showcasing the paradoxically visible and invisible nature of women in theatre. These plays featured women who had to subsume their desires to succeed in a man's world. Although audiences saw women on stage occupying men's roles in private and public settings, women's social mobility was always measured against, and contained within, an established gender binary. Following in the footsteps of Henrik Ibsen's *A Doll's House* (1879), the New Woman on stage could only recreate herself through personal sacrifice, and sometimes a refusal of maternity. The door that Ibsen's Nora Helmer shut on her home life in the final scene of his play remained closed to all women who sought to pursue a career. These New Women had to choose between inhabiting a domestic space or a public space, between having a career or a husband, between professional success or motherhood. Thus, Vida Levering, in Elizabeth Robins's *Votes for Women* (1907), for example, struggled between her commitment to the suffrage movement and social pressure to abort her child. In *A Man's World* (1910), Rachel Crothers's heroine fought for recognition as a writer, while raising a child as a single parent. The message in New Woman dramas was that women could advance women's rights or raise children, but not do both. Therefore, women's rights to reproduce were linked to women's willingness to conform to social demands and regulations. This prejudicial social alignment began to change when feminists embraced the newly minted science of biology as an ally that could provide them with the means to control their reproductive rights.

When biology was first recognized as a full-fledged science towards the end of the nineteenth century, women academics were poised and ready to take leading roles in the new

scientific environment.² A changing academic landscape at the start of the twentieth century had made it possible for paleobotanists, like Marie Stopes, to establish the first birth control clinics in the United Kingdom, and for nurses, like Margaret Sanger, to ignite birth control activism in the United States. Reproductive rights became a cause supported by women for women, and a movement whose own reproduction depended mostly on women's action. Stopes's dramas on birth control and her manuals on sexual education empowered some women to rally for changes in private and public spheres. Sanger's periodical, *The Birth Control Review*, provided exposure for the work of emerging African American female playwrights and writers like Mary Burrill and Angelina Grimké, whose dramas in turn educated readers and theatre audiences on reproductive politics. Professional playwrights like Susan Glaspell, who were also ardent supporters of feminism, wrote dramas that exhibited women emerging from their domestic environments and having social agency because of their involvement in the birth control cause.

It is important to note at this point that men were also writing plays on reproductive rights, though these works addressed evolutionary theories, in the case of George Bernard Shaw's *Back to Methuselah (A Metabiological Pentateuch)* (1918), or on abortion, such as Eugene O'Neill's *Abortion* (1914), and Harley Granville-Barker's banned *Waste* (1906). The latter plays did not touch on women's rights, nor did they have an overtly didactic intent, with the focus on the detrimental consequences to men's lives when women had an abortion. I mention dramas by male playwrights in my dissertation only when their work intersects at some point with that of the women playwrights. In the case of Marie Stopes, for example, she aligns herself with popular

² In 1902, three scientists, Carl Correns in Germany, Erich Tschermak in Austria, and Hugo de Vries in Holland, rediscovered the work of Gregor Mendel on heredity in pea pods, which had been published in 1865. Mendel is credited as the founder of genetics because he was able to trace consistent genetic traits in pea pods through several generations. The publication of Charles Darwin's *On the Origin of Species* in 1859 had also generated an ongoing passion for biology as a newly minted branch of science.

playwrights of her time by quoting from speeches by George Bernard Shaw and Harley Granville-Barker, among other prominent playwrights, in her written defence of the banning of her play *Vectia*. Stopes asks audiences to see her as a colleague to the popular male playwrights, and thus to validate her right to challenge the authority of the Lord Chancellor's office, and to stage plays with controversial themes. Writing on the rise of women's theatre in the Modern period, Viv Gardner notes that the "most successful subversions came only when women went outside the existing structures and created, however temporarily, their own theatre" (12). By addressing reproductive and women's rights, women playwrights created a stimulating space where their theatrical endeavours responded to and supported a growing feminist movement. Birth control dramas not only instructed audiences on reproductive rights, but also exposed spectators to the militant possibilities of theatre by mobilizing them to be active participants in the feminist cause.

A similar intersection of feminist interests and reproductive politics emerged during the second wave of feminism with the arrival of Assisted Reproductive Technologies (ARTs), thereby setting the groundwork for the recurrence of the subgenre of reproductive rights drama. Like their modern period counterparts, these plays exemplified how by voicing and performing reproductive issues, women could attain social agency and effect political change. These dramas embodied women's increasing presence and influence in private and public spheres by featuring women scientists, geneticists, and politicians on stage. Yet, in spite of feminist gains across economic, political and social stages, theatre remained a gender-biased environment. Dormant gender divisions were especially visible in dramas dealing with the appropriation of women's reproductive systems. Scientific innovations like stem cell research and cloning had led scientists to believe that women's wombs could be replicated or even made obsolete. The danger to the

advancement of women's rights at this stage was that the application of these new technologies, which centered on the creation of artificial wombs and other non-female environments for gestation, sometimes resulted in the marginalization of women from their central roles in traditional biological reproduction.

To call attention to the consequences of the unregulated research and application of ARTs, women playwrights produced dramas that, like their predecessors' work, reasserted women's voices and feminist standpoints. Contemporary and recent playwrights, like Michelene Wandor, Lisa Loomer, Wendy Lill, Cassandra Medley, Caryl Churchill, and Liz Lochhead built on the foundation of early twentieth-century dramas to stake a claim for women's voices in a new and seemingly menacing biotechnological environment. As Phillips notes, "genres . . . are necessarily responsive to each other as well as to the social conditions that frame them. . . . As authors innovate and the conditions of knowledge and communication change over time, genres undergo a process of revision that registers new relations of authors, readers, and disciplines" (212). Thus, Lill's *Chimera* (2007), for example, transmitted a reproductive rights message through a mixed genre docudrama format that challenged established theatrical conventions. Churchill's *A Number* (2002), in turn, resisted and redefined its categorization as women's drama by presenting a feminist play that did not have a female character on stage. In my opinion, these texts reveal how the subgenre of reproductive rights drama not only opened up new spaces for women's work, but also altered the relationship between playwrights, actors, and spectators.

To reinforce the social value of women's contributions to theatre, these playwrights also often rooted their own dramatic endeavours in the inherent theatricality of science. Analyzing the performativity of science, Kirsten Shepherd-Barr contends that recent playwrights writing dramas about science rely on performance "not only to demonstrate [a play's] scientific ideas but

to enact them in such a way that the science is both performed for us and transformed into metaphor on stage” (34). Biology studies living organisms and the creation of life itself, and as such it “can be narrativized more easily than mathematics and sciences,” argues Sabine Sielke in her essay chronicling the history of biosciences (31). Indeed, the story of creation and survival is a universal tale, which easily provides a shared experience between scientists and their subjects, between women playwrights transmuting scientists’ experiments on stage and their audience. By placing themselves as narrators and subjects of natural or assisted reproductive narratives, women playwrights reclaimed the right to be acknowledged as active representatives and participants in the reproductive politics debate.

Furthermore, women playwrights staged women’s bodies, and in particular their uniquely female reproductive organs, as sites of difference and possible subversion. Through the subgenre of reproductive rights dramas, women playwrights asked audiences to see women on stage as active, historicized, verbal, three-dimensional beings, and not just passive bodies on a doctor’s examination table, a gurney, an operating theatre, or a morgue slab. In addition, and to highlight the need for women to control the reproductive process, these playwrights put women scientists on stage in didactic roles. These characters encouraged spectators to see the woman scientist, and by association the playwright, as purveyors of knowledge, as social educators. Chronicling the relationship between works on stage and feminism, Susan Glenn notes that “the stage and the female performer became increasingly important symbols and resources for the conduct of women’s politics” whereby “the experience of the popular theatre influenced the way the public saw and understood new styles of women’s political behavior” (131). Theatre absorbed and regenerated feminist concerns representing them for public consumption, and women playwrights were ideally positioned to use the public stage to create new models of womanhood.

With these varied representations of female agency, women playwrights staged the multiple possibilities of self-representation offered by reproductive politics. Indeed, women playwrights sometimes cloaked scientific rhetoric in emotional autobiographical or semi-autobiographical narratives designed to appeal to their audiences' sense of experiential and shared social responsibility. Lill wrote *Chimera* as an autobiographical rendering of her stint as a Member of Parliament in Ottawa, Canada, and dramatized her frustration at failing to curtail stem cell legislation. In Lill's *Chimera* and in other dramas featured in my project, the woman scientist represents a confluence of feminist and scientific agency. Women scientists struggled to be recognized as specialists in women's issues in general, and in reproductive rights in particular. To stage women's experience in academia, Cassandra Medley's *Relativity* (2006), for example, features three powerful women scientists who each specialize in a separate area of genetic research. Medley's women achieve political and academic authority through a merger of their scientific knowledge and feminist activism. Yet, it is important to note that embracing science in Medley's play, as in other dramas in this subgenre, can also mean sacrificing familial ties and loyalties with consequent social marginalization.

Writing and working from these cultural and/or academic margins allows women playwrights to take advantage of the unexplored narrative possibilities of the new scientific rhetoric. Analyzing new intersections of science and culture, Sarah Franklin coins the term "genetic imaginary" to refer to the syntactic power of the new genetics discourse. Franklin contends that "as the borders of the undead and the unborn recede into an indeterminate horizon of enhanced technoscientific potency, the challenges to the imagination beckon irresistibly, uncannily, hopefully, and with enormous popular appeal" ("Life Itself" 198). The new lexicon used to define multiple possibilities of the human — clones, geeps, chimeras, and frozen

embryos — emerges to challenge the limits of both scientific and theatrical imaginations. Hence, plays about reproductive rights record and represent communal interests by pushing and resetting the frontiers of science. Churchill's *A Number* imagines a world where human cloning becomes a reality. By imagining and staging scientific discoveries that have not yet occurred, theatre can explore the social consequences that these innovations may have, all within a preventive, controlled scenario. Reproductive rights dramas can ameliorate possibly traumatic encounters between audiences and an unknown science. Through dramatic representations, spectators are given the opportunity to experience vicariously and work through their anxieties about new scientific discoveries.

Women's plays about conception and contraception stage various possibilities of human existence that depend on informed choices regarding scientific innovations. Reproductive rights dramas allow audiences to apply the theatrical gaze and to experience the consequences of unregulated birth control, genetic tampering, stem cell research and cloning. Gillian Beer observes that when science is transmitted through a cultural medium, "it becomes part of the imaginative currency of the community. It is set into multiple interpretative relations and helps to construe the times" (179). Therefore, applying a feminist perspective to science can result in a theatrical experience that, to borrow Dolan's term, can be an "activist project of culture-making" (*Spectator in Action 2*). When scientific knowledge is presented through women's dramas, and therefore women's voices, it can become a force for positive individual and social transformation.

Theatre practitioners also must reflect on the impact that representations of science on stage can have on scientific practices. What transformations can happen to scientific knowledge when it is represented through women's writing? As a feminist theatre scholar, I show how

theatre can resonate and advance some social agendas that may impact scientific research. In Lisa Loomer's *Expecting Isabel* (2005), for example, the playwright analyzes an infertile couple's search for a scientific solution to their conception dilemma. The couple at the heart of Loomer's narrative has the means to access scientific resources, but often does so at the expense of other women who are objectified and marginalized as surrogates or wombs to be harvested. When women playwrights bring these public interest issues to light, through the subgenre of dramas on reproductive rights, theatre scholars can use these works to analyze how plays can challenge or contribute to the reproduction of economic disparities.

Access to birth control education, to genetic innovations, and to cures for infertility are not only contingent on financial solvency. As women's dramas have pointed out, gender and racial prejudices have also often been a factor in determining universal access to scientific knowledge. In the Modern period, Mary Burrill and Angelina Grimké wrote plays about the plight of African American women whose reproductive rights were not considered equal to those of their white counterparts. A few decades later, Michelene Wandor, in *AID Thy Neighbour* (1978), staged the differences in institutional access that same sex couples and heterosexual couples received at an infertility clinic. By dramatizing these inequalities of race and sex, women playwrights call attention to morally questionable science practices and the legislation that condones them.

These strategic mergers of feminist, scientific and social interests offer theatre practitioners and spectators new possibilities and viewpoints from which to successfully challenge and subvert — not conform to — existing gender favouritism. Consequently, I contend that all these texts are rich indicators of feminist legacies, interventions, and advocacy, and that they merit more critical feminist scholarly analysis than they have received thus far. My activist perspective reflects Dolan's recent call to feminist theatre scholars to become "cultural pundits and watchdogs for

women and gender issues in theatre” (“Making a Spectacle” 565). In her rallying cry, Dolan acknowledges that while women playwrights and scholars had already achieved “a spectacle—now it is time to make a difference” (565). I consider the subgenre of plays on reproductive rights as an appropriate starting point towards such an endeavour because these works provide a female and feminist stance from which to critique and effect change in women’s theatre. These texts offer not only a different thematic approach to canonical theatre, but more importantly, they produce and reproduce a language, a feminist science rhetoric, through which to chart and record the evolution of autonomous women’s work in theatre. In addition, I maintain that these dramas challenge Dolan’s contention that women in theatre were “still not controlling the means of their own production or the discourse that characterizes their work” because this subgenre was successful in creating a blueprint for female agency in theatre (564). Rather than remaining a buried species to be discovered by others every few decades, women playwrights who wrote dramas about reproductive rights can now be recognized and celebrated as genera capable of breeding species of their own.

Chapter One: Marie Stopes

I wonder how many other serious plays by women have been destroyed before they ever came into being? It would be interesting were it possible, to assemble all the plays or parts of plays by women directly or indirectly denied existence by men. I fancy the collection would be scarifying. Women's creative work still does not get a fair chance for women have things to say which men have not the ears to hear.

— Marie Stopes, *A Banned Play and A Preface on the Censorship* (1926)

1.1 Introduction

When accessibility to birth control information became a contentious issue during the first wave of feminism, women's drama reflected the various standpoints of the reproductive rights debate. These plays brought together a community of women scientists, activists, journalists and playwrights to publicly showcase women's issues through performance. Each of the first three chapters in this dissertation features two of these works as examples of pivotal and transformative intersections between gender, science, and the arts. In my first chapter, I maintain that scientist, birth control pioneer, and aspiring playwright Marie Stopes embodied an interdisciplinary engagement between theatre, social work and academia by writing two reproductive rights dramas: *Our Ostriches* (1923) and *Vectia* (1923). These texts not only contributed significantly to the rise of the subgenre of birth control drama, during the Modern period, but also paved the way for future work by women playwrights on women's rights themes. Stopes's plays succeeded in challenging established gender binaries because she showed by example how women, particularly those with access to education, could exercise multiple social roles and occupy positions of authority. Stopes was the first woman PhD in the United Kingdom, and she translated her scientific education into wildly successful sex education

manuals like *Married Love* (1918). By writing these non-fictional texts and producing her plays, Stopes made it socially acceptable for women to become authorities and educators on contraception and conception practices.

Before dramatizing reproductive rights on stage, Stopes had already established herself as an expert on women's issues. Her first sex education manual, *Married Love*, had sold more than 750,000 copies in ten years and had more than nineteen printings during her lifetime. *Married Love*, and its equally popular companion pieces, *Radiant Motherhood* (1920) and *Wise Parenthood* (1922), had given Stopes the public recognition and social clout needed to establish the first birth control clinics in England. The mass appeal of these clinics reinforced Stopes's civic and community standing as a social educator. Her success as an author and founder of the birth control clinics in turn motivated Stopes to pursue her life-long dream of becoming a renowned creative artist.

It should be noted that Stopes was not the first non-professional playwright to attempt a dramatic rendition of the birth control debate. In 1914, Lawrence Langner wrote *Wedded: A Social Comedy* featuring the plight of a pregnant woman whose fiancé dies before the wedding ceremony.³ Although this drama was probably the first play written on birth control, Langner was more interested in outlining the bride's legal quandary than in disseminating birth control information. Unlike the work of women playwrights, *Wedded* did not feature strong female voices and characters, nor did it convey a didactic message. Commenting on the reasons behind the writing of *Wedded*, Linda Ben-Zvi notes that bohemians like Langner "wrote about and discussed their concerns for, and affinity with, the working class, but nevertheless, retained

³ *Wedded* first appeared in the November 1914 issue of Margaret Anderson's *The Little Review*.

separate lives, rarely touched directly by the problems they explored artistically and intellectually” (173). Thus *Wedded* was written more as a creative exercise and lofty social commentary, than as activist or instructive drama. Stopes, on the other hand, had a clear didactic intent when she conflated her academic and literary experience on reproductive rights into her two dramatic texts.

To judge the success of Stopes’s dramatic incursion, and its impact on the development of the subgenre of reproductive rights theatre, I trace Stopes’s unusual path to playwriting. I first outline Stopes’s personal and professional evolution beginning with her work as a paleobotanist into a feminist scientist who defied the norms of the academic establishment. Then I show how Stopes morphed from a birth control advocate into a socially conscious playwright who used theatre as a forum to advertise a generalized need for accessible birth control education. Finally, I contend that by focusing on reproductive rights as a theme, Stopes emerged as a feminist playwright, albeit one with mixed commercial and artistic success. I believe a close reading of the content, context and reception of *Our Ostriches* and *Vectia* substantiates how these two dramas became markers and triggers of Stopes’s multiple and empowering social personas.

1.2 Becoming a Feminist Scientist

To map out Stopes’s emergence as a feminist scientist, and her subsequent transformation into a feminist playwright, it is important to first understand how her formal education was a product of a matriarchal legacy. As stated in the introduction of this dissertation, feminist theatre scholars argue that women’s writing has been and remains sporadic and undocumented because women writers and playwrights cannot build on the often unrecorded work of their foremothers. Moreover, at the start of the twentieth century, women’s access to education was limited and

often only available to the upper classes. Any education available tended to be gender biased, and focused on men's contributions to history. Therefore, women's ideas and creative endeavours were not communally correlated nor recognized in historical records. Yet, there is one continuous link in female activism that has been historically documented, and that is an unwavering and unrelenting call for women's right to access education. Stopes's work bears traces of this ongoing advocacy through the suffrage and academic endeavours of her mother, Charlotte Carmichael Stopes. In addition, I analyze briefly the impact of proto-feminist writings like Mary Wollstonecraft's foundational text *A Vindication of the Rights of Women*, popular during this time, as it may have also influenced the feminist standpoint of both Stopes women.

By obtaining a formal university education, Marie Stopes was following the path taken by her mother Charlotte who was the first woman in Scotland to receive a university certificate, and who became a member the British Association for the Advancement of Science. Stopes's mother was also a member of the Royal Society of Literature, where she was well known for her oratory skills, and recognized as a Shakespeare scholar. When Charlotte Stopes instilled in her daughter her own passion for academic work coupled with an activist streak as a vocal suffragette, she became a model of gender breakthrough. Indeed, Stopes's dramatic texts and her work with the birth control clinics reflect the influence of her mother's matriarchal legacy of advocacy for feminist interests.

It should be noted that a hundred years earlier, the work of Mary Wollstonecraft had also recognized universal education as a path for greater civic involvement and agency for women. Before writing her groundbreaking *A Vindication of the Rights of Women*, Wollstonecraft had published *Thoughts on the Education of Daughters* (1776), *The Female Reader* (1789), and *The Wrongs of Woman or Maria*, which was published posthumously in 1798. As a woman writer,

Wollstonecraft deployed women's issues to call attention to plights shared by her gender. Her work, however, was not circumscribed to a female target audience. Moreover, as a proto-feminist, Wollstonecraft wrote to elicit sympathy, and more importantly civic action, from a general audience. Stopes followed a similar path, and used a comparable justification for writing *Married Love*. She wrote her sex education manual to share her personal experience with a community of women, and the "anguish that might have been prevented by knowledge" (*Married Love* 182). Stopes linked the information she acquired through her formal education with a social responsibility to disseminate this knowledge. She felt compelled to "hand at once those gleanings of wisdom I have already accumulated which may help the race to understand itself" (*Married Love* 182). Although I could find no tangible proof that Stopes had read Wollstonecraft's writings, it is noteworthy that both women writers address women's issues and women's rights from a similar standpoint. They both believed widespread education for women was a crucial platform from which women could subvert the biased social structures of their respective times.

When Stopes aligned women's education with civic activism, she was also asking the academic and political community to view her as both a feminist and a scientist. With her positioning, Stopes threatened entrenched notions of gender roles because, as Barbara Gates notes in her text on Victorian and Edwardian women's relationship to nature, women who wanted to be doctors worked within a biased environment because "the language of science when applied by a woman to men's bodies was simply unacceptable" (108). Stopes experienced the same culturally created refusal to see women as capable of owning and voicing scientific rhetoric when she went to Munich to pursue her PhD and was the only woman in her science class.

Stopes's classmates and instructors did not know how to approach the conscientious student who refused to conform to academic dress codes or gendered behaviour. Professor K. Goebel described her as "an attractive figure, despite her forbidding capacity for hard work" (qtd. in R. Hall 46). With this comment, the male professor turned the academic focus on Stopes into an objectifying gaze where physical attraction became more desirable and prominent than intellectual capacity. He implied that the academic community saw Stopes's intellectual ability as a "forbidding" menace that needed to be harnessed. Moreover, Goebel silenced Stopes by referring to her as a figure, a mannequin, aligning Stopes with a voiceless entity. Stopes's academic capacity was further subsumed in discriminatory rhetoric when Goebel described her as being "attractive," thus positioning Stopes as an object of men's sexual — not intellectual — desire. With these words, Goebel also reiterated the ingrained social perception that intellectual development was incompatible with femininity. Stopes fought the socially constructed and repressive mechanism of power by forcing the scientific community to accept that she could be a "figure" of authority in academic, as well as literary circles.

Stopes made her mark in the British scientific community when she became the youngest scholar to obtain a Degree of Science at University College in London in 1902. She followed this academic endeavour with a PhD in paleobotany at the University of Munich in 1904, and served a three-year term as the first female academic lecturer at the University of Manchester from 1904 to 1907. Stopes's swift ascent in academia was remarkable, as she was living in a time when university and college dons routinely blocked women from taking classes, passing examinations and pursuing degrees because they felt women were less suited to intellectual endeavours. Bonnie G. Smith, in her analysis of the impact of gender on history, argued that "women scholars were not even part of a second sex; they were a third sex" in academia (191). Stopes, as

a woman scholar and academic herself, managed to avoid this marginalization into ungendered – and academically unrewarding – territory, by focusing on botany, a science that was not considered as difficult or taxing as physics or chemistry.

Since the impact of any research carried out by women scholars in botany would be limited to the natural world, women botanists were not considered a threat in male-dominated political or industrial circles. Women's academic work in botany, and subsequently in the larger discipline of biology, was also not seen as a challenge to hegemonic social structures. The implication was that botanical research carried out by women scientists, like nature itself, could be easily controlled by men. Imperial exploration during the Victorian and Edwardian period further strengthened the perception of nature as a world that needed to be tamed and ruled by man. Stopes set out to debunk the myth that nature and women needed to be marginalized and corralled, by applying her scientific knowledge to her sex education manuals and plays. Through her work, she sought to unveil the social mechanisms that had set up the gendered social structure in the hopes of dismantling it.

1.3 Translating Science into Birth Control Activism

As a successful academic and a daughter of a suffragette, Stopes was aware of the changes brought on by the first wave of feminism. To unleash her multi-pronged campaign on women's reproductive rights, Stopes took advantage of the social anxiety surrounding women's increasing incursion in the work place and a declining national birth rate. Stopes launched her sex manuals and dramas when England was experiencing a collective feeling of male emasculation. World War I had claimed a large percentage of England's generation of young, virile and fertile men. Their deaths created a declining national birth rate that would be exacerbated by a spread of

influenza in 1919. No longer part of an overwhelming majority, white, British men felt their social power slipping when women obtained the right to vote and stepped into industrial jobs vacated by those fighting abroad. Christina Hauck, in her exploration of Stopes's feminist tendencies, describes the latent malaise and divisive gender sentiment as "fears about class and racial extinction" which "frequently took the form of anti-feminist diatribes as male theorists sought to affix blame for what they perceived to be an unprecedented and dire crisis" (113). During this period, women were also claiming the right to wear men's clothing, as evidenced by the popularity of The Rational Dress Society (1891) that encouraged women to wear split skirts for cycling. Ruth Hall, in her biography of Stopes, notes that Stopes herself was well known for not wearing corsets and brassieres, sometimes even donning men's trousers in expeditions, thus preferring comfort to constraint (24, 67).

While women were gaining social freedoms and rights, women's lack of sex education still kept them in the dark regarding their procreative rights within marriage. Stopes boldly rallied for women to demand birth control education, in a public call reminiscent of suffragette speeches: "True, man keeps woman so far as he can in the lower walks of professional life, but she is established on the outskirts of his monopoly and when she universally holds the key to the control of her motherhood in her own hands, she will penetrate everywhere" (*A Banned Play* 13). Stopes wrote this rallying cry for change in the preface to her banned play, *Vectia*, to call attention to how objections to women obtaining sex education had reached all the social spheres, including theatre circles. Stopes argued that her play was censored because of "great social hypocrisies, and that in this matter the average man's judgment is not clear, but is warped, blurred and twisted by the false sex tradition of centuries" (*A Banned Play* 15). Although a change to the gender hierarchy was possible through a culturally driven power shift, Michel

Foucault, in *The History of Sexuality, Vol. 1*, warns that “the effort to speak freely about sex and accept it in its reality is so alien to a historical sequence that has gone unbroken for a thousand years now, and so inimical to the intrinsic mechanisms of power, that it is bound to make little headway for a long time before succeeding in its mission” (9). Stopes believed the key to successfully challenging entrenched and divisive sex hegemony lay in demanding and asserting equal civic and reproductive rights in marriage.

Stopes argued that a marriage could not reach its full potential until “women possess as much intellectual freedom and freedom of opportunity within it as do their partners” (*Married Love* 99). Her words echoed a common ideology at the core of all feminist movements and clearly stated in the ten Resolutions of the Second National Convention for Women held in 1851. Resolution seven declared that “woman ought to choose for herself what sphere she will fill, what education she will seek, and what employment she will follow, and not be held bound to accept, in submission, the rights, the education, and the sphere which man thinks proper to allow her” (“Second National Convention” 113). When she deployed feminist ideology, Stopes led by example, arguing to keep her legal name when she married Reginald Ruggles Gates. She asserted that, “notwithstanding my legal marriage, my name is Marie C. Stopes. As I have been for some time, and still am entitled to the courtesy of the title of ‘Doctor’, the situation is relieved of any difficulty regarding the application of either ‘Mrs’ or ‘Miss’ to that name” (R. Hall 94). For

Stopes, her name was attached to her intellectual property, and she was unwilling to relinquish it to the institution of marriage.⁴

Stopes urged women to exercise their right to equitable recognition in marriage by accessing birth control education. Stopes argued that when women availed themselves of birth control, they obtained the right to define their legacy through the number of descendants they chose to produce. Hence, women could have a public voice and influence the lives of future generations. In her manuals and dramas alike, Stopes reminded her audience that she embodied the practical application of female agency through reproductive rights. When Stopes married Gates, she had not had sex education, and it took her three years to realize that her marriage to Gates had never been consummated. She then sought and obtained an annulment to the union. Her failed marriage prompted Stopes to educate herself on sexual matters, and she approached the endeavour as a scientific project. While carrying out her research, she prophetically speculated that there could be other women like her, and from all walks of life, who lived in sexual ignorance. Thus, she set out to write sex education manuals for a broad, non-academic audience.

When she published her sex education manuals, Stopes claimed she voiced the concerns of other women because she was now a well-versed sex education expert: “who in the world should know this better than I? I, who have the intimate confidence of tens of thousands of my contemporaries of every social class” (*Married Love* 12). Through the confessional tone of her

⁴ Once again, Stopes echoed the sentiments expressed earlier by Wollstonecraft, who questioned the laws that made “an absurd unit of a man and his wife; and then, by the easy transition of only considering him responsible, she is reduced to a mere cipher” (ch. 9). In 1765, William Blackstone’s *Commentaries on the English Common Law* had also stated that women in England were living under *coverture* where married women’s rights were managed by their husbands. Maria J. Falco, in her inquiry into the history of feminism, contends that Wollstonecraft addressed this issue in her writing by contesting the law that “in a marriage two persons had become one, and the one was the man” (3).

manuals, Stopes emphasized her role as an “everywoman” figure. She personified a popular modern period construction of “public selves through autobiographical negotiations,” as chronicled by Maggie Gale in her overview to the anthology (*Auto/Biography* 3). By creating narrators and characters who were palimpsests of her real life persona, Stopes engaged both the reader and the theatre spectator in her plight. The outraged brides or brides-to-be in her manuals and plays represented Stopes at various stages of her life. In her study of Stopes’s marriage manuals, Leslie Hall argues that as a scientist, Stopes had “an acute sense of audience, and in always lucid prose, shaped her style toward her intended readership, whether this was her scientific peers or the uneducated but basically literate working-class woman” (123). Readers could hear and see Stopes’s authorial voice through layers of carefully worded rhetoric, a discourse whose main intent was to elicit public sympathy for Stopes’s – and by extension every woman’s – predicament.

With her popular sex manuals, Stopes effectively bridged the gap between academics and the general public by making science accessible to all. Moreover, personalizing scientific rhetoric became a key component of Stopes’s public appeal since her work managed to strike a balance between lyrical prose and scientific prescriptive advice. In his analysis of the emergence of sexology in the modern period, Paul Peppis notes that Stopes reaffirmed the right of women to write on scientific matters by modernizing the trend towards anti-sentimental literature, and “conjoining idioms of scientific rationality and impersonal detachment with vocabularies of lyric sentiment, thus affirming the continuing relevance of sentimentality to modernism’s efforts to reform gender by rewriting sex” (575). Consequently, Stopes made scientific matters easily understandable to women without feminizing the discipline or losing her own standing as a

scientific authority. She transformed herself successfully from a scientist into an author and social educator.

At this stage in her life, Stopes consciously turned to drama to promote her views on birth control. She felt theatre would allow her to further layer and develop her increasingly influential public persona. Stopes referred to *Vectia*, her first reproductive rights drama, as an “almost unadulterated autobiography” (R. Hall 97). Indeed, I believe that through her plays, Stopes was able to both stage and typify her own tumultuous transformation into both subject and object of her research. By featuring a heroine who desires a child but who has been unknowingly living in an unconsummated union for three years, *Vectia* borrowed heavily on Stopes’s own experience. When the eponymous heroine in *Vectia* learns about sex education, through the scientific theories of Havelock Ellis, she frees herself from the social obligation of marriage to an impotent husband. With this play, Stopes translated biological theories into practical applications accessible and understandable to theatre audiences. Thus, through *Vectia*, Stopes emerged as a playwright who, like her academic and literary personas, was a herald and conduit for social change.

By publicly dramatizing her scientific knowledge about sexual reproduction, Stopes sought to elicit the same enthusiastic response from theatre spectators and critics as she had received from her readers. However, Stopes did not realize that the success of her sexual education manuals had depended in part on the anonymity and privacy offered by the reading experience. If her controversial drama were staged, its performance would put the audience in the uncomfortable position of communally experiencing the public humiliation of a man who could not perform his sexual duties in marriage. It was therefore not surprising that the Office of the Lord Chamberlain banned the play in 1923, even as Stopes had already booked the Royal Court

Theatre in London for a three-month engagement. The ban did not deter her. Between 1923 and 1930, Stopes continued to submit *Vectia* to the censors (although under other titles: *Married Love*, *Cleansing Circles* and *Vortex Damned*) but with no success. Unfortunately for Stopes, neither the Lord Chamberlain's Office, nor theatre audiences in her time, were ready to publicly embrace dramas that promoted sex education written by a woman playwright, even if that woman was also an accredited scientist.

Although *Vectia* was never staged, Stopes published the text in 1926 under the title: *A Banned Play and a Preface on the Censorship*. The printed text allows us to appreciate how Stopes intended to merge autobiographical drama with scientific authority to promote women's reproductive rights. While relying heavily on her life story to dramatize *Vectia*'s quandary, Stopes did not just focus on her own science credentials to address the need for sex education. Rather than using references to her sex education manuals, which may have come across as heavy handed, Stopes strategically shored up her argument with the work of Havelock Ellis, a popular expert on sexology at the start of the twentieth century.⁵

I believe Stopes chose Ellis's work, among those of other scientists writing on sexual desire at the time, to deliberately align herself with a male peer sympathetic to feminist causes in general, and biological reproduction in particular. In *Man and Woman*, Ellis argued that "the hope of our future civilisation lies in the development in equal freedom of both the masculine and the feminine element in life," thus supporting equal representation of the sexes before the law (451). As a social educator, Stopes would also have known that Ellis believed "the

⁵ Ellis's texts figure prominently throughout the play showing how both genders react differently to its contents. While *Vectia* uses Ellis's knowledge to escape her marriage, her husband trashes Ellis's work by hurling it into a waste paper basket.

reproduction of the race is a social function” (*Social Hygiene* 64). For Stopes, Ellis was an academic colleague whose work validated and propped up her own authority to advocate for a more widespread social understanding of women’s reproductive roles and responsibilities. Hence, I contend that by including his work in *Vectia*, Stopes attempted to merge scientific knowledge from established academics of both sexes into her didactic drama.

Vectia focused on a woman’s right to become a mother and to control her reproduction in the world. Although women’s reproductive rights were not considered offensive issues during Stopes’s time, her play was banned because Stopes misjudged men’s reaction to an overt representation of female agency. In her *Preface on the Censorship*, Stopes argues that *Vectia* “shows a woman who is simple, pure, and normally sexed, and a man who is futile and weak as a result of the poisoning of his youth, and for that reason the Lord Chamberlain feels that the whole of public opinion will be behind him when he bans it!” (11). I believe men during Stopes’s time viewed her drama as a threat to masculinity because Stopes chose to set up female reproduction as a counterpoint to male impotence and homosexuality. In *Vectia*, Stopes also referenced Ellis’s theories on homosexuality, taken from his popular texts, *Sexual Ethics* and *Sexual Psychology*. By having *Vectia* resolve her childless plight through the reading of Ellis’s work, Stopes introduced the socially unacceptable possibility that William, *Vectia*’s husband, could be impotent due to his latent homosexuality rather than due to any fault of the heroine. When *Vectia* confronts William with her newly acquired sex education, he begs her to stay arguing that he can provide her with “the higher side of marriage,” that is the charade of a socially acceptable, albeit unconsummated union (140). Stopes refutes this proposition by having the virile lawyer Heron convince *Vectia* to escape her loveless marriage. Heron provides *Vectia* with a heterosexual alternative that would produce the child that he claims “urges” her to give it

life (143). With this choice, Stopes implied that Vectia acquired reproductive rights information thanks to the scientific knowledge she received textually from Ellis as the sex expert, and subliminally from Stopes as the playwright.

Stopes further reinforced the perils of sexual ignorance by ending the play not with the new couple embracing, but with the image of William shaking his head in despair, and asking himself “Why wasn’t I told – years ago – why wasn’t I told?” (144). She set up sexual knowledge in the play, and in real life, as information that both sexes should have. More importantly, Stopes implied that sex education could be accessed and mediated through her as a scientist and a playwright. She further reiterated her didactic role by complementing the printed edition of the play with a series of advertisements for her birth control clinics, positioning herself as the authoritative conduit for both sexual education and the right to access this information.

Yet, all of Stopes’s scientific and literary credentials could not help her overcome established gender prejudices against a woman playwright who wrote dramas on these controversial themes. Stopes failed to convince the Lord Chamberlain’s Office to change its ruling, even after the text of the play appeared in printed form. To this day *Vectia* has never been professionally staged. Hence, the banning of *Vectia* meant theatre audiences never witnessed Stopes’s first attempt at dramatizing women’s reproductive rights. In an ironic twist of fate though, the censorship of *Vectia* gave Stopes the opportunity to stage another birth control play, *Our Ostriches*. Her second work on reproductive rights was even more overtly autobiographical and more vehemently propagandistic than its banned predecessor.

1.4 The Emergence of a Birth Control Playwright

On November 14, 1923, during the opening night of *Our Ostriches* at the Royal Court Theatre in London, Stopes stepped onto the stage and informed the audience that following the banning of *Vectia*, she had written a replacement play “in a day” (*A Banned Play* 5). By addressing her audience prior to the performance, Stopes asked spectators to conflate her public persona as a birth control activist with that of a woman playwright. With her speech, Stopes marked the stage as a place for female agency and advocacy. For her, the theatre stage also became a representational space created and occupied by women where the existence of banned plays could be publicly recognized, if not produced. With the verbal acknowledgement of one play, and the physical representation of its substitute, Stopes introduced London audiences to a burgeoning subgenre of dramas on reproductive rights.

In *Our Ostriches*, Stopes dramatized the need for easily accessible birth control education by once again relying on an autobiographical standpoint. *Our Ostriches* was a fictionalization of Stopes’s conversion into a birth control pioneer. Stopes’s double in the text, Evadne Carrillon, is an aristocrat who ventures into the slums and is appalled when she discovers the living conditions of lower class women. One of these women is Mrs. Flinker, who had given birth to eleven children with various infirmities, and who is once again pregnant. Mrs. Flinker cannot access birth control education because she is poor and the Church has told her it is a sin to use contraceptive devices. Mrs. Flinker’s plight prompts Evadne to embark on a political battle to provide access to birth control to everyone regardless of class, but especially to those who have a history of breeding diseased or feeble-minded children.

Stopes consciously represented Mrs. Flinker’s unchecked reproduction as a menace to a society anxious to increase its national birth rate. As a proponent of eugenics, Stopes felt that

birth control would curtail the breeding of lower class people, like Mrs. Flinker, who had five children die in childbirth and gave birth to four sickly ones. When Evadne bemoans the “dreadfulness of weak babies coming one after another to homes like this,” she is espousing Stopes’s eugenic views that only higher class people should be allowed to breed to improve the race (39). In *Our Ostriches*, Stopes merged her eugenics agenda with propaganda for her birth control clinics in an effort to find a more receptive audience for her views on reproductive rights.

Using her life story once more as a resource, Stopes recreated her failed performance before the British Birth Rate Commission for the climactic third act of *Our Ostriches*. Stopes had been called to give advice, as a birth control expert and founder of the Society of Constructive Birth Control and Racial Progress, for the Commission’s 1918-20 “The Problems of Population and Parenthood” report on the national birth rate.⁶ When she appeared before the Commission, Stopes had already published *Wise Parenthood: The Treatise on Birth Control* as a follow up to the success of *Married Love*. She had also opened the first birth control clinic in London, and was well known as a reproductive rights advocate. However, the Commission, made up mostly of male Church and government officials, was not receptive to having Stopes’s scientific

⁶ Before Stopes established her Society of Constructive Birth Control and Racial Progress, the Malthusian League (1877-1927) had advocated for the right to publicly speak about population control family planning. However, the Malthusian League was not as popular, nor as effective in its mission. It focused on practicing birth control through abstinence and self-control, rather than relying on Stopes’s science-based methods. Stopes also skillfully aligned her Society with her Mothers’ Clinic, which operated with the mandate to provide practical education and access to various methods of birth control for women of all classes. In addition, Stopes founded The Medical Research Committee on Contraceptives in 1922 as a branch of her Society, to act as a liaison between the medical community and the general public.

principles, nor her personal experience, override long-established (male) social values, which in turn were entrenched in religious dogma.⁷

Stopes's testimony before the Birth Rate Commission was not taken into account when reproductive rights policies were drafted because Stopes held strong eugenics beliefs (as *Our Ostriches* explicitly shows). Eugenics ideology ran counter to religious anti-abortion doctrine, which advocated natural procreation and censored scientific contraception practices. Moreover, eugenics advocated for a policy where those who were fit were encouraged to breed to increase the numbers of the dominant race. Tamsen Wolff, in *Mendel's Theatre* (her ground-breaking work on eugenics and performance), observes that "part of the persuasive power of eugenics lies in its joint attention to the quality of the collective group (broadly defined, the human race or the nation) and the quality of the individual. Eugenics thereby appears to close the distance between the individual and the collective modern subject" (131). When Stopes chose to include eugenics as part of her reproductive rights activism, she exploited the temporal dimension of theatre where an audience sees a historical past — in this case Stopes's personal experience before the Birth Rate Commission — coming alive in the performance being staged before them.

Wolff also suggested there was a link between eugenics and modern drama in their shared concern for visibility in, and of, the individual body and the collective body. According to Wolff, "in eugenic theory, there is a vital tension between hidden truth (for eugenicists, usually ominous genetic secrets) and visible truth (genetic history displayed on the body)" (6). A body's ability to

⁷ By the time *Our Ostriches* was written in 1923, science was slowly entering the public discourse with "domestic science" and "scientific motherhood" becoming part of common rhetoric. Science had begun to achieve recognition as non-scientists discovered that when "scientific methods were applied to everyday tasks it was supposed that they would be done more rationally and efficiently" (Lewis 34). The general public's change in attitude towards science made it easier for Stopes to discuss more openly a scientific, though sometimes controversial, approach to sexual education and birth control.

at once hide and reveal the truth reflected an ongoing fascination with scientific progress of this time — such as the development of microscopes, the invention of x-ray machine, the discovery of atoms, and the rediscovery of genetic science — which facilitated new research on the unseen recesses of the human body. Scientists’ obsession with the invisible went hand in hand with the development of psychology and psychiatry since these new sciences explored the intangible psyche. Eugenicists based their theory of selective breeding on the dichotomy between what can be seen and the threat of what “lurks unseen” in the human body, which created and fed a culture of fear and anxiety in early twentieth century society (Wolff 6). Wolff argued that eugenicists seized this situation as an opportunity to introduce their theories as facts through elements of theatre because “theatre gave them an audience, a community that would actively detect and confirm eugenic conclusions about human differences and thus accept the equation of biological and social worth that eugenicists aimed to demonstrate” (7).⁸ As an advocate of eugenics, a scientist, and a playwright, Stopes seized the opportunity to promote her beliefs in a didactic, authoritative, and theatrical manner. By naming her heroine, Evadne Carrillon, for example, Stopes hinted at her heroine’s and her own role as flag bearer for the eugenics movement. Evadne’s last name, Carrillon was a form of the French word “carillon,” which referred the church bells rung during medieval times to announce imminent attacks. By choosing this name for her avatar in the play, Stopes reinforced her own role as someone who calls others to arms. Furthermore, not only does the character’s first name have the same root prefix “ev” as the word *eugenics*, but it also carries the name “Eva” imbedded in it. According to Christian gospel, Eva

⁸ Indeed, eugenics proponents employed theatrical devices in their displays at carnival, fairs and academic conferences. Eugenicists often held contests searching for the “fittest” families, and displayed photographs of the winners for others to follow suit and breed the best quality human being. When eugenics proponents promoted “race motherhood” by encouraging certain women to conceive, they planted the foundation for designer babies, which would resurface with Assisted Reproductive Technologies (ARTs) in the latter part of the century.

was both the first woman and mother of mankind, and the first human to defy church teachings, which is what Evadne does when demanding contraception information for all women during her plea to the Birth Rate Commission.

It is important to understand, as Jane Lewis points out in her chronology of the history of the birth control movement, that when the Church of England accepted the use of birth control, it did so “on medical and eugenic grounds,” even though eugenics had yet to prove its scientific merits (34). Stopes introduced her argument that science, even in the form of an unproven scientific theory, should override religion when in her play the Bishop of Chelmsgate officiously stated to the Birth Rate Commission that “we are all only too ready to welcome light thrown upon this problem by science” (58). Stopes further emphasized the merger of scientific and religious beliefs in the public advertisements for her birth control clinics where an incandescent light bulb was used to signify the “marvellous light” of (contraception) information illuminating a path of knowledge in the modern world. I posit that it is not a coincidence that Stopes, with her scientific credentials, set herself up as the bearer of this particular torch. Indeed, Stopes attempted to merge eugenics theories with scientific rhetoric in the thirteen pages of advertisements for all her sexual education manuals and her birth control clinics which accompanied the printed edition of *Our Ostriches*. This alignment of her scientific, commercial, and creative interests firmly defined Stopes as a conduit for both social activism and eugenics propaganda.

Although Stopes claimed to speak for all women, her eugenics-laced activist work on reproductive rights was in fact confined to defending the rights of the privileged classes. Wolff notes that “eugenics rhetoric promoted the protection and expansion of the native-born, healthy, middle-to upper middle – class Anglo-Saxon ‘race,’ using terms of heredity and aesthetics to pit

alleged purity (of the blood) and beauty (of the body) against contamination and ugliness” (170). The motto of Stopes’s Mothers’ Clinic promoted: “Joyous and deliberate motherhood / A sure light in our racial darkness” (*Our Ostriches* 116). The “racial darkness” referred to a national prejudice where the British upper classes saw themselves as the highest representatives of the British race, superior to the lower, working classes seen as racial contaminants. Thus, Stopes’s “racial darkness” alluded to the darkening of the race through the birth of children who were unfit and who belonged to the lower classes. Her use of the pronoun “our” also connotes an ironic and subliminal process of othering. The language of the clinic’s motto aligning “deliberate” contraception with the process of bringing “light into our racial darkness” carried echoes of British Imperialism. British explorers and missionaries set out to bring the light of civilized knowledge into the dark and less evolved corners of the world.⁹ Britain established a need for a white authority to exert civilizing influence and racial superiority over the darker-skinned savages in the colonies, while using this same justification to send their own lower-class undesirables to colonies abroad (Wolff 4). Stopes refers to this imperial endeavour in her play when the Commission reads a précis by Professor Sir William Beveridge stating there are “enormous areas of the earth which were fit for cultivation are not cultivated at all” (76). For Stopes, the British Commission condoned marginalizing the diseased, the perverted, the weakest members of society to the colonies to “cultivate” and breed with the locals, for fear that if they remained on British soil they could contaminate the race.

⁹ The eugenics movement also sought to emulate missionary discourse in a bid to earn the respect and public following enjoyed by religious doctrine. Stopes appropriated religious rhetoric in her motto by evoking the words from the Bible in the gospel of John: “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life” (New King James Vers. 8:12), and from the gospel of Peter where the Israelites are told they are “the chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation . . . that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who called you out of the darkness and into his marvelous light” (New King James Vers. 2:9). Since bearing light implies bearing knowledge, the possession of this knowledge then gives authority to the torchbearer.

It should be noted that Stopes did not restrict her public endorsement of eugenic practices to her dramas. She continued to appropriate images of imperialism and racial scourging in her latter works, such as *Mother England: A Contemporary History*, published in 1929, with the subtitle: *Self-written by those who have had no historian*. The text is a compilation of letters, a “self-written record of the dumb class of working mothers of whose lives history has taken no cognizance” (Preface n. pag.). According to Stopes, these letters are a plea to “Mother England” to provide “the knowledge of how to bear in health and joy the beautiful and happy scions of an Imperial race that might even yet flower from our ancient stock” (191). Stopes declared that providing this knowledge was her mission and “the basis of the work done by my husband and myself in founding the first birth control clinic in the British Empire” (189). With this statement, Stopes unabashedly assumed the role of parent of this race when she becomes the *other* Mother England. Through her scientific knowledge of reproduction, Stopes set herself up as an emblematic authority with agency to disseminate information on contraception, and in effect to control the future of the British race.

In *Our Ostriches*, Stopes appropriates the role of social educator through a narrative that focuses on reproductive rights from its opening lines. When the curtain comes up, Brother Peter and Lady Carfon talk about the imminent betrothal of Lord Simplex and Evadne describing it as a “suitable attachment,” which will be blessed by both the Church and society (14). Although *Our Ostriches* claims to be about the unchecked reproduction of the lower classes, Stopes almost buries this issue in her more pressing — I would argue more eugenic — concern that the “suitable” people successfully reproduce. The play thus begins with the problem of finding a husband for Evadne, Lady Carfon’s daughter, so that Evadne can reproduce the Imperial race. Stopes reinforces her eugenics intent by ending her drama with Evadne choosing Doctor Verro

Hodges as her partner in marriage, as a mate with whom she can procreate the socially acceptable and superior race.¹⁰ The predicament of the lower class Mrs. Flinker and her yearly pregnancies, which should have been the heart of the birth control narrative, becomes an excuse for the ultimate matchmaking of two more desirable examples of reproduction.

Thus Stopes's audience never hears the voices of Mr. and Mrs. Flinker in the public setting of the court that legislates access to birth control education. Instead, Evadne, Hodges, the clergymen, and academics speak for or against the Flinkers, in a case of theatrical and social ventriloquism. The Flinkers have no authority to decide upon their reproductive rights. Members of the upper classes control this information together with the ability to publicly argue for their cause. Stopes makes the same dramaturgical choice in her dramas as she did in her sex education manuals, where she summons, edits, and ultimately controls the voices of others to support her argument, and to reinforce her authoritative stance.

1.5 Transforming into a Feminist Playwright

With *Our Ostriches*, Stopes not only boosted her role as a birth control expert, but also embraced a feminist standpoint by inviting theatre audiences to envision and accept a woman as an authority on reproductive rights. By making Evadne witness the birth control dilemma of the Flinker household, and empowering her to present the playwright's views at the Birth Control

¹⁰ With this narrative option, Stopes was once again inserting an autobiographical note. Stopes had created her own real-life happy ending by founding the first birth control clinic in the United Kingdom with her second husband Humphrey Verdon Roe. The advertisement for the groundbreaking clinic, featured in the printed version of her play, clearly sets out her unequal partnership in this endeavour. Stopes's husband's name appears before hers as Humphrey Verdon Roe, Esq., thus highlighting his public superiority in both gender and class. Roe was an aeronautical engineer and Stopes had a degree in science. Although Stopes had an academic pedigree more suited to the nature of the clinic, she was introduced in the literature as "his wife" according a non-reciprocal hierarchical marital status not uncommon to the time period.

Commission, Stopes sets up feminist agency as a challenge to male political and religious authority. When Evadne is at the Flinker home, she does not face Mr. Flinker as the head of the household, but rather has to deal with the meddling and celibate Brother Peter. Mr. Flinker is likewise absent from the court proceedings, replaced by the celibate Bishop of Chelmgate, Chairman of the Birth Rate Commission. Stopes hoped audiences would question why both of these two priests, who could bear no children, should wield the power to control birthing policies in the United Kingdom. These two Church representatives are distanced from the issues, unable — and moreover unwilling — to comprehend the plight of the lower classes. This bias is even more evident when they refuse to have Mrs. Flinker appear as a witness because as Evadne states, they decline to “know at first-hand the lives you play with as ciphers on paper!” (74).¹¹ For Evadne and for Stopes, these male figures of authority focus on abstract generalities and ideas and not on actual individual plights. In essence, Stopes presented these authoritarian figures as entrenched in their political and social circles from which they could oversee, but need not engage with, the dilemmas of the lower classes. For Stopes, when these men buried their heads in legal terminology, they were emulating ostriches that bury their heads in the sand.

Unfortunately for Stopes, critics of *Our Ostriches* felt that by financing the play, she was more interested in publicizing her emerging birth control clinics than in criticizing social attitudes. As a result, London theatre critics panned her drama in scathing reviews that ridiculed Stopes’s creative aspirations. The unnamed reviewer in *The Illustrated London News* wrote that “*Our Ostriches* scarcely pretends to be a play; it is propaganda – on ‘birth control’ – presented in

¹¹ “Cipher” is a curious word selection for Stopes. She could be echoing the argument outlined earlier in this paper by Wollstonecraft who accused men of treating women as “ciphers” in their marriage (see footnote 3 in this chapter).

dramatic form and in an intelligent parade of argument” (“*Our Ostriches* at The Court” 968). The also unnamed reviewer in *The Times* was more blunt in his perception stating that “with the production of last night dramatic criticism is not concerned. There is no play to criticize; it is mere propaganda” (“*Our Ostriches*” 10). In light of this harsh criticism regarding Stopes’s propagandistic agenda, it is not surprising that the most positive critical response was written by C. B. S. Hodson in the *Eugenics Review*.

Countering the theatre critics’ reviews, Hodson judged the play precisely on its merits as a piece of propaganda, arguing that “we shall only learn gradually how many people were persuaded by being either decoyed or coerced into listening for once to practically all the arguments pro-birth control seriatim, delivered in an entertaining manner” (67). Furthermore, Hodson did not gloss over Stopes’s role as a board member of the British Eugenics Society. Instead, the reviewer hailed the role as a worthy credential by stating that only those who have studied extensively and fought for the cause of eugenics would understand the nuances and caricatures of this particular drama.¹² Hodson’s comment on the eugenics element of Stopes’s play is noteworthy as it also signals a feminist endorsement of Stopes’s work. C.B.S. Hodson was not only a woman, but also the Secretary of the British Eugenics Society for over twenty years. By writing on *Our Ostriches*, Hodson foregrounded her own activist role, as both a public relations agent for a fellow board member’s work and as an advocate of eugenics in general.

¹² In 1914, Stopes wrote another play addressing eugenics called *The Race or Ernest’s Immortality*. The play is not as autobiographical as Stopes’s previous endeavours. It narrates the story of Rosemary Pexton, the daughter of a country solicitor who is being forced to marry a local squire, even though she is in love with a young soldier. Pexton sleeps with the soldier three days before he goes to war where he is killed. When Rosemary finds out she is pregnant, she uses eugenics rhetoric to justify her desire to keep the child. She argues that “heredity does matter Is it not more wrong that not only Ernest, but all the fine, clean strong young men like him who go out to be killed, should leave no sons to carry on the race; but that the cowardly and unhealthy ones who remain behind can all have wives and children?” (qtd. in R. Hall 112). The play was never staged, and it remains in the Stopes-Roe collection in manuscript form.

When Hodson commended Stopes for converting some members of the audience who “came away much enlightened,” she was praising Stopes for doing her missionary eugenics and feminist duty while slyly carrying out the same task herself through her writing of the review (67). Because Hodson’s review came out two months after *Our Ostriches* closed, her text was not as much a timely recruitment effort, as a call to arms to her readership, male and female, to engage in similar civic-minded, creative endeavours.

For Stopes, Hodson’s endorsement validated her own view that women had to create their own theatrical space — one supported by other women — in order to succeed. Writing on the interconnections and interdependence between theatre and audiences, Jacky Bratton argues that all dramas “are uttered in a language, shared by successive generations, which includes not only speech and the systems of the stage — scenery, costume, lighting, and so forth — but also genres, conventions and, very importantly, memory” (37). Therefore, Bratton contends that the most common characteristic of female autobiography is “self-definition in relation to significant others; so that, rather than a sense of individual autonomy, a sense of identification, interdependence and community is key in the development of women’s identities” (101). By literally embodying sexual education through an autobiographical dramatic representation, Stopes made women believe they could challenge and change their status in a gendered social hierarchy. Indeed, in *Our Ostriches*, Stopes’s heroine pleads that “woman must help woman!” in a reiteration of the first wave of feminism’s call for female solidarity (84). Stopes forged a trail for empowering, feminist group action through her visible presence in academia, in the public sector with her birth control clinics, in the arts through her plays and translations, and within the British Eugenics Society.

Stopes also demonstrated the need for collective female action in the preface to the printed edition of *Vectia*. In this text, Stopes once again proclaimed herself as a spokeswoman for her sex when she publicly defended and conflated the rights of every oppressed woman with the rights of the woman dramatist who is up against a world of “men managers, men producers, men theatre owners, men newspaper proprietors, men critics, men censors, a man-made code of so-called morality” (*A Banned Play* 9). With an impassioned argument, Stopes asks her readers and potential theatre audience to question “how many other serious plays by women have been destroyed before they ever came into being? It would be interesting were it possible, to assemble all the plays or parts of plays by women directly or indirectly denied existence by men” (*A Banned Play* 8). Defending *Vectia*, Stopes took a feminist standpoint by merging a woman’s right to access sex education with a woman playwright’s right to challenge dramatic censorship.

In her argument in favour of *Vectia*, Stopes employed reproductive rights rhetoric by reiterating the power of the womb, an exclusively female gestating environment. When she argued that “no one can estimate the incalculable loss to British drama, British social life and literary fame by the destruction in utero, as one might say of the greatest works of our leading men of thought,” she reinforced the image of the female womb as a place to nurture creative and intellectual activity (40). Stopes reiterated this standpoint in the first scene of her play by showing Vectia modeling a life-like statue of a child in clay, and calling it a Galatea to her Pygmalion referring to the Greek myth whereby the sculptor Pygmalion falls in love with an ivory statue he creates and names Galatea. I believe Stopes also inserted a deliberate allusion to Shaw’s popular play *Pygmalion*, which premiered in London on 11 April 1914 at Sir Herbert

Beerbohm Tree's His Majesty's Theatre and ran for 118 performances.¹³ In her reference to Shaw's play where Professor Henry Higgins transforms flower girl Eliza Doolittle into an upper class aristocrat through speech lessons, Stopes reversed the role of reproducer, giving a woman the power to recreate herself rather than have her be the passive object of a man's creation. Stopes thus reinforced female creativity as an endeavour that should be respected and acknowledged, not censored and silenced.

Through her broad defence of women's rights, Stopes's drama addressed a multiplicity of political issues and feminist causes, such as population control, immigration, a declining birth rate, and equality of the sexes. Dramatizing birth control gave Stopes the opportunity to convey a didactic message and to exert female agency over the reproductive process. By reshaping and rewriting her expertise in birth control and sex education into dramas designed to empower her target audience, Stopes herself embodied and generated a powerfully gendered and complex intertextual engagement between theatre, science, and social reform.

Stopes's imprint in theatre history found its echo in North America in the work of her counterpart, Margaret Sanger. Stopes and Sanger had met in 1915 when Sanger sought exile in London to avoid prosecution for disseminating birth control information in the United States. Stopes asked Sanger for information regarding contraception which she then used in her research for *Married Love*.¹⁴ Although Sanger was not a playwright like Stopes, she endorsed and encouraged the promotion of reproductive rights through the arts. Sanger printed dramas and

¹³ See *Bernard Shaw. Collected Letters: 1911-1925* edited by Dan H. Laurence (Viking, 1983), for more information on the run of *Pygmalion*.

¹⁴ The two women would later become bitter rivals when Sanger laid claim to coining the term "birth control" and tried to open the first birth control clinic in London following a raid on her Brownsville clinic in Brooklyn, New York. When Sanger was unable to pursue her plans, Stopes opened the first of her Mothers' Clinic for Constructive Birth Control on March 17, 1920.

short stories in *The Birth Control Review*, and like Stopes, she also buttressed these emotional pleas with scientific endorsements from respected scientists like Havelock Ellis. While Stopes's largely autobiographical work centered on her public persona, Sanger encouraged and incorporated more diverse voices by showcasing race as a factor in reproductive rights representation. Whereas Stopes debated access to birth control through white, upper and middle class characters, Sanger elected to promote this concern through the work of African American playwrights and writers. Furthermore, rather than speaking for others (as Stopes had done), Sanger allowed emerging playwrights to speak directly to theatre audiences as representatives of their gender and race. As my next chapter explores, by giving these playwrights a public space, Sanger promoted the rise of African American women's drama in a feminist setting where their work would not be measured or judged against a white male or female equivalent.

Chapter Two: Mary Burrill and Angelina Grimké

A free race cannot be born of slave mothers. A woman enchained cannot choose but give a measure of bondage to her sons and daughters. No woman can call herself free who does not own and control her body. No woman can call herself free until she can choose consciously whether she will or will not be a mother.

— Margaret Sanger, *The Birth Control Review* (1919)

2.1 Introduction

As seen in the previous chapter, the Lord Chancellor's Office banned Stopes's *Vectia* on moral grounds arguing that Stopes's play publicly emasculated men by questioning their sexual orientation under the guise of promoting the need for sex education. When Stopes submitted *Our Ostriches*, as an alternative to *Vectia*, the Lord Chancellor's Office had no legal grounds to object because Stopes's reproductive rights drama focused solely on the lack of access to birth control. At the start of the twentieth century there was no legislative body in the United Kingdom that could legally prevent the public performance or dissemination of texts featuring birth control. Thus, Stopes had the freedom to open mothers' clinics, publish marriage manuals, and even stage a drama like *Our Ostriches* without fear of breaking the law. In the United States, however, American birth control activists like Margaret Sanger, and African American dramatists like Mary Burrill and Angelina Grimké, had to craft and distribute their reproductive rights message within the restrictive parameters of the Comstock Law, a federal act governing the "Suppression of Trade in, and Circulation of, Obscene Literature and Articles of Immoral Use," in effect since 1873 (Jütte; Kranz). While the law was meant to regulate public morality, in reality it targeted the distribution of birth control information.

In response to this legislative restriction, Margaret Sanger, founder of the first birth control clinics in the United States, published *The Birth Control Review*, a journal which ran from

February 1917 to January 1940.¹⁵ Since this periodical was created specifically to challenge the Comstock Law, Sanger had to word her content in a legally ambiguous manner to avoid censorship. Thus, her writing straddled a fine line between calling attention to the need for birth control education, and avoiding giving direct information on contraceptive devices.¹⁶ From the very first issue of *The Birth Control Review*, which bore the headline “Shall We Break this Law?”, Sanger was forthright in her journal’s mission. Her rallying cry set the tone for the journal’s content in the years to come as it evolved into a powerful forum for reproductive rights activism. The “We” in Sanger’s headline called everyone, regardless of gender or race, to participate in the struggle for access to universal birth control education. Yet, Sanger, like Stopes, also placed herself firmly at the helm of this movement. In the previous chapter, I illustrated how Stopes took on the role of mediator and conveyor of birth control information by claiming to speak for the rights of others while also advancing a eugenics agenda. Sanger used similar tactics when she appropriated an autocratic stand in *The Birth Control Review*. I show how Sanger published editorials that endorsed eugenics to the detriment of promoting the reproductive rights of African American women when she edited a special “Negro” issue of *The Birth Control Review* in 1919 to address reproductive politics in the context of the African

¹⁵ Sanger edited her journal from 1917 to 1929 arguably during its most influential period.

¹⁶ Stopes took a similar approach with *Our Ostriches* whereby no concrete information on birth control methods was openly discussed on stage. Although there is no evidence that Stopes distributed information on her birth control clinics to theatre audiences, the propagandistic nature of the printed text hints that there may have been some promotional material available to complement what was seen on stage. As stated in chapter one of this dissertation, the printed version of *Our Ostriches* was heavy handed in its inclusion of multiple advertisements for birth control information, which in turn could be accessed through Stopes’s clinics or by purchasing her manuals.

American population.¹⁷ Nonetheless, I believe the African American voices in the Negro issue of *The Birth Control Review* were also carefully chosen by Sanger to promote her own ideology, and not necessarily to further African American interests. Sanger's issue featured two reproductive rights texts by African American women playwrights: the drama *They That Sit in Darkness* by Mary P. Burrill and the short story *The Closing Door* by Angelina Grimké. In this chapter, I argue that even with Sanger's editorial constraint, Burrill and Grimké were successful in bringing to light the plight of the African American mother when they grounded their work on the universal appeal of women's reproductive rights.

I further contend that these African American playwrights wrote dramas and stories for Sanger's *Birth Control Review* that recreated and reinstated the neglected African American woman and mother on stage and set up African American maternity as a controversial site from which to debate reproductive rights and women's rights in general. More importantly, publishing

¹⁷ The Oxford English Dictionary notes the term *Negro* was used from the seventeenth to the nineteenth century as the standard address for dark-skinned people originally native to the African continent ("Negro," def. 1a.) At the start of the twentieth century, prominent African American intellectuals and community leaders applied the word to promote literary and cultural movements. Thus, "the 1920s had christened itself variously as the New Negro, the Negro Renaissance, the Negro Awakening, and the Jazz Age," notes James Hatch in his chronicle of the Harlem Renaissance (215). During this period, members of The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), such as W.E. B. DuBois, Alain LeRoy Locke, and Jessie Redmon Fauset, were militant in their activism to renew a public awareness for African Americans' contributions to the arts and politics. Thus, the adjective *Negro* became associated with a cultural renaissance and active political participation. DuBois in particular used theatre "as a tool depicting blacks as living, breathing human beings with the same attributes and failings as their white counterparts" (Hill 154). Therefore, when Sanger names the special issue of her journal "The Negro Issue," she is following this social trend. Yet, it is important to also note that the term *Negro* has fallen from use in the past fifty years. When the Black Power movement in the 1960s created a resurgence of interest in black history and culture, the words *black* in the United Kingdom and *African American* in the United States replaced *Negro* as synonyms for racial pride (Dicker/sun). The term *black* was used in Britain because the Black Power movement emerged from the culture clash experienced by West Indian immigrants who were raised on English literature and culture in their home country. The first generation of black artists began to "bridge the gap between the African, Caribbean and British experience," while the second generation "generated a cultural renaissance in Black creativity" (Davis and Fuchs 51). In my dissertation, I follow the example of recent African American scholars like Soyica Diggs Colbert, Glenda Dicker/sun, Harry J. Elam, Jr., James Hatch, and David Krasner together with British scholars like Geoffrey V. Davis and Anne Fuchs and use *African American* and/or *black* throughout my dissertation depending on the birthplace of the playwright. I will revert to the term *Negro* when referencing Sanger's use of it in her journal to reinforce *The Birth Control Review*'s status as a product of its times.

these dramas in Sanger's periodical also gave the two women playwrights an opportunity to access and define a ground-breaking public and cultural space more attuned to African American women's voices. As a result of her publication in Sanger's journal, aspiring and unknown playwright Burrill found a multicultural audience for her present and future work. Grimké's short story became the precursor for her canonical play *Rachel* (1920), the first drama written by an African American woman playwright to enjoy a commercial production. By writing on reproductive rights for Sanger's periodical, these African American playwrights embarked on a journey of artistic transformation that would later bring them theatrical recognition.

Burrill and Grimké were part of a rising Little Theatre Movement¹⁸ of "resistant" playwrights, to borrow a term that Dolan applies to feminist critics. Dolan argues that resistant readers analyze "a performance's meaning by reading against the grain of stereotypes and resisting the manipulation of both the performance text and the cultural text that it helps to shape" (*Spectator as Critic* 2). Defying the pressure to tailor their reproductive rights narratives to the expectations of Sanger's mostly white audience, Burrill and Grimké created innovative

¹⁸ For more information on The Little Theatre Movement see chapter 3 of this dissertation and Dorothy Chansky's *Composing Ourselves: The Little Theatre Movement and the American Audience* (2004).

African American women's drama that left a theatrical imprint for other contemporary playwrights to follow.¹⁹

2.2 Periodicals, Theatre, and the Race Factor

Writing on the link between drama and periodicals, Susan Smith contends that periodicals were an “important site of public deliberation, contestation and intellectual circulation, at once interlocking and in tension” (xi). Furthermore, she states that drama was a “powerful agent in the attempt to establish and sustain difference and distance between the middle and the lower classes and between the Anglo-Saxon and the various ‘Others’” (xv). Documenting and disseminating racial and social anxiety, periodicals were a reflection of the continuous struggles for national identity. Plays that ran in periodicals addressed many topical issues of the day, such as the threat of rising immigration, the fracturing of social structures, and the changing business environment. Thus, Smith observes that dramatic texts were an ideal fit for periodicals because as creative endeavours and representations of social conflict, plays moved seamlessly between literary and

¹⁹ Throughout my dissertation I will be using the term *white* to refer to fair-skinned people of European or American descent. The Oxford English Dictionary defines *white* as “those ethnic types (chiefly European or of European extraction) characterized by light complexion, as distinguished from black, red, yellow, etc. (“white,” def. 4a). The adjective *white* is the preferred expression used by contemporary and recent African American scholars who apply it as a counterpoint to the terms *black* or *African American* (Hill 154; Elam Jr. and Krasner 331; and Hatch 215). Feminist scholars like Eileen Boris and Susan Smith whose work I reference throughout this chapter also use *white* in their analysis. It is important to note here though that the term *white* can be divisive. Bill Ashcroft et. al, in *Post-Colonial Studies: The Key Concepts* notes that “the category white was effectively occluded, naturalized as an always already-given category against which other races could be distinguished,” and this positioning gave it a “special force, since it is un-stated, set apart by its force as the normative” (220). David Krasner calls attention to the widespread use of *white* as the norm in theatrical circles, during a roundtable discussion of the state of African American Theatre at the Association for Theatre in Higher Education Conference in 1997. Krasner said most of the panels he attended were all “white: they were about white theater and white issues, although they passed themselves off as ‘universal’” (Elam 331). While the use of white to define universality or normative is troubling, it is a practice that continues today in scholarship. The individual entries in the *Cambridge Guide to American Theater* (2007) for example do not identify white playwrights as *white*, but they do attach the terms African American or Asian to non-white playwrights. In this dissertation, I use *black*, *white*, and *African American* only as markers of cultural and racial differences. It is not my intent to perpetuate or to give voice to entrenched, biased standpoints that may have been or may still be associated with these adjectives.

cultural environments. Furthermore, these dramas participated in “an imaginative construction of an Anglo-Saxon legacy, a mythic history of whiteness, unity and imperial destiny born of a determination to close the sectional wound between post-Civil War Southern and Northern factions” (S. Smith xiii). Periodicals were in fact macrocosms and barometers of the social forces at work.

Between 1890 and 1918, one hundred and twenty-five plays were published in periodicals in the United States. Fifty-one of these dramas were written by women for women. American periodicals replicated cultural hierarchies by catering to a white female reader who was both a “consumer and a product to be consumed” (S. Smith 79). Moreover, periodicals became manuals for social decorum and behaviour for both the arriviste woman and the upper class example she sought to emulate. Accordingly, women were both united and trapped in the social grouping addressed by the periodical. Each individual interest group was still conscious of being part of a greater whole, an imagined and artificial construction of a dominating white ideal. With the September 1919 Negro issue of *The Birth Control Review*, Sanger appeared to redress racial prejudice by highlighting the plight of ignored African American women. She had reason to want to appear more inclusive after losing supporters to her cause due her extreme socialist stands, during the early stages of her activist career.²⁰ Yet from the first page of the Negro issue, the tone of her message was undeniably paternalistic and subliminally racial. The headline on the cover page for the Negro issue reads: “The New Emancipation: The Negroes’ Need for Birth

²⁰ It is noteworthy that when Sanger visited Vancouver on July 2, 1932 to give a talk sponsored by the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom, she sparked interest in birth control from the mostly socialist crowd. Following Sanger’s visit, and inspired by the articles of poet and politician Alexander Maitland Stephen defending birth control that appeared in the socialist newspaper *B.C. Federationist*, a group of ardent supporters formed the Canadian Birth Control League in December of 1924. This league then led the way to the founding of a birth control clinic in 1932 whose goal was not “childlessness, but *wanted* children, better marriages, freedom for women and race improvement” (McLaren and McLaren 65; emphasis in the original).

Control, As Seen By Themselves.” Using the word “emancipation,” three generations after the Civil War, resurrects images of slavery.²¹ Linking emancipation with “birth control” and with a race’s “need for” this information implies that even in the twentieth century African Americans do not have the same freedoms before the law as others. Furthermore, the use of the third person possessive— as in “the negroes’ need” — racially separates and differentiates their need from the collective need. The dependent clause that follows this racial “need” further marginalizes the African American population by implying that they are “themselves” complicit in this culturally constructed social separation. Sanger’s implication was that African Americans saw themselves as incomplete “others” when compared alongside the white majority. The underlying message was that Sanger, her publication, and her readership could address this need because African Americans lacked the authority and education to resolve the issue. In other words African Americans once again could not free themselves; the “negroes” needed white authorities to emancipate them. Thus, the headline contentiously positioned African Americans as visible and invisible before the law. Sanger’s *Birth Control Review* provided the illusion of an independent platform for African Americans to voice their plight, while using a white editor to mediate their discourse.

While Sanger raised the spectre of slavery to justify the “new emancipation” of African American women through her birth control clinics, African American playwrights fought to

²¹ Ten years after the publication of the Negro issue, Sanger continued to align her ongoing reproductive rights effort with the successful abolitionist cause. Sanger appropriated the rhetoric of enslavement in her Introduction to *Motherhood in Bondage* (1928) where she declared that “here in our country we are countenancing a type of slavery that is a disgrace to American ideals” (xix). Sanger described “birth control” as the “surest instrument of emancipation of enslaved womankind,” declaring that to the victimized women, her name “has become a symbol of deliverance” (*Motherhood in Bondage* xi). Thus, Sanger built her credibility in the same manner that Stopes did, by justifying her writings as an answer to a public request. Notwithstanding Sanger’s public commitment to the abolitionist cause, I argue that Sanger’s “emancipation” of African American maternity was only an illusion meant to control unchecked African American reproduction through a covert eugenics agenda.

erase the scars of this violent legacy. Slavery had not only dehumanized the African American individual, but had also set up the African American woman as a breeding machine for a sought-after resource: the African American male worker. Before advocating for reproductive rights, African American women playwrights had to first change the public's perception of the African American mother. Allison Berg states in her study of representations of maternity during this period that, "as white women aspired to the mantle of 'scientific motherhood' — wedding their natural maternal instinct to science in order to create the best child possible — black women sought to revise stereotypical images of the mammy in order to define a 'New Negro mother'" (106). In a modern society obsessed with eugenics and the reinforcement of racial boundaries and hierarchies, African American playwrights had to contend with the gendered legacy of the Progressive Era and New Woman plays. These dramas featured an overwhelming number of white women holding down men's jobs, being single parents, addressing previously taboo health concerns, and speaking openly about the advantages and disadvantages of using birth control. African American women on stage — when they were featured at all — were often cast in the subservient role of the "mammy," a nursemaid to upper class white children. When not playing a surrogate mother role to other women's children, African American women were depicted as home wreckers, prostitutes or seductresses who led white men into socially unacceptable interracial relationships. Thus, audiences saw the bodies of African American women on stage as embodying the possibility of breeding quadroon or octoroon children who would then

contaminate the purity of the race.²² Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar contend that the standpoint of the New Negro Women during the first wave of feminism was different from that of their white counterparts because “for all their advocacy of freedom, then, these [African American] women are trapped in manipulative, hypocritical, or traditional relationships with men” (137). As a result, African American women were doubly effaced on the basis of their race and gender. They were invisible and voiceless performers subjugated by both African American and white men, and I believe, by women like Sanger.

2.3 African American Drama in *The Birth Control Review*

Sanger’s control over African Americans’ narration of their reproductive rights dilemmas was evident in *They That Sit in Darkness* (1919), a one-act play written by Mary Burrill on commission for *The Birth Control Review*. As a respected college professor, Burrill brought her experience in academia to her dramatic work.²³ The overtly didactic tone of her drama aligns with Sanger’s main goal to instruct the readership of *The Birth Control Review* on the consequences arising from lack of access to birth control information. *They That Sit in Darkness* takes place in the house of Malinda Jasper, a poor laundress from Alabama who has six children, the youngest one just a week old. Her oldest daughter and namesake Lindy has been accepted to Tuskegee University in Alabama, an African American school. As the play opens, the family is

²² Since increased class mobility in Antebellum society had exacerbated fear of miscegenation, the Racial Integrity Act was passed in 1910 in Tennessee and 1924 in Virginia. The Act enforced racial boundaries that had circulated for over a hundred years during the time of slavery by stating that people should be recognized before the law according to race. Thus any white person with one drop of “colored” blood was considered colored, and the same principle applied to Native Americans.

²³ Mary Burrill was perhaps best known for teaching speech and drama in Washington D.C., and she counted among her students playwrights May Miller and Willis Richardson. The latter would become the first African American playwright to have a play produced on Broadway when his drama about women’s suffrage, *The Deacon’s Awakening* was staged in 1921 (Fisher and Londré).

making plans for Lindy's departure when Miss Shaw, a white nurse, comes to visit the household. Miss Shaw is appalled at the poor hygienic conditions of the home, and at Malinda's deteriorating health. Malinda asks the nurse for birth control information so she won't get pregnant again because she does not have the physical strength, nor the financial means to support any more children. The nurse tells Malinda she cannot give her this information because it is against the law for her to do so. When Miss Shaw tells Malinda to take a break and rest, Malinda lies down and dies of a heart attack. Her daughter Lindy then has to give up her dreams of a higher education to take over the running of the household.

Although Malinda Jasper's case was similar to that of many African American women, Burrill's dramatization was in fact a modified retelling of Sanger's own conversion to the birth control movement. In her recruitment campaigns, Sanger often narrated the story of Sadie Sachs, a poor mother of three who didn't want to have any more children, and who Sanger visited as a nurse. Sadie had asked her doctor for birth control information, but he refused to give her any. Soon after, Sachs died of complications from a self-induced abortion. As Berg notes, Burrill "merely changes the cast of characters, from white residents of New York's Lower East Side to a black family in the South" (117). To an extent, Burrill was complicit in the same act of ventriloquism that Sanger deployed to promote the Negro issue.

Following Sanger's example, and presumably her instructions, Burrill used some of the rhetoric associated with birth control activism. Echoing the motto of Stopes's Mothers' clinics, Burrill writes of bringing light into the darkness. In this case, though, the writer sets up "darkness" as a signifier for both lack of knowledge, and the African American race. In fact, Burrill frames her play with this contrasting imagery. She opens the play describing the Jaspers as a family that "sits in darkness," hopelessly waiting for information, for education, for a future

to arrive (5). This scene is then repeated in the last moments of the play when the omnipresent narrator describes the action in terms of this light binary: “As Miles follows her out, Lindy enters the kitchen. The light has gone from her face for she knows that the path now stretching before her and the other children will be darker even than the way they have already known” (8). As an African American, Lindy loses the possibility of accessing the light of knowledge, and must now remain, with her family, in her own figurative and literal darkness. Burrill further reinforces this racial separation in her title, *They That Sit in Darkness*, where the use of “they” implies a communal distancing of the African American protagonists. The Jasper family make up the “they” who are racially “in darkness” in a southern town removed from the light emanating from the northern metropolis of New York, where not coincidentally Sanger’s periodical was published. The play reiterated this double positioning of African American women within Sanger’s issue, where their reproductive rights were acknowledged, but only as they related to the rights of white women.

2.4 Reproductive Rights and the Menace of Lynching

While Burrill customized her drama to meet Sanger’s interests, Grimké refused to tailor an African American narrative to white sensibilities. Her short stories and dramas offered a more resistant reading of the primarily white, middle-class woman’s reproductive rights struggle. In *The Closing Door*, Grimké introduced *The Birth Control Review*’s readership to the nascent Anti-lynching movement, whereby African American mothers chose to commit autogenocide rather than allow white mobs to murder their children. While Burrill glossed over civil rights, Grimké firmly joined civil and reproductive rights under the same militant banner. I believe Grimké’s choice to narrate the uniquely African American experience of lynching in her work

for *The Birth Control Review* challenged Sanger and her audience to openly acknowledge race as an inevitable component of the reproductive rights debate.

The Closing Door tells the story of an African American couple, Agnes and Jim Milton through the narrative voice of Lucy, an orphaned teenager, whom the Miltons take into their household. Lucy recounts Agnes's doomed pregnancy in flashbacks showing the reader how happy Agnes was to be pregnant with her first child until she hears her beloved brother Bob has been lynched by a mob for refusing to make way for a white man on a sidewalk. When Agnes learns her brother's fate, she closes herself off from the world, retreating to her room to await the end of her pregnancy. Agnes gives birth to a baby boy, but she smothers her unnamed child so it won't suffer the same fate as her brother. Agnes is then institutionalized and dies in an asylum.

Whereas Burrill elicits public sympathy by transmuting Sanger's birth control story into an African American experience, Grimké asks *The Birth Control Review's* readership to empathize with Agnes through the universal, colour-blind bond of maternity. To do so, she begins her narrative in the midst of blissful family dynamics that could be taking place in any household, with no discernible African American characteristics. While Burrill signals her characters' heritage through distinctive voices -- a less educated lexicon for Malinda, a more refined rhetoric for Miss Shaw -- Grimké gives Agnes an educated speech pattern interchangeable with that of a white woman.²⁴ Consequently Grimké sets up an image of daily life that could apply to any lower-middle class woman of the Modern period. When Agnes finds out she is pregnant, her joy is again expressed in a universally empathetic language: "I'm so happy, happy, happy!" (*The*

²⁴ Speech and character voice were key, illustrative components of dramas that appeared in periodicals. As Susan Smith notes, "if the theatre of this period was primarily visual, the drama in periodicals was primarily verbal and aural. Though often complemented by illustrations, the American plays as well as the foreign plays dramatize situations through accessible language and dialogue" (14).

Birth Control Review 3.9, 12). The African American home is filled with joy with news of the pregnancy, as would any household. The idealized depiction fractures with the lynching incident. Lynching reasserts racial difference by placing Agnes in the divisive and conflicted role of being both victim and heroine.

The menacing public cries from the lynch mob that invade the private domestic space unearth the hidden racial conflict in Grimké's story. Reviewing the anti-lynching plays written by African American women, Judith Stephens explains that Grimké appropriated "the dominant gender ideology of the time which idealized motherhood in order to demonstrate how black mothers were excluded from that ideology" (334). The mob's violent language reminds Agnes that her freedom — to walk the streets, to reproduce children — is merely an illusion. Agnes realizes she is just "an instrument of reproduction"²⁵ — another of the many — a colored woman — doomed — cursed — put here — willing or unwilling. For what? — to bring children here — men children — for the sport — the lust — of possible orderly mobs — who go about things — in an orderly manner — on Sunday mornings" (*The Birth Control Review* 3.10, 10). With this hard-hitting rhetoric, where she juxtaposes contrasting words like "orderly" with "mob," Grimké highlights the disparity between the races.

Grimké also introduced imagery of self-containment, often associated with biological reproduction, to describe the persecuted African American woman. When Agnes retreats into her

²⁵ In *Motherhood in Bondage* (1928), Sanger repeats this rhetoric by stating that some of the letters she received "tell of husbands who look upon their wives as mere breeding-machines" (xviii). Sanger recounts how she used this imagery, though to different effect, in an earlier publication, *A Woman and the New Race* (1920). In describing the text, Sanger claims "that book carried in simple and elementary terms the message of Birth Control as the surest *instrument* of emancipation of enslaved womankind" (*Motherhood* xi; emphasis added). In this instance, Sanger gives the word "instrument" a positive connotation by using it across racial boundaries. She makes the term a tool of empowerment rather than one of oppression. It should be noted though, that ultimately agency still resided with the white woman, as she was the one wielding the *instrument* of education. Sanger in fact argues that "to these women, my name has become a symbol of deliverance" (*Motherhood* xi). The African American woman remains objectified as the "other" who has to passively wait to receive enlightenment from the white educator.

room, and literally into her own skin, she gives up public mobility. David Hirsch offers a valuable reading of Grimké's multi-layered rhetoric by arguing that Agnes's self-containment and systematic closing of visible and non-visible doors are acts of self-possession, where "with the closing of the door, each room Agnes inhabits becomes a womb of protection" (464). When Agnes first realizes she is pregnant, she does not openly speak of the pregnancy. Her expressions of joy are immediately tainted with an ingrained fear, as she says that, "there is such a thing as being too happy, too happy" (*The Birth Control Review* 3.9, 12). Agnes is afraid of voicing her emotional and physical state because she is apprehensive that the words will alert the outside world to her happiness and make her vulnerable. Even after the baby is born, the child remains hidden from view in her room.

Agnes understands the need for the African American individual to become invisible, for his or her voice to be muted as a survival mechanism. Hirsch argues that even as Agnes "polices and silences her self, the outside 'mob' has been internalized. Even while it is within her body, the baby, as a mediated representation of self, is never the same as Agnes, but is – like Lucy's words – always already in the realm of otherness" (469). The cries of Agnes's baby and Lucy's need to voice Agnes's story emerge as powerful rhetorical forces that cannot be fully contained or hidden because they are part of the African American experience of reproductive rights. To justify this daring and original representation of birth control and its impact on maternity, Grimké explains how Agnes's child was contaminated by the legacy of his uncle Bob's lynching. She begins by illustrating how this violent act takes place outside his home, outside his mother's womb to show how this child's fate was already determined by the acts of others. When the child is born, his sense of self is already linked to his role as a second victim of racism. He is not given the chance to fight or escape the mob's hatred because he was exposed to it while growing in his

mother's womb. He was literally born with the mark of death. Agnes's infanticide only hastened what she saw as her son's inevitable death.

For Grimké, there were three visible actors in the volatile lynching scenarios: the white man who inherited the legacy of slave owners and had an ingrained fear of the African American man; the African American man who was testing his new civic freedoms and who was lynched as a deterrent to racial transgression; and the white woman whose feminist gains gave her new social freedoms to interact with all kinds of men, but whose racial purity — and the purity of those she would reproduce — had to be protected against the “Negro” menace. The fourth actor, the wife or mother of the man who was lynched (that is to say, the African American mother), was not usually represented or voiced in the lynching conflict. Writing on theatre and race, Tamsen Wolff states that 3,2000 African men, women and children were murdered by lynch mobs between 1882 and 1932. Yet, Wolff argues that these stories were often unrecorded in popular literature and culture, thus “the violence done to African America bodies was at once highly visible and overlooked” (171). Therefore, it is not surprising that much of African American women's drama in this period centered on rescuing, defining and making visible the key role of the neglected and voiceless African American mother.

Grimké's story and her future plays introduce the African American mother who must willingly forfeit her maternal role. W.B. Worthen comments that *Rachel* — Grimké's landmark lynching drama — defines this refusal of motherhood as an act that “implies a kind of autogenocide oddly complicit with the racism she wants to oppose” (Introduction 223). As Worthen suggests, by aborting their own children, these women are also preventing the birth of a future emancipator. Furthermore, African American women were also unwittingly becoming enforcers of negative eugenics, whose proponents encouraged sterilization of “inferior”

individuals, like those belonging to the African American race. Yet, I agree with Berg who claims the refusal of maternity in Grimké's dramas also creates a site for female agency because "the self-inflected pain of childlessness came to symbolize a politics of resistance" (105).

Grimké illustrates this standpoint more fully in *Rachel* (1920), a dramatic version of *The Closing Door*. The play tells the story of a working class woman who finds out that her father did not die of natural causes but was lynched. The image haunts the protagonist as she sees her educated siblings and the children in her neighbourhood being systematically exposed to racism. Rachel becomes so traumatized by their experiences that she refuses her fiancé's offer of marriage because she doesn't want to become a mother and bring another child into a racist world. She aborts the possibility of parenthood by using self-denial as a form of birth control.²⁶ In spite of this outward refusal of maternity, Rachel shares Agnes's view of motherhood as a calling, and giving it up psychologically kills her.

While some critics of the play claimed that *Rachel* promoted race suicide, Grimké refuted these charges in an essay printed in the January 1920 issue of *The Competitor* that ran alongside a reprint of her play.²⁷ She countered that her appeal was directed to a passive and conservative white audience who "if they could see, feel, understand just what effect their prejudice . . . [was] having on the souls of the colored mothers everywhere, and upon the mothers that are to be, a

²⁶ Laura Dawkins, in her work on maternal infanticide, states that African American mothers in modern dramas reject the white version of the mother as a suffering and resigned Christian *mater dolorosa*. African American women prefer the representation of motherhood as an angry, destructive persona that evokes "the figures of Lilith and Medea, mythical mother-monsters who unleash violence upon their own children" (227). Furthermore, the murderous mother in these works not only self-destructs, but also "functions as an agent of subversion, stirring fear as well as sympathy" (227). Both of Grimké's narratives show the heroines cursing the God they revered. Agnes challenges Him to be "pitiful" (*Birth Control Review* 3.10, 9), and Rachel laments that "God is laughing" because African Americans are his "puppets" (Grimké 246). These mothers refuse the saintly image of maternity proposed by organized religion because they feel that it is disjointed from the reality of their lives.

²⁷ *The Competitor* published three issues in Pittsburgh, PA between 1920 and 1921 showcasing a selection of essays, short stories and plays by prominent African American playwrights.

great power to affect public opinion would be set free and the battle would be half won” (51). Consequently, I contend that through the characters of Agnes and Rachel, Grimké staged both the imagined possibility and realistic impossibility of motherhood for African American women. For Wolff, for example, “Rachel’s hyperbolic, even hysterical, response to motherhood is remarkably consistent whether it takes a positive or negative direction. This suggests not an individual neurosis so much as a deep ambivalence about a compulsory, idealized maternal position” (173). Like Agnes, Rachel refuses to embrace a traditional vision of maternity that is socially or culturally constructed. Wolff argues that Rachel fights back against a world intent on overwhelming her with a constant threat on her life by arguing that Rachel’s sense of being besieged “is much larger than the anxiety about the death of any one individual” (175). Indeed, in Grimké’s work no one dies during the course of the play, but the possibility of being hurt and of dying is an undercurrent that taints the drama from the first mention of the lynching that occurred ten years before. When death finally comes, it is the death of Rachel’s dream of motherhood, and the death of Rachel as a normative mother figure.

The African American mother who consciously chooses to give and withdraw life becomes a problematic standpoint for women’s rights. By choosing to kill their offspring rather than having him or her be killed by a lynch mob, African American mothers were exerting agency over the fate of their race. Yet, this autogenocide also means African American mothers were denying life to a possible saviour of the race. Moreover, since the murdered offspring was often male, African American writers and playwrights perpetuated biased gender binaries. By having the mother reproduce only sons, African American playwrights were negating, and indeed denying, any social agency to daughters. By silencing daughters, and not giving them a presence on the theatrical stage, African American mothers and playwrights were complicit in carrying on

the cycle of gender victimization. The African American woman in these plays remained a powerless mother who could only helplessly reproduce sons for lynch mobs, or who could refuse maternity and prevent the procreation of her own race.

Writing on the role of mothers during the lynching movement, Koritha Mitchell contends that “because she so often survives to suffer in the home from which her husband or son is removed, the black mother/wife is the witness that those content with the racial status quo most want to silence. She bears witness to what it means to live with lynching” (147). Burrill and Grimké tread new ground in theatrical representations of race by taking the primarily white audience of Sanger’s periodical into an African American household; however, they fail to move that witness/survivor out of the confining setting of the home. Their heroines remain trapped in a domestic space that limits their opportunities for progress. Mobility is given only to nurses, doctors, husbands, and children. In Burrill’s play, only Miss Shaw, as a non-African American woman, and Malinda’s son, as an African American male child commissioned to get milk, can leave the domestic space. Lindy and her mother stay tied to the area of the kitchen and laundry. Grimké’s Agnes and Lucy also remain inside the domestic space while their men venture outside to work or to be lynched. African American mothers cannot enter public space, nor access the agency that comes with this mobility. Burrill and Grimké show that the doors to these women’s homes only open within the illusory confines of the theatre. When the curtain comes down on their stories, the African American mothers remain in their homes, their lives closed off from the outside world.

I posit that Burrill’s and Grimké’s voices were similarly controlled and restricted to the space allotted by Sanger in *The Birth Control Review*. The editorial introducing the Negro issue was written by Blanche Schrack, a white woman and frequent contributor. Schrack noted that the

“the needs of the two races bring them together constantly in a variety of intimate ways – colored women nurse white babies, there are colored cooks in most white families, and since laundries are practically unknown in the majority of white homes, washing is called for Monday morning by colored washerwomen,” and pleaded that the life of the “white child” is in danger if the washer woman is unhealthy (3). Her argument was that African American women’s circumstances could only be understood in their relationship to a white woman’s needs, and in regards to the continuity of a master/servant relationship. This standpoint reinforced Sanger’s covert agenda to present the African American reproductive rights as an issue that needed to be filtered, controlled, and supervised by a white agent of authority. Sanger’s control of the African American narrative was even more evident in her decision to split Grimké’s story across two issues. The key resolution to Grimké’s narrative was not advertised on the title page of the October issue, nor was the first part of the text recapped or introduced for the readers’ benefit. Burying the climactic second act of Grimké’s play in the October “non-special” issue of *The Birth Control Review* suggests to me Sanger had moved on from “Negro” issues to return to highlighting her eugenics concerns.

Had Sanger chosen to include a prominent African American writer, editor, or advocate for the birth control movement in any of her periodical’s issues, her attempts at inclusiveness would have earned her more public credibility.²⁸ Yet, Sanger did not give voice or space to African American women academics, scientists, or activists. Instead, she chose to print a letter by Isaac

²⁸ Sanger tried to make up for her misstep by printing a one-sentence apologia from W.E. B. DuBois, a prominent founder National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), and the editor for twenty-four years of the cultural magazine *Crisis*. DuBois’s note read: “I believe very firmly in birth control, but I regret to say that I have been absent so long from my desk that I am unable to promise any article in the near future” (*Birth Control Review* 3.10, 15). The succinct response clearly shows that he was only asked to contribute an article, and not to edit the issue, in spite of his credentials as a prominent editor and advocate for birth control. Sanger relegated DuBois’s note to the bottom of a back page next to an advertorial for subscriptions to her periodical.

Fisher, a University Editor (of an unnamed journal) at Fisk University, who was distressed by articles written by a white woman against African American women in academia.²⁹ Not only did Sanger not publish written correspondence from these nameless and voiceless disenfranchised African American women, but she also allowed a man to speak for them, further marginalizing and silencing African American women from political discourse. Susan Smith argues that in periodicals “the more closely one examines the voices joining in the national conversation, the more its conflicted, discontented and polyvocal nature surfaces” (33). In the two issues of Sanger’s *Birth Control Review* featuring work by African American women, Burrill, Grimké, and the white editors shared an uneasy public space. It is my belief that Sanger’s choice to feature the women playwrights’ narratives emphasized rather than covered up African American women’s gendered, social, and racial marginalization.

2.5 The Eugenics Agenda

Appearing in Sanger’s periodical was both beneficial and limiting for African American women playwrights like Burrill and Grimké. Although their dramas circulated to a white readership who would not have read their work otherwise, these African American women’s plays were still framed by editorials on eugenics. This contextualization was not unusual given that periodicals that targeted women often transmitted codes of ideal conduct while censoring

²⁹ Fisk University is a private and historically African American institution highly regarded in the United States. It was founded in 1865, a few weeks after at the end of the Civil War with a mandate to educate freed slaves. At the time it welcomed students of any age, from children to senior citizens, so long as they had “an extraordinary thirst for learning” (“Fisk University History” n. pag.) The institution was accredited in 1930, and the campus was designated a historic facility in 1978. Some of the best known African American activists and leaders, such as W.E.B. Du bois, educator Booker T. Washington, journalist Ida B. Wells-Barnett, and historian John Hope Franklin are Fisk alumni and have been part of Charles S. Johnson’s prestigious Race Relations Institute at Fisk (“Fisk University History”).

undesirable behaviour. According to Smith, periodicals were essential tools for “documenting and dramatizing threats of disruptive disorder to the status quo,” such as the menace of women’s unchecked reproduction (5). Whereas in Burrill’s drama, women’s objectionable reproductive practices made covert appearance through Malinda’s pregnancies, in Grimké’s story, the fear of undesirable procreation was seen through the unspecified heritage of the narrator and Grimké’s hybrid paternity. When a woman’s reproduction process appeared to be ungovernable, it created a social anxiety that expanded to concerns regarding gender control. A constantly pregnant, and moreover undesirably pregnant, African American woman was thus seen as a threat to social order.

Grimké reflects the social anxiety generated by African American pregnancies in her story where Lucy’s origins are not clearly stated. Lucy describes herself as a “yellow, scrawny, unbeautiful girl” (*The Birth Control Review* 3.9, 10) and thus there is the hint that she can “pass” as not fully African American, even while living in Agnes’s household. This racial ambiguity was important from a eugenics perspective as the narrator was Grimké’s mouthpiece, and Grimké’s racial background was controversial and problematic for proponents of eugenics. The playwright was the daughter of biracial parents: African American Archibald Grimké and Sarah E. Stanley. Archibald was the son of a union between Henry Grimké, a slave owner in South Carolina and Nancy Weston, his slave. Therefore Grimké was a quadroon with a mulatto father and a white mother. Lois Cuddy and Claire Roche, in their introduction to the evolution of eugenics in the United States, comment that women authors often used the narrative of “passing” (where light-skinned men or women attempt to pass for whites) as a way to debate racial equality. While there is no evidence that Grimké ever attempted to pass as white, Cuddy and Roche argue that “the narrative crisis occurs when the whites learn of the ‘tainted blood,’ and the

responses of the characters are the measure of their worth” (36). The mostly white readership of Sanger’s *Birth Control Review* would have had a long-standing interest in these eugenic beliefs, as every issue of Sanger’s periodical featured an article, editorial or comment on the need to exert control over unchecked breeding of the wrong “type” of people.

The social fear was illustrated in a 1906 Message to Congress by Theodore Roosevelt, where the then President raised the alarm of a possible “race suicide” and “national death” if white, middle-class women did not reproduce at the same rate as their immigrant or African American counterparts (qtd. in Berg 3). The threat of “race death” comes up repeatedly in Sanger’s *Review* as justification for the dissemination of birth control information. In the “Havelock Ellis” issue of Sanger’s periodical that ran in February of the same year, Ellis echoed Roosevelt’s rally: “We desire no parents who are not both competent and willing parents. Only such parents are fit to father and mother a future race worthy to rule the world” (qtd. in Roche 262). The Negro issue, featuring Burrill’s play, also included an article titled “Eugenics and Child Culture” by G. Hardy, a pseudonym for Gabriel Giroud, an outspoken French Neo-Malthusian leader who wrote on the desirability of having scientific control over reproduction. He argued that: “if gestation and the rearing of the child are not conducted under the most favourable sanitary and economic circumstances, to increase and multiply can be only harmful to the individual, the race, and the species” (18). *The Birth Control Review* reader would have read Hardy’s article right after absorbing the image of the not quite “favourable sanitary and economic circumstances” of Malinda Jasper’s household depicted in Burrill’s play. While the criticism was not direct, I believe the connection between eugenics and the undesirability of a specific race’s unchecked reproduction would be clear to Sanger’s audience. Moreover, Wolff states that the “the ways in which eugenics is not about black people suggests a baseline

assumption of black inferiority, a racism so entrenched that it merits virtually no direct discussion” (170). Sanger’s *Review* illustrated this narrow mentality and perspective when Burrill’s and Grimké’s narratives of thwarted and refused African American motherhood came across as lives of “others,” and not as possible fates for the middle to upper class readers of the periodical.

2.6 The New African American Woman Playwright

While Sanger kept authorial control over the dissemination of Burrill’s and Grimké’s dramas, the publication of these plays succeeded in inserting African American women’s reproductive rights into the universal debate on birth control. Through Sanger’s periodical, the two African American women playwrights rebuilt the besieged African American household by making their plight known to the policy makers who could make a difference. Although *They That Sit in Darkness* had an overt propagandistic agenda, it also shed light on a shared interest in birth control activism by white and African American women. Burrill opened the door to a dialogue between women that looked beyond the divisions of race, and focused instead on common ground: the need for women — not the State — to monitor, safeguard and improve every mother’s life, and by extension that of her children.³⁰ By writing about the conflicted and complex relationship of race and gender with reproductive rights, African American women playwrights managed to carve out a space for their voices and for their drama within an admittedly biased system of cultural communication.

³⁰ Sanger saw herself as contributing to this education movement through an inclusive national birth control campaign. She attempted to organize a “Negro Birth Control Committee” in each community, which would be led by a local priest and recruit African American doctors and nurses. Although Sanger meant for this project to be one of African American empowerment, neither she nor the people subsidizing these efforts included African Americans in the decision making part of the process and the project failed.

Burrill's and Grimké's dramas, like all the work of African American women playwrights during the Modern period, occupied a paradoxically visible and invisible social and theatrical space. While white women playwrights, such as Elizabeth Robins, Cicely Tyson, and Sophie Treadwell, still found it difficult to obtain funding for their work, "obstacles like these were doubled for black women, who faced discrimination on grounds of race as well as gender, and who were even less likely than white women to have access to financial resources for production," notes Mary Loeffelholz, in her text on modern period women artists (179). Thus, the work of African American women playwrights was seldom staged in commercial productions with mass appeal.³¹ These women's dramas remained relegated to smaller stages in community centers, church basements, or appeared only in print, in periodicals such as Sanger's *Birth Control Review*. The Negro Little Theatre Movement, with a mission to produce theatre that was a result of communal effort, was a perfect fit for these disenfranchised African American practitioners.

It is important to note that the Negro Little Theatre Movement emerged from an African American-centered education system. The theatre program at Howard University, a chartered and historically African American organization, for example, was one of the most prominent and advanced in North America. Through this program, Howard University Professors Montgomery T. Gregory and Alain Locke joined forces with W.E. B. DuBois to provide opportunities for the production, performance and publication of plays by African American playwrights, and women in particular. Chronicling the rise of the Negro Little Theatre Movement, Kathy Perkins notes

³¹ Grimké's *Rachel*, for example, had its premiere at the Myrtilla Miner Normal School on March 3-4, 1916 in a production sponsored by the Drama Committee of the District of Columbia branch of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP).

that these three men “encouraged blacks to write plays about the black experience” (3). In 1913, DuBois wrote *Star of Ethiopia*, a pageant of African American history which was produced and performed throughout the 1910s and 1920s. In 1925, he also founded Krigwa, a theatre group which established branches in Washington D.C., New Haven, Baltimore and Cleveland (Fisher and Londré).³² Dubois’s Negro theatre company also produced and staged work like Burrill’s *Aftermath*, a controversial play about an African American soldier who returns home after serving his country only to find out his father has been lynched by a white mob. Although Krigwa presented Burrill’s drama in May 1928, the text was first published in 1919 on the heels of the end of World War I. With the writing and staging of narratives on the African American experience, Burrill and DuBois sought not only to call attention to social injustices, but also to rally the African American populace into collective action.

African American reformers took their public and communal call to arms to the domestic sphere. They appealed to mothers and homemakers seeking to educate themselves about their rights. African American activists employed their own communities’ resources (such as churches, schools, and halls) to set up day care centres and kindergartens. These sites not only helped mothers who worked outside the home, but also gave these women a space where they could share information and receive schooling. Eileen Boris, in her work on the history of African American activism, describes the purpose of this endeavour as one of building self-esteem and pride, where “an educated mother could turn from housekeeping for the family to housekeeping for wages, but it was expected that she would clean her own home as

³² For more information on Dubois’s links to the Negro Little Theatre Movement see Erroll G. Hill and James V. Hatch’s *A History of African American Theatre* (2003) and Jonathan Shandell’s essay in *The Cambridge Companion to African American Theatre* (2013).

professionally as she would another's" (227). African American activists aimed to translate educational gains obtained at home into political and social action in a public space. Writing dramas on reproductive rights was, therefore, one component of a broader educational curriculum envisioned by African American reformers. Indeed, Susanne Auflitsch, in her history of one-act plays by American women, states that "with its emphasis on the need for female education, Burrill's play partakes of the long tradition within feminist discourse of 'true motherhood' that has been concerned with the topic of female education from at least the eighteenth century, and on both sides of the Atlantic" (175). As a charter member of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and the president of the National Association of Colored Women (NACW) from 1896-1901, Mary Church Terrell called for the rise of "true motherhood" of African American women to counter the prescriptive white discourse. True motherhood for Terrell did not mean separation, but rather an acknowledgement that motherhood was universal, in an echo of the message that Burrill's and Grimké's dramas and stories gave to readers of Sanger's *Review*.³³ By recording and recreating a new African American model of maternity, playwrights like Burrill and Grimké generated transformative and transgressive theatrical paths for practitioners of African American theatre.

The next chapter of my dissertation shows how a professional playwright, like Susan Glaspell, deployed reproductive rights as a central theme in two of her dramas. Unlike Stopes, Burrill and Grimké, who were inexperienced theatre practitioners when they created their birth

³³ In one of her speeches at the National Mothers' Congress in 1899, Terrell argued her case by stating that: "I cannot recall that I have ever seen a baby, no matter what its class, colour, or condition in life, no matter whether it was homely or beautiful according to recognized standards, no matter whether it was clad in rags or wore dainty raiment, that did not seem dear and cunning to me" (qtd. in Boris 220). Rachel's infatuation with children in Grimké's play uses a similar rhetoric when the heroine says: "I know now why I just can't resist any child. I have to love it – it calls me – it draws me. I want to take care of it, wash it, dress it, live for it. I want the feel of its little warm body against me, its breath on my neck, its hands on my face" (*Rachel* 227).

control dramas, Glaspell was already a successful playwright when she wrote two reproductive rights dramas: *Chains of Dew* and *The Verge*. These plays were part of the last season of plays staged by The Provincetown Players, a small but very influential theatre company that came out of the Little Theatre Movement. Although as a white woman, Glaspell didn't have to face racial prejudice, she still had to overcome ingrained gender prejudices, often from within her own theatrical circle. Glaspell used her birth control plays to teach audiences to see women as influential actors in the reproductive rights debate and its theatrical representations. Through her groundbreaking dramas, Glaspell pushed against the boundaries of a gendered theatre canon offering an alternative representation of, and a space for, emerging and resistant theatrical women's voices.

Chapter Three: Susan Glaspell

CLAIRE: Plants do it. The big leap — it's called. Explode their species — because something in them knows they've gone as far as they can go. . . . [They] go mad — that life may not be prisoned. Break themselves up into crazy things — into lesser things, and from the pieces — may come one sliver of life with vitality to find the future.

— Susan Glaspell, *The Verge* (1921)

3.1 Introduction

In *The Feminist Spectator as Critic*, Dolan defines feminist performance as a “political intervention in an effort toward cultural change” (2). Based on this terminology, I believe the dramas written by Stopes, Burrill and Grimké, analyzed in the previous two chapters of my dissertation, were feminist performances designed to instruct audiences on how to effect social transformations. Unfortunately, the commercial interest and eugenics agenda driving Stopes’s and Sanger’s work, undermined the dramatic and/or political impact of their texts. Susan Glaspell, on the other hand did not use theatre “as propaganda for the birth control movement, but rather deployed the movement to explore new roles for women and the tensions inherent in the choices they represent,” as noted by B.W. Capo in her story of contraceptive practices during this period (36). Since Glaspell’s work was not circumscribed or sponsored by a commercial agenda, she had the artistic license and freedom to explore and push the boundaries of feminist rights in theatrical circles. As a professional playwright, Glaspell wrote two reproductive rights plays: *Chains of Dew* (1922) and *The Verge* (1921) for the Provincetown Players, an offshoot of the Little Theatre Movement that emerged in 1890 and remained influential until 1920.³⁴ In this chapter, I argue that Glaspell deliberately positioned her reproductive rights texts within a larger,

³⁴ For more detailed information on The Little Theatre Movement see Dorothy Chansky’s *Composing Ourselves: The Little Theatre Movement and the American Audience* (Southern UP, 2004).

burgeoning genre of feminist dramas to bring light to women's dramatic work within an admittedly restricted and biased theatrical environment.

The first section of this chapter shows how Glaspell looked to theatre as a tool for birth control activism in *Chains of Dew*. In this drama, she staged the emotional turmoil created when Nora Powers, a New York-based birth control proponent, converts Diantha Standish, a Minnesota housewife, into a reproductive rights activist. Glaspell conflated the artistic support she found as a member of the Provincetown Players with elements of female communal support commonly associated with both the birth control campaign and the first wave of feminism. Hence, I contend that through her dramatic work, Glaspell showed New York theatre audiences how a theatrical space could be developed into a forum for both feminist activism and feminist performance.

Glaspell took a similar activist approach with *The Verge* where she merged science and gender issues in her representation of Claire, a woman scientist who wants to create a new plant species that can self-reproduce without the need for pollination. Glaspell staged Claire's obsessive biological experiments and her heroine's increasing social alienation as consequences of an oppressive society intent on preserving patriarchal control over the process of reproduction. It should be noted that Glaspell also foregrounded the socially sanctioned curtailment of women's reproductive rights through Claire's refusal of traditional maternity. Elin Diamond asserts that Glaspell subverted motherhood when she cast Claire as a woman scientist who is a "creative woman who mothers plants, not American children" ("This Garden is a Mess" 126). Glaspell's Claire refuses to play the mother role in her own house, and instead transforms her domestic space into a laboratory for experiments in botanical hybridity. Diamond explains this double positioning of gender by stating that, "when spectators 'see' gender they are seeing (and

reproducing) the cultural signs of gender and by implication the gender ideology of a culture” (*Unmaking Mimesis* 45). When Glaspell dramatized these controversial standpoints, she not only undermined gender hegemonies but also uncovered theatrical prejudices. Consequently, I also illustrate how Glaspell, through her reproductive rights plays, worked to change audiences’ perception and reception of women’s drama. It is my belief that Glaspell, like Stopes, used drama to subvert entrenched gender divisions that kept creative and publicly outspoken women like her marginalized from political and cultural action.

3.2 A Feminist Theatrical Community

Glaspell became a feminist playwright when she founded the Provincetown Players with her husband George “Jig” Cram Cook and a group of like-minded artists. The mission of the Provincetown Players was to produce innovative dramas in small, select venues to counteract the popular, but vacuous and melodramatic productions offered by large, commercial theatres. Cook believed spectators were intellectually numbed by the predictability of Broadway fare where “having paid for your seat, the thing was all done for you, and your mind came out where it went in, only tired. An audience, Jig said, had imagination,” notes Glaspell in *Road to Temple*, her biography of Cook’s life (200). To produce groundbreaking dramas for a discerning audience, the Provincetown Players first had to create this audience, or instruct modern audiences on how to play their part. W.B. Worthen reiterates this need when he notes that “the modern theatre’s history of innovation is directly concerned with producing a certain kind of experience for the audience, and so with producing the audience itself” (Introduction 3). Glaspell and Cook wanted to stage plays for an engaged, active audience who would not hesitate to question the theatrical messages they received.

Revising an audience's traditionally passive role reflected the varied background of Little Theatre practitioners and spectators. Writing on the history of the Little Theatre Movement, Dorothy Chansky asserts that "the audience being constructed ideally would include a citizenry that, even if not all its members attended the theatre, could change their attitudes toward the theatre, thus facilitating governmental support, theatre in schools, and perhaps the participation of family members" (8). According to Chansky, Little Theatre supporters came from a rising managerial class of self-educated men and women who were heavily involved and invested in activism. They wrote for periodicals, participated in politics, and managed theatres. Glaspell recorded this plurality of interests in *Chains of Dew*. When Nora says she can appreciate art and also be the secretary for the Birth Control League, she implies she can embrace poetry and still campaign for a worthwhile cause. Glaspell's Nora asks audiences to accept the premise that women can play a variety of active and productive social roles.

Creating an opportunity for artists and spectators to experience multiple roles was also a key component of the mandate of the Provincetown Players. Glaspell recalls Cook asking: "Why not write our own plays and put them on ourselves, giving writer, actor, designer, a chance to work together without the commercial thing imposed from without? A whole community working together, developing unsuspecting talents" (203).³⁵ An inexperienced Glaspell benefitted from this non-gendered creative space when Cook asked her to write a play for the Provincetown's first season. The result of this request was *Trifles* (1916), which became Glaspell's most acclaimed work. Its popularity in turn led to the critical and commercial success

³⁵ Edna Kenton, general manager of the Provincetown Players, reiterated the unwavering sentiment in the annual circular sent to subscribers for the eighth and last season of the company which read: "The theatre of the Provincetown Players is, therefore today, as in the beginning, a purely experimental theatre, a frank testing ground for plays by native playwrights" (*The Provincetown Players* 144).

of the Provincetown Players. With this new theatrical venue, Glaspell found artistic support and financial backing to create modern drama from a feminist perspective.

Glaspell first empathized with women's issues when she worked as a statehouse and legislative beat reporter for the *Des Moines Daily News*. As part of her job, she was commissioned to write twenty-six articles, from December 1900 to April 1901, on the Hossack murder trial.³⁶ These articles would later become the basis for the plot of *Trifles*. Barbara Ozieblo, in her biography of Glaspell, recalls how Glaspell's "initially hostile, fully orthodox attitude toward Mrs. Hossack, accused of bludgeoning her husband as he slept, became more sympathetic after she visited the Hossack home. There, taking in trifling clues that together formed a picture of Mrs. Hossack's life, Glaspell talked to members of the family and neighbours" (*A Critical Biography* 28). Indeed, after her visit to the Hossack household, Glaspell tried to sway public opinion through her writing, but it was too late to dissuade a jury intent on finding Mrs. Hossack guilty. The experience of rallying public support for another woman gave Glaspell insight into the political and artistic value of presenting a topical issue through a woman's perspective. In *Road to the Temple*, Glaspell effectively linked this feminist point of view with her own process of gestation as a playwright when she described how she found the inspiration for *Trifles* by sitting in front of the empty stage, and feeding off its energy:

After a time the stage became a kitchen – a kitchen there all by itself. I saw just where the stove was, the table, and the steps going up-stairs. . . . the stage took it for

³⁶ Prosperous Warren County, Iowa farmer John Hossack was found murdered in his bed on December 1st, 1900. He was killed with an ax while he slept. Although his wife Margaret Hossack claimed to have slept through the incident, she was charged with his death. During the trial, the couple's less than idyllic home life came to light, and neighbours reluctantly testified with stories of emotional abuse. During the first trial, a jury of twelve men found Margaret guilty and sentenced her to life in prison. On appeal, a new jury could not come to a unanimous agreement, and Margaret was released. She died sixteen years later and was buried next to her husband.

its own, so I hurried in from the wharf to write down what I had seen. Whenever I got stuck, I would run across the street to the old wharf, sit in that leaning little theatre under which the sea sounded, until the play was ready to continue. (206)

Through this creative process, Glaspell literally stepped outside her comfort zone and into the unknown world of the theatre. She sought out the stage as a place to revive, rewrite and represent an experience of social injustice. She transmuted her experience to her audience giving them in turn the opportunity to cast, or recast, their own judgment. In this manner, Glaspell presented the stage as a space of, and for, reproduction of women's stories.

Judith L. Stephens calls attention to this revisioning of theatre in her analysis of theatre history where she states that there is a "new appreciation of drama as a site of struggle over the meaning of gender during periods of social change" ("Gender Ideology" 55). As a feminist, Glaspell drew on drama to call attention to a feminist cause, yet unlike Stopes, Glaspell did not mire her message in propaganda. Instead, Glaspell's plays showcased fully defined dramatic characters with voices that were not political or off-putting. Glaspell's women did not speak from election platforms or pulpits but from their homes. They found discursive power in their female environment without needing to appropriate men's voices nor their dramatic styles.

Glaspell's polyvocal women on stage replicated her own involvement with feminist groups like the Heterodoxy Club of Greenwich Village, pioneers of the birth control movement in North America³⁷ who attracted women such as Emma Goldman, a political activist, anarchist and writer; Mary Ware Dennett, a suffragist and founder of the Volunteer Parenthood League and the

³⁷ The Heterodoxy Club of Greenwich Village was founded in 1912 by feminist Marie Jenney Howe as a place where "unorthodox women" could gather once a week to freely discuss topics of interest such as suffrage, birth control, and women's rights in a supportive environment.

National Birth Control League; and Margaret Sanger to their membership. Hence, in the first scene of *Chains of Dew*, Glaspell surrounds Nora, the secretary of the fictional Birth Control League with a circle of friends that includes a newspaper editor, an Irish activist, and a poet. Glaspell congregates all four characters in Nora's office, which brims with propaganda for birth control in the form of posters, a diorama, and pamphlets, further emphasizing the multidisciplinary and multisensory appeal of the movement. Glaspell further reinforces drama's link to her own activism when Diantha's neighbours ask Nora how often she meets with fashionable women to discuss birth control; Glaspell has Nora respond: "Quite frequently. Once a week. At committee meetings. Birth control is the smart thing in New York this season. . . . When suffrage grew so – sort of common – the really exclusive people turned to birth control" (154). Thus, Nora becomes a model and an avatar for Glaspell's own feminist interests.

Writing on the impact of the first wave of feminism, Linda Gordon explains the rise in the popular appeal of the reproductive rights struggle in North America by stating that birth control advocates "wanted to transform the nature of women's rights – indeed, of human rights – to include free sexual expression and reproductive self-determination" (138). Reproductive rights activism attracted feminists, socialists, liberals, and reformists who saw birth control as a stepping stone, or as a platform to showcase their individual issues. The translational political tactic succeeded in transforming the movement from a voluntary grassroots interest group into a nation-wide, highly organized, and influential lobby group. The strategy also ensured that birth control could be "embraced by many individuals or groups with other positions potentially in conflict" (Gordon 174). Glaspell reflects this change in her text when she shows Nora casting a wide net in her recruitment efforts as she seeks support from people on opposite sides of the political spectrum. In *Chains of Dew*, Nora manages to convert both James O'Brien, a radical

Irish journalist, and Mrs. Standish, Seymore's conservative, midwestern mother, who had given birth to seven children during her lifetime.

Nora's modern recruitment tactics are never more evident than when she arrives at her lover Seymore's fictional Midwestern home in Bluff City, Minnesota. As soon as she walks in the door, Nora sets out to transform the passive, domestic environment. By removing a Madonna painting, hanging a few well-placed posters, and laying out pamphlets depicting more contemporary versions of motherhood, Nora transforms Seymore's living room into a branch of the Birth Control League. With this female appropriation of setting, Glaspell highlights the mobility of the birth control movement as an ideology which could take root and spread easily to the most conservative of places.

As a New York playwright, Glaspell established an intellectual hierarchy and difference between New York and the Midwest. In *Chains of Dew*, Nora asks Seymore's Midwestern wife Diantha: "How does it feel to be the heart and backbone of the country? The only thing we have to be in New York is the brain" referring to the Midwestern farm work involved in producing the tangible consumer goods that keep the economy afloat (153). Nora's comments are designed to pit physical labour against the less tactile, more intellectual task that takes place in the financial offices of Wall Street and the headquarters of major newspapers in New York.³⁸ Nora subtly acknowledges the socially constructed dependency of the movement by arguing that although the Midwest provides the fuel that keeps a body running, it is New York that has the brains that rule over that body. Glaspell transfers her own New York-based activism with the Heterodoxy Club

³⁸ Glaspell knew that the birth control movement in the United States originated in New York, and that Margaret Sanger kept the control of her organization centralized, even as Sanger, like Nora, also sought to recruit grassroots volunteers to spread and sustain the message.

into the character of Nora Powers by making the birth control activist into a pragmatic and conflated representation of feminist power. While her namesake Nora Helmer, in Henrik Ibsen's *A Doll's House*, felt imprisoned in her own home, Glaspell's Nora has sexual mobility, and as her last name none too subtly implies, the power to recruit funds for the birth control movement.³⁹

By envisioning Nora as a single woman with fashionable, bobbed hair, Glaspell also creates an aura of sexual freedom around the birth control activist. Nora's contemporary hairstyle aligns her with the forward-thinking, cultured, feminist reformers from New York, and differentiates her from the conservative, homebound midwestern housewives. Thus Glaspell successfully merges feminist rights with reproductive rights when Nora's interest in birth control becomes a natural extension and fit of her liberated lifestyle. Glaspell further reiterates how extended female mobility is tied to sexual desire in her other reproductive rights drama, *The Verge*, through the character of Claire who flirts and sexually controls the three men in her life: Tom, her would-be lover; Dick, her current lover; and Harry, her husband. Critics have pointed out that with the choice of the men's names Glaspell showed Claire's – and perhaps her own – disdain for the kind of non-distinctive, under-achieving everyman that these men represent. In addition, I propose that Claire's freedom to choose between any Tom, Dick, and Harry also highlights the power of her own sexual desire, and her ability to act upon those desires in the new social climate of the early decades of the twentieth century.⁴⁰ In Glaspell's play, Claire

³⁹ Glaspell's use of the name Nora went beyond artistic homage to Ibsen's heroine, as Glaspell's Nora is a woman crusading for women's right to refuse maternity. As a single woman, Nora Powers was both Ibsen's Nora who chooses to leave her children behind, as well as a stand-in for Glaspell who could not bear children herself, but who was a successful creative artist in her own right.

⁴⁰ Moreover, Claire's own name, which means both "light" and "famous", makes her metaphorically stand out against the bland, interchangeable men.

braces herself against the Tom, Dick and Harrys of her world who want to protect, objectify, and eventually reproduce her, under their own terms. I believe that with her dramaturgical choices and subtle delivery of a contraception message, Glaspell was visualizing a different future for women, a world where greater access to birth control education would give women the same freedom to roam, experiment, and satisfy their urges as men, without the fear of an unwanted pregnancy. Glaspell foregrounds the possibility of female agency in *Chains of Dew* by dramatizing the trope of the wandering woman as a force for cultural change rather than one of social menace.

When Glaspell embraces contraception as a theme, she creates an on-stage female alliance between women whose varying degrees of mobility are dependent on their marital status. In the first two acts of *Chains of Dew*, Glaspell showcases women who are single like Nora, as well as women who are mothers like Diantha and Seymore's mother. The mothers in the play are not defined by their maternity, that is to say Glaspell does not show them being maternal towards others or overtly complaining about their maternal duties. Moreover, Seymore and Diantha's children are mentioned but never seen. In the case of Seymore's mother, she is beyond child-rearing age, and the dolls she creates are not children's toys, but depictions of the full-grown adults whom she despises, but cannot publicly criticize.⁴¹ Furthermore, when Diantha is offered the presidency of the Birth Control League, she accepts quite hastily leading the audience to think she may have secretly not wanted to have another child. Instead of connecting these

⁴¹ Furthermore, Glaspell does not give maternal rhetoric or stage presence to the women with seven children shown in the birth control posters. Glaspell does not give voice to women overwhelmed with unwanted maternity nor women who may have benefited from birth control and could offer testimonials. This dramaturgical decision is similar to Stopes's choice to efface Mrs. Flinker from the second act of *Our Ostriches*. Stopes elected not to give the pregnant mother of eight a role in the court scene where her first-hand account could have clearly illustrated the dire need for birth control.

women through a shared experience of motherhood, Glaspell unites her women under the banner of a refusal of maternity and/or a woman's right to choose when and how many children to have.

Theatre audiences also hear Seymore's mother reveal that although she bore seven children, she still wants to support birth control. When she gives Nora seven hundred dollars — a hundred dollars per child — for the birth control cause, she justifies her donation by stating that “seven is too many” (169). Seymore is duly horrified at his mother's words because *he* was the seventh child, and questions his mother's choice: “You are giving seven hundred dollars to a movement which had it existed would have meant my non-existence?” (169).⁴² His mother responds that as a man Seymore will never understand the toil that bearing seven children takes on a woman's body, nor sympathize with the fact that she had no choice but to bear him because no contraceptive devices were readily available.⁴³ By foregrounding this matriarchal sacrifice to satisfy a patriarchal desire for lineage, *Chains of Dew* shows audiences the effect on women's lives of a reproductive rights bias that was culturally condoned. Indeed, Glaspell's drama gives spectators a close up view of the politics of contraception by showing the consequences of women's lack of access to birth control.

Glaspell underpins Seymore's unwillingness to face the long term impact of birth control activism when she ends *Chains of Dew* not on the comedic trope of marriage, but rather on a

⁴² Glaspell's use of the word “existence” to address Seymore's aliveness is a curious one because it does not acknowledge reproduction as a biological process, but as a state of being dependent on words, thus evoking the idea of creation as an incantatory procedure. Seymore speaks of his mother “wishing him out of existence” with her monetary contribution, and tries to appropriate the power of creation and non-creation by yelling at the doll that her mothers gives him: “I wish *her* non- existence” (Glaspell 169; emphasis added).

⁴³ I also consider that Glaspell further reinforces Seymore's inability to understand a woman's perspective on birth control by deliberately choosing an ironic name for the character. When Seymore's mother names him Seymore, she was perhaps hoping her child would “see-more” of the world around him, see beyond gender biases, and proactively work to change social constraints.

sombre, cautionary, and almost tragic tone. In the last scene of the play, Diantha submits to Seymore's wishes and agrees to give up her post as President of the Bluff City branch of The Birth Control League. As a poet, Seymore visualizes the birth control movement solely as an ideology. He sees it as a spell that Nora has cast upon Diantha and his mother and one which can be easily undone through rhetoric. Therefore, he readily receives Diantha's acquiescent words at the end of the play as the key to breaking the hold that the movement has on her. Seymore is unable to see the physical and emotional toll that uttering these words has taken on his wife. By agreeing to renounce her activist work, Diantha capitulates to the restoration of the old patriarchal order to her midwestern household. She closes the door on the possibility of a female-driven change that would have taken her from the domestic into the public space. Glaspell represents the reinstatement of social order as a tragedy for this Midwestern woman as well as for all the women in the audience who may have wanted to follow Diantha's lead.

Even with this pessimistic ending, Glaspell's feminist message is ultimately subversive as Diantha verbalizes her yearning for social change and envisions another future. Ellen J. Gainor notes that Glaspell chose this closing scene in "proto-Brechtian fashion, to highlight conventions of realism that demand the restitution of the social order and to force her audience to think carefully about marriage, gender roles, and American culture, very possibly with an eye to motivating social change" (*Susan Glaspell in Context* 192). Therefore, when Seymore complains that taking down the birth control posters will leave marks on the walls, Diantha concurs that "yes, there will be holes in the wall" (176). She reveals these final thoughts — with "malicious satisfaction," according to Glaspell's scene direction — in a whispered aside to the audience (176). Diantha knows that she, like the wall, has been scarred and marked by her involvement with the reproductive rights campaign. Therefore, although Diantha does not physically leave her

home, as Nora Powers does when she returns to New York, or as Ibsen's Nora Helmer does when she leaves her children, Glaspell shows modern audiences how Diantha's newly acquired knowledge has given her a glimpse into an alternative world beyond the walls of her domestic space. Diantha's birth control activism has taught her that walls — be they physically or socially construed — are not impermeable and can be broken down. Glaspell ends her play by placing her heroine in a paradoxical Brechtian-like state where Diantha is both physically restored to the domestic space, but mentally freed from its constraints.

3.3 The Stage as a Biological and Creative Womb

While Glaspell often locates her plays in domestic spaces, her feminist representation of these settings challenged gender hierarchies. Glaspell staged the home as a site for gender discussion, and possible gender resistance to hegemonic standards.⁴⁴ Kristina Hinz-Bode describes Glaspell's women as having a “paradoxical sense of being simultaneously isolated from and connected to others — and a corresponding feeling of being caught between one's individuality and one's social existence” (4). For Glaspell, the home, and a woman's sense of place within it, reflected her relationship to everything and everyone outside her domestic space. In modern plays, women's roles in the household were usually delineated along gender lines. Women defined themselves through their relationships to men who were in turn seen the obstacles to women's social and subjective transformations. In Stopes's *Our Ostriches*, when Evadne enters the Flinker home, she has to face off against Mr. Flinker and a male-centered

⁴⁴ With *Trifles*, *Chains of Dew* and *The Verge*, Glaspell made the stage as her home, and women's homes the stage for her feminist plays. Glaspell continued to explore her fascination with home as entrapment through *Alison's House* (1930), a drama that received the Pulitzer Prize. Glaspell's award-winning play was based on the life of poet Emily Dickinson who suffered from agoraphobia.

religious institution that condemns birth control. In Grimké's works the male lynch mobs influence the heroines' choices to retreat into their homes and commit race genocide. In Glaspell's dramas, women have to remain at home and subsume their interests to men's desires at the expense of advancing feminist and reproductive rights.

Glaspell was complicit in women's buttressing of men's interests through her creative relationship with her husband. In *The Road to the Temple*, Glaspell hints at Cook's insecurities and an idealism which had to be constantly validated by others: "He was the center; for the most part, he made the others want to do it, as well as persuaded them it could be done. I felt the energy must go into keeping that fire of enthusiasm, or belief, from which we all drew" (207). Cook's creative frustrations escalated during the last seasons of the Provincetown Players coming to a head with the infighting among the playwrights, and his inability to find a wider audience for his plays. Glaspell narrates how Cook gave up theatre to pursue his lifelong dream of living and working in Greece. Cook and Glaspell left to live abroad on March 2, 1922 before the end of the eighth season of the Provincetown Players, and just as Glaspell's two reproductive rights dramas were due to premiere. By fleeing to Greece and putting his own creative endeavours ahead of the company's and Glaspell's needs, Cook prevented Glaspell from witnessing the opening night of *Chains of Dew*.

Much like Cook, who found himself increasingly phased out from the company he had helped to create, Seymore, in Glaspell's *Chains of Dew*, also finds himself an outsider in his own home when Nora brings reproductive rights to his doorstep. Glaspell illustrates how the birth control movement invades Seymore's home and subverts his position within it when Diantha thanks him for "volunteering" to give speeches that support birth control by saying that "it's going to be great to have you right behind us!" (155). Although Glaspell uses sexual innuendo

for comedic effect, the subversive undercurrent of gender criticism and the suggested role reversal cannot be ignored. Moreover, in Glaspell's imagined setting, three women: Seymore's wife, his lover, and his mother — all of whom support birth control — outnumber the patriarch in his own household.

Glaspell further exacerbates the gender divide when Seymore is betrayed by one of his kind, the Irish journalist O'Brien, who argues that there is a "terrible inequality in this whole arrangement," and states that the balance should be redressed by allowing men like him to experience the reproductive process (170). "How I should love to bear a child!" he says, in a moment that could be perceived once again as comic relief, but that is in fact a more subtle and incisive criticism by Glaspell on the inequality of the sexes (170). With this comment, Glaspell asks spectators to consider the effects of an inversion of the reproduction status quo, and thus to envision alternatives to the current reproduction hegemony. Glaspell's criticism had to be subtle as the Comstock Law was still in effect, and abortion was a taboo subject during her time. For either sex, birth control could only be staged as a choice or a "wish" that could be publicly expressed, but not acted upon.

Yet, there are also clues throughout the play that Glaspell may have wanted her audience to consider all applications of birth control, even those that had to be taken after the fact. Glaspell can only hint at these options by having her characters use broken words, and hesitant phrases, as if afraid that voicing these alternatives too strongly may actually conjure them up on stage. When Nora finds Seymore's mother angrily ripping the head of the "Seymore" doll, Nora asks her if she is "unmaking" him, to which the mother replies: "I mustn't – unmake Seymore. It really couldn't be done. He'd become. . ." leaving the phrase unfinished as to what the effect of this reversal would have been (173). Glaspell further reinforces the unspoken reproductive rights

quandaries when she gives Diantha the choice Seymore's mother didn't have. Nora asks Diantha: "Which do you love more, Seymore or birth control? If you had to choose between them, which would you take?" (174). It is a disturbing conundrum for Diantha because either decision will end in the death of a human being: the death of Seymore as head of the household, or the death of the emancipated Diantha. Nora, as the most knowledgeable person in the room about birth control methods, wants to preclude the abortion of Diantha's feminist identity, which Nora has called into being. She urges Diantha not to make the choice, and not to let herself be sacrificed: "Of course you won't! You can't do it — now" (175). Unfortunately, in Glaspell's drama the new Diantha, with bobbed hair and proudly carrying the banner of birth control, has to die for Seymore to continue to live.⁴⁵

I believe that Glaspell, as a woman playwright who had to renounce her own needs to fulfill her husband's creative ambitions, was representing her own artistic curtailment through her reproductive rights dramas. *Chains of Dew* was staged in April 1922, in a hurried and poorly received production meant to fill in a gap in the Provincetown Players' last season.⁴⁶ It is hard to judge what an audience's response may have been to Glaspell's blend of dramatic and activist message, particularly when the production did not draw large crowds. Alexander Woollcott, from *The New York Times*, argued the play was "stale" and "might be dismissed with a wave of the hand if not for the interesting figure of the mother," whom he saw as the only salvageable

⁴⁵ Barbara Ozieblo sees Diantha as "an amalgam of the New Woman who dares to assert herself, and the older model of the True Woman who upholds the conventions of society" ("The Modernist Experiment" 22).

⁴⁶ Glaspell had in fact written the play in 1919 and asked Eugene O'Neill to shop it on Broadway in early 1920, as she thought the play had commercial appeal. Broadway producers George C. Tyler and John D. Williams turned it down because Glaspell was an unknown playwright thereby crushing her hopes of breaking into mainstream theatre. Had the play been produced in the 1920-21 season, its content would have been more timely and appealing to the theatre-going public than in 1922 when interest in the birth control movement and its activities was waning. This delay, together with a hastily rehearsed production resulted in poor critical reviews.

character (20). Ludwig Lewisohn, the drama critic for *The Nation*, lamented Glaspell's lack of realistic characterization and her overuse of symbolism, where figures like Seymore "never step out of Miss Glaspell's mind into the world of the concrete" (627). Although highly critical, Lewisohn's review is intriguing because the reviewer never mentions the words "birth control" or "contraception." Lewisohn dances around the theme playing up Seymore's artistic dilemma as the plot point that drives the narrative.

While the Comstock Law was still in effect, and may have deterred some reviewers from voicing outright support of the birth control movement, it is worth noting that Lewisohn's deliberate omission does not align with his paper's open support of the movement. On May 3, 1922, only three weeks before Lewisohn's review of Glaspell's play, and while the drama was still running, *The Nation* ran a long, two-column article on the challenges of disseminating birth control information in Mexico. The article included parts of a letter from the Mexican District Attorney eloquently defending his countrymen's right to access birth control information without fear of persecution from the law ("Birth Control in Mexico"). The same issue of the newspaper also carried an eighth of a page ad for subscriptions to Sanger's *The Birth Control Review* further solidifying *The Nation*'s willingness to discuss the subject. Yet, birth control was still a polarizing and divisive subject for spectators and readers. By not referencing contraception in his review, I believe Lewisohn was consciously negating Glaspell's activist aim and/or impact.

It is ironic, though not surprising, that critics were therefore more receptive to Glaspell's feminist message when her drama was revived in 2008, as part of the Orange Tree Theatre's "Female Playwrights Season" and a four-day international conference celebrating Glaspell's work in Richmond, a suburb in Greater London. British drama critics honed in on Glaspell's frustration with gender biases of her time. More than three of the critics who saw the Orange

Tree's production thought the most salient feature of Glaspell's work was its aggressive tone. "Its most striking attribute is anger" and a "bracing realism," said Sam Marlowe of *The Times* (292). Sarah Hemming of the *Financial Times* agreed that "Glaspell is witty and shrewd, but angry too" (293). Helen Huff reported that when the curtain fell on the tragic ending, "the audience responded with a hush" (94). Moreover, Cheryl Black, reviewing the play for *Theatre Journal*, was struck by the audience's enthusiasm for the themes Glaspell staged as they "left buzzing with questions and fervently partisan responses to what they had witnessed, a testament to the contemporary relevance of the political and personal issues raised" (648). Twenty-first century audiences attending the Orange Tree's production interacted with Glaspell's drama in an active manner fulfilling her mandate to create plays which would wake up modern theatre spectators from the stupor and lethargy induced by the lighter and superficial fare offered on Broadway.

Some critics also argued that the 2008 performance should be considered as the true premiere of the play since the earlier production had not had a proper chance at succeeding with the Provincetown Players' rushed staging. The play itself had not been published since its first production, so there had also been no opportunity for a revival in the intervening years.⁴⁷ Furthermore, the Orange Tree Theatre is well known for calling attention to the work of forgotten playwrights. I argue that the 2008 *Chains of Dew* should remain not only as a successful revival of Glaspell's play, but as a production that resurrected the original spirit and intent of the Provincetown Theatre Players to create timely and provocative work.

⁴⁷ Before going to Greece, Glaspell had sent a typescript to the Library of Congress, and Director Kate Saxon worked from this extant copy for the Orange Tree production.

3.4 Creating a Dramatic Space through Biology

While the Provincetown Players provided a creative space for Glaspell's dramatic skill to flourish, it was ironic that Glaspell's two plays about reproducing life should have been featured in a season that signalled the death of the groundbreaking theatre company. I contend that the decision to feature reproductive rights drama in the repertoire of the Provincetown Players reflected Glaspell's and Cook's long-held interest in biology and reproductive sciences. The two artists had first met as members of the Monist society, a group of free thinkers who convened on a regular basis to exchange ideas. The term "monist" was coined by naturalist Ernst Haeckel to represent the essential unity of mind and matter. In the late nineteenth century, Haeckel created hundreds of new species of fruits and vegetables, and theorized on embryo development. Glaspell credited Haeckel with inspiring Cook, who was originally a farmer in Iowa, to apply his knowledge of biological creation to artistic endeavours. Glaspell narrated that Cook "studied Darwin and Haeckel while turning soil for the seed, and with an excited sense of long-ago stirrings saw the earth part because once more, as through the centuries, life was swelling from darkness to the light" (*Road to the Temple* 19). Glaspell describes Cook's passion for both in similar rhetoric linking artistic creation with biological reproduction.

Glaspell uses the same reproductive discourse in *The Verge* when Claire describes the biological process as something that cannot be "prisoned," that breaks itself free to produce "one sliver of life with vitality to find the future" (240). Glaspell herself only became known as a playwright once she had helped plant and nurture the foundational roots of the Provincetown Players. Therefore, I propose Glaspell continued to link biology to feminist self transformation in her reproductive politics dramas through the characters of Diantha and Claire. Diantha used birth control ideology to break through her stifling domestic space allowing her repressed, activist self

to emerge. In a similar, though more proactive manner, Claire's hybrid experiments also reflect her intent to breach genetic principles and gender constraints. These two women, together with Glaspell as their creator, fight social conventions that frustrate their efforts to self reproduce by creating an "other" improved version of themselves.⁴⁸ When reviewing Glaspell's *The Verge* in 1925, the unnamed drama critic of the *Illustrated London News* praised Glaspell's passion for her craft by stating that "only a woman could have created Claire — erotic, neurotic, abnormal, and yet alive. . . . We feel in her presence that an intense and passionate emotion has gone into her creation" ("The Drama of Susan Glaspell" 644). Thus, we should see Glaspell as amalgamating her own creative desires with Claire's biological passion to produce groundbreaking theatre that would not be pigeonholed as "women's" drama. Indeed, Glaspell argues that Claire's ultimate aim was to produce a perfect *non-gendered* being that could survive and thrive as an "other" outside the confines of the existing gender hierarchy.

With this dramaturgical choice, Glaspell once more explored the motif of gender as marginalization by referencing elements of biology. In *The Verge*, for example, Glaspell shows how Claire rejects the outside world preferring instead to create and live in her own social microcosm.⁴⁹ As a woman scientist, she transforms her domestic space into a laboratory to create a hybrid plant, which in turn could recreate itself into the perfect organism. At the end of the

⁴⁸ Modern theatre audiences would have readily accepted Glaspell's Claire as a woman scientist because spectators would have included an increasing number of women who had graduated from medical colleges and newly inaugurated women colleges like Bryn Mawr (1885) and Mills (1885).

⁴⁹ Claire's desire to turn her home into a scientific space had its roots in the emerging scientific motherhood movement, which wanted to bring the domestic space in line with newly acquired industrial methods and conditions. During the modern period, the home had become a branch of the scientific laboratory for socially sanctioned, and indeed sometimes socially prescribed, experimentation. Thus, American women sought reassurance and comfort not only in scientific medicine, but also in the application of scientific methods to housekeeping, household management, and public administration. Moreover, the middle classes found science to be an academic field more democratically accessible to them, and one that did not depend on birth rank or inherited wealth. For more information on the rise of "scientific motherhood" see Rima D. Apple's "Constructing Mothers: Scientific Motherhood in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries" (*Social History of Medicine* 1995).

play, the new specimen wraps itself around Claire mimicking a filial relationship to her and acknowledging Claire as the reproducer of this new being. By surrounding Claire with plants and making her into the “mother” of this natural world though, I believe Glaspell was implying that women, like nature, were outside the space of language and representation. Diamond, in her work on depictions of nature in women’s drama, states that Claire’s garden was like Hedda Gabbler’s inner room, “a space of nondiscursive negativity, dimensionless and hallucinatory, an uncharted space” (*This Garden* 122). Glaspell reinforces the self-imposed silence of domestic space when she opens her play with a scene with no dialogue where Claire’s plant is seen emerging from the darkness below as if from a womb. Glaspell’s first line in the play is in fact a stage command for light to appear, and Claire’s subsequent entrance into the room is described as giving “the room another kind of aliveness” (230). With this striking visual metaphor for birth, Glaspell was both embodying and demonstrating how a woman could take over the role of creator.

Glaspell reinforces Claire’s role as a reproducer and inventor by giving her heroine the power to control and create a different rhetoric. Karen Gardiner, writing about the quandary of the female artist, describes Claire as a modern woman who “pushes out – linguistically, biologically, morally, creatively” by creating her own stilted language, her own offspring, and her own set of rules to deal with social conventions that oppress her (197). As a result, language becomes both a bridge and a divide between Glaspell’s women and their men. Claire’s hesitant rhetoric, made up of short, abrupt phrases is incomprehensible to the men in *The Verge*. Linda Ben-Zvi, a preeminent scholar on Glaspell, argues that Glaspell’s female characters “are virtually inarticulate, or are rendered so because of the situation they find themselves in” (156). The problem lies in the limits of traditional language, which is not complex or inclusive enough

to represent women's needs. Conventional language carries a set of signs and signifiers, a cultural baggage, which hinders Claire's efforts to introduce her innovative, and at times transgressive, feminist ideas. Therefore, Claire's discourse is not so much inarticulate as experimental. Throughout the play, Claire never ceases to speak to men. Yet because they can't understand her re-articulation of language, they can't grasp what she is trying to say. To help the men in the play — and I would argue her own audience — to understand Claire's rhetoric, Glaspell conveys her heroine's state of mind through her actions. Elaine Aston, in her review of the Orange Tree Theatre's 2008 production of *The Verge*, commented on Isla Blair's physicality when playing Claire: "Blair spoke gesturally rather than verbally – especially through patterning of arm, hand, and finger movements. The border between 'deadness' and 'otherness' was located physically by Blair, who thus constantly marked the transgressive tension between inward and outward movement" (230). Glaspell's Claire pushes back physically and intellectually against social mores intent on defining and confining her. Yet, because Claire is a woman, those around her view her reproductive/creative act, and any action or discourse associated with it as "transgressive" with regards to established gender norms.⁵⁰

Claire has to keep her ethically questionable experiments secret or risk becoming a social pariah since Glaspell had already defied social conventions by making Claire into a woman

⁵⁰ Claire's breakthrough in genetic science also represented a gender break with the sexual repression associated with earlier methods of birth control, such as voluntary parenthood. This nineteenth-century practice was based on "continence," that is the abstinence of sexual relations outside of marriage and limited relations within marriage for the purpose of achieving a Victorian ideal of self-control over one's body. The practice was neither a popular, nor an efficient method of contraception because it meant that men and women who sought relief outside of marriage became vulnerable to venereal diseases and pregnancy. As more single women began to live and work outside the home, Victorian morals and contraception methods fell out of popular favour, and were not a realistic option. In chronicling the history of the birth control movement, Linda Gordon states these changes in sexual behaviour "created a new concept of birth control. Birth control now meant reproductive self-determination along with unlimited sexual indulgence" for both sexes (128). This sexual revolution prioritized women's needs over men's desires, thereby subverting the Victorian hierarchy that placed men as morally superior beings.

scientist. When Glaspell staged a drama with a woman in control of the reproduction of the species, she was highlighting women's restlessness and growing refusal to passively subject themselves to scientific scrutiny. Diamond argues that Claire's unorthodox application of the creative force defines her as a "woman whose Nietzschean creativity/negativity puts her at odds with the mercantilist progressivism of her husband, her sister, and the gender script of true womanhood" ("This Garden is a Mess" 127). Nietzsche was critical of the Christian tradition, which in glorifying suffering encouraged a culture of passivity, acceptance, and reactivity. According to him, this tradition of conformity went against the positivity and active nature required to create.⁵¹

Meanwhile, it is worth noting that while Claire endorses and encourages botanical reproduction, she refuses her own maternal status. Although Claire has a daughter, she rejects Elizabeth because Claire considers her to be too passive in nature and with a tendency to subject her needs to those of the men in her family. Elizabeth represents a generation of women that in spite of inheriting the right to vote has lapsed back into social conformity and acquiescence to patriarchal order. Claire's daughter has no ideas of her own and can only endlessly repeat what "all the other girls" like her think (244). Claire's sister Adelaide, who was in her youth one of these girls, accuses Claire of being an "unnatural woman" for not loving her child (84). Yet, Claire cannot force herself to love someone who perpetuates the norm. She views her child with

⁵¹ Sybil Thorndike, who played Claire at the Regent Theatre in London in the 1925 Pioneer Players' version of *The Verge*, also expressed her impression of Claire in terms of this Nietzschean dichotomy: "Some people believe that Claire kills life, that she represents negation. She is on the contrary affirmative-positive; she experiments with plants, which are the symbol of her desire, not to create something beautiful, but to create some new form more daring than any that preceded it" (qtd. in Ozieblo, *A Critical Biography* 184). Ozieblo also speculates that because Thorndike's career was closely monitored and controlled by her husband and brother, she may have been familiar with the theme of subjugated female artistic desires.

the same disdain she has for Edge of the Vine, a plant in her laboratory that will not accept a new form, but instead chooses to return to its old ways.

I believe Claire's subversive behaviour also has its roots in women's long-held desire for education. In the Bible's Genesis narrative, Eve takes the apple from the Tree of Knowledge because she is both ambitious and curious. She wants to obtain information that could change her status in the world contesting the power of her creator. Diamond describes Glaspell's rewriting of the biblical narrative of Adam and Eve's expulsion from the garden, as a revisioning of the myth of motherhood where "the garden, that symbol of feminine enclosure, of nature tamed, of postlapsarian redemption, becomes in [Glaspell's drama] the space of maternity gone bad" ("This Garden is a Mess" 122). Claire refuses to limit herself to the knowledge dispensed by others, and sets out to obtain it for herself at the cost of her social reputation.

Claire's relentless defiance can also be seen through her stance against sexual repression and any other form of gender control. Claire's rebellious standpoint is emblematic of the climax of the sexual revolution movement during the first wave of feminism when as Gordon argues "the critique of sexual repression was part of a growing attack on hierarchy, authoritarianism, and all forms of social repression. Feminism, the critique of male tyranny, was thus a kindred social ideology" (126). By making Claire into both a woman and a scientist, and her home into both domestic space and a laboratory, Glaspell challenged the popular cult of scientific motherhood where maternity, and by extension women themselves, had become an object of public scrutiny and criticism. Liza Maeve Nelligan likens Claire's ambition to create something new — and I would argue to recreate *herself* — to "feminism itself, which was then, as it is today, a movement dedicated to reconstituting the social order so that female human beings can be something that has never been before: unconditionally free to choose life's patterns" (90).

Living in the aftermath of the age of Imperialism and the Industrial Revolution, Claire had seen how men exploited Mother Nature. She felt the only way for women and nature to survive was to reproduce themselves and their offspring into a different, unassailable and uncontrollable species.

3.5 The Legacy of Modern Reproductive Rights Dramas

Glaspell's dramas proved that the birth control debate went beyond an essential biological concern. Birth control activism affected multiple interconnected social concerns ranging from immigration to class mobility to moral codes, and even to freedom of speech. Yet, the subgenre of birth control plays only lasted through the interwar period. Once the Comstock Law was repealed in 1937, birth control clinics proliferated in the United States making birth control information widely and legally available to all. Access to birth control education was no longer a cause that needed support within the feminist movement, and women playwrights no longer featured contraception as a theme in their plays.

Fifty years later, during the second wave of feminism, women dramatists revisited the issue of reproductive politics when Assisted Reproductive Technologies (ARTs) became popular with geneticists and fertility scientists. Although reproductive rights were now about conception, rather than contraception, women's dramas on infertility, in-vitro fertilization and surrogacy explored some of the same themes as the birth control plays. For example, the class and gender divisions that plagued Stopes's dramas surfaced once again in Michelene Wandor's and Lisa Loomer's plays about in-vitro fertilization and about gay and lesbian couples who sought to procreate. The eugenics controversy latent in the work of African American playwrights emerged once more in Wendy Lill's and Cassandra Medley's staged debates on stem cell

research funding that would allow couples to design made-to-order babies. Glaspell's challenge to a gendered science environment reappeared in Caryl Churchill's and Liz Lochhead's works, as these dramas showcased men's need to reinstate patriarchal authority. Although these contemporary and recent playwrights now had more opportunities to perform and produce their plays, these women still worked within a highly hierarchal theatre environment. The following three chapters show how Wandor, Loomer, Lill, Medley, Churchill, and Lochhead emulated their Modern period counterparts and used the subgenre of reproductive rights drama as a vehicle and herald for their own theatrical and subjective transformations.

Chapter Four: Michelene Wandor and Lisa Loomer

It is only when women are present in significant numbers in all theatre roles, initiatory as well as interpretive, that we shall see a theatre which represents the concerns of all its audience, not just the experiences of one half being relayed to the other half.

— Michelene Wandor, *Carry on Understudies: Theatre and Sexual Politics* (1981)

4.1 An Absence of Reproductive Rights Drama: 1930-1970

The first three chapters of my dissertation analyzed the emergence of a subgenre of reproductive politics drama at the start of the twentieth century when women playwrights deployed elements of first-wave feminism — such as the struggle to access birth control — to carve out a theatrical space of their own and to create an audience for their work. Women’s drama featuring a merger of activism and science resurfaced towards the end of the twentieth century. These contemporary and recent plays recorded and questioned a new reproductive rights debate that materialized following the second wave of feminism. In these feminist narratives, women playwrights staged reproductive rights through the same women-centered perspective found in the earlier birth control texts. However, the Modern period texts focused on contraception issues, while the late-twentieth-century dramas addressed the popularity of new conception practices, such as in-vitro fertilization, stem cell research and cloning. I begin my close study of the re-emergence of the subgenre of reproductive rights drama by exploring British playwright Michelene Wandor’s *AID Thy Neighbour* (1978) and American playwright Lisa Loomer’s *Expecting Isabel* (1998) as feminist revisions of a rapidly changing scientific

environment.⁵² Wandor's *AID Thy Neighbour* premiered the same year as the birth of Louise Brown, the first successful "test tube" baby.⁵³ Wandor's play stages the controversies surrounding early in-vitro fertilization practices – which, though officially unregulated, were covertly biased against homosexual couples. I then look ten years ahead, to the late 1980s when these conception processes, now known as Assisted Reproductive Technologies (ARTs), had become more commonplace, even though they continued to be mired in ethical concerns. The proliferation of ARTs in the 1980s and 1990s meant biological reproduction now took place in a technological setting rather than in a woman's body. I analyze these new conception alternatives and their impact on women's reproductive rights through Loomer's *Expecting Isabel*, since her drama chronicles a heterosexual couple's carnivalesque ride through a myriad of contemporary fertility options.

Before reviewing these plays in detail — as successors and counterpoints to the early twentieth-century dramas — it is important to account for the transition period between the two feminist "waves." Following World War II, women's drama of any kind was seldom commercially produced or critically acknowledged. Tracing the work of women playwrights in England during this period, Wandor notes that of the 250 plays between 1956 and 1975 at the Royal Court theatre, only 17 were written or directed by women (*Carry on Understudies* 142). Moreover none of these plays had reproductive rights as a central theme. Nevertheless, I believe

⁵² In Wandor's play, AID stands for Artificial Insemination by Donor.

⁵³ Louise Joy Brown was born on July 25, 1978 to Lesley and John Brown through in-vitro fertilization. The procedure was monitored by Doctor Robert Edwards and Doctor Patrick Steptoe at Oldham hospital in Lancashire, England. Her younger sister Natalie was born four years later, also through in-vitro fertilization. Dr. Edwards received the Nobel Prize for Medicine in 2010 for his work. Dr. Steptoe had died ten years earlier and could not share the prize because Nobel prizes are not awarded posthumously.

that there were social and cultural forces at work laying a feminist and theatrical foundation that allowed the subgenre of plays by Wandor, Loomer, and their successors to reappear.

To understand the conflation of events leading to a renewed interest in reproductive politics, I begin with Marlene LeGates's premise that "between the two waves, the [feminist] movement ebbed rather than disappeared" (313). Hence, I argue the marginalization of women's contributions to theatre was part of a larger social trend aimed at curtailing women's presence and influence in public and political circles. During the 1940s, women had unprecedented opportunities to work outside the home when they took up posts vacated by men who were on active duty. Women were a visible presence in munitions factories, plants, and multiple commercial venues. These women did not earn the same wages as men even though they were carrying out the same work. In addition, women were in essence holding down two jobs by taking over, albeit temporarily, men's patriarchal roles in their homes. When the war ended, LeGates points out that women were left with "a legacy of expectation that they would be rewarded for their help. Their experiences gave many a lasting sense of pride in their ability to accomplish something different" (315). Moreover, the national fight for democracy during the war had given women and minority groups hope that the victory could be translated into similar gains in the war against inequality in the work place and in society.

These expectations were swiftly curtailed when men returned to the workforce in a society that was no longer driven by the war effort. To revive the economy, politicians, businessmen and the media promoted consumer spending by sponsoring the idea of a traditional family unit with the father as the breadwinner, the mother as the homemaker, and two to four children living in a suburban dwelling. The government and private sector created a new consumer-driven environment. Wandor explains how these changes in the social landscape isolated women in

their homes, and gave them mixed messages regarding their new standpoint in this consumer society: “The reality was that large numbers of women still worked outside the home, but women’s magazines extolled the virtues of the feminine wife and mother, and domestic craft skills” (Wandor, *Carry on Understudies* 7). Increasingly, women were phased out of the public work environment and encouraged to return to, and remain in, domestic spaces. Women did not settle easily into their new, restricted social roles after the agency they had wielded during wartime. Their restlessness was documented by women writers like American Betty Friedan in her bestselling *The Feminine Mystique* (1962), where she shed light on women’s distress with an enforced return to a life of domesticity. In Britain, Hanna Gavron came to similar conclusions in *The Captive Wife* (1966), when she polled several hundred disgruntled housewives. Friedan’s and Gavron’s work ignited the sparks of dormant discontent that led to the second wave of feminism.

Women playwrights joined the activist struggle by writing plays that showcased women’s increasingly vocal and public complaints about their new social circumstances. Although none of the plays written during this period used reproductive politics as a platform for feminist activism, some plays featured women resisting or rejecting enforced maternity. Writing on motherhood dramas that appeared at this time, Komporalý notes that, “contented motherhood was almost entirely absent, as a range of plays centred on women negotiating motherhood with an independent life, and on women’s resistance to give birth or to nurture” (8). Two dramas that exemplified this sentiment were Shelagh Delaney’s *A Taste of Honey* (1958), and Anne Jellicoe’s *The Sport of My Mad Mother* (1958), both of which showcased characters who challenged traditional representations of motherhood. Delaney’s drama was a counterpoint to the mass media images of an idealistic, nurturing, female-centered home by featuring Jo, a working-

class white woman pregnant by a black boyfriend. Jellicoe's drama, in turn, focused on mythology and castration through Greta, the central character who used pregnancy as a violent and fatal female power against male oppression in her tribe. While neither of these plays addressed reproductive rights directly, the texts nevertheless foregrounded women's increasing need to control their maternity. Furthermore these representations of motherhood showed how women playwrights used themes of sexuality and reproduction to address feminist rights.

Women writing for theatre also emulated methods employed by women activists during this period who discussed topics of common interest through consciousness raising groups. These communal associations laid the foundation for a collective feminist political and theatrical practice, such as the one-act agitprop plays presented by London's Women's Street Theatre Group. When this collective staged *Sugar and Spice* in 1971 as part of the celebrations of International Women's Day, the performance featured giant props of deodorants, sanitary pads, and a "giant red, white and blue penis" (Wandor, *Carry on Understudies* 38). Wandor argued the display of purposefully exaggerated sexual objects was a way of bringing the private into the public by "breaking taboos about what is considered 'decent' for women to display in public, and challenging the way women's bodies and their sexuality are deliberately hidden and repressed where they don't conform to the dominant sexual imagery" (*Carry on Understudies* 38). These performances promoted the systematic, activist work of women's groups, and set the groundwork for future political action.

The political impact of women's alliances was also felt in North America. In Canada, for example, the Royal Commission on the Status of Women presented a report with 167 recommendations, which led to the creation of the National Committee on the Status of Women (NAC) in 1970. In the United States, Betty Friedan had founded and become the President of the

National Organization for Women (NOW) in 1966. The rise of activist efforts on both sides of the Atlantic led to the second wave of feminism, which arrived in full force in 1968 when protesters against the Miss America pageant in Atlantic city carried a banner that read “Women’s Liberation,” and tossed their bras, curlers, and high heels into a “freedom” trash can, according to Charlotte Canning in her chronicle of feminist theatre groups (43). Wandor reaffirmed the central role reproductive politics played in the movement by arguing that the second wave of feminism established “a clear link between women’s relationship to (a) material social production; (b) the family; (c) individual sexual choice” (*Carry on Understudies* 13). She also recalled how subsequent scientific advances in contraception such as the “Pill,” formally licensed in 1960, gave women even more choices regarding childbearing because “whereas for men sexual pleasure and procreation had always been separate options, for the first time Western women were approaching a point where those options could be a reality for them too” (*Carry on Understudies* 7).⁵⁴ Indeed, while society encouraged women to remain at home and raise children, science was finally giving women an easy and safe contraception method that could free them from socially dictated motherhood duties. As a result, when the First Women’s Liberation Movement Conference took place in Britain in 1970, the issue of reproductive rights was firmly and publicly ensconced in the feminist platform.

⁵⁴ It should be noted that the development of the Pill was part of a feminist legacy leading back to the activist efforts of Margaret Sanger and her successful appeal of the Comstock Law in 1936. Robert Jütte, in his account of the history of contraception, retells how Sanger was instrumental in the development of the Pill. Sanger had invited Doctor Gregory Pincus, an expert on biology and reproduction to a dinner party where she asked him about the cost “required to develop a method of contraception which could simply be ‘swallowed like an aspirin’” (209). Sanger then put Pincus in touch with influential backers who provided the funds that allowed him to develop the Pill in conjunction with Doctor John Rock at Harvard Medical School.

4.2 The Return of Reproductive Rights Politics to the Theatrical Stage

Writing on her experiences as a theatre practitioner during this time, Wandor points to “the utilitarian idea of theatre as a device which could be used to raise consciousness, provoke debate, and spread propaganda. . . . Put at its simplest, entertainment and instruction alternated in these plays” (*Women Playwrights* 57). *Care and Control* (1977), her first play for Gay Sweatshop Theatre Company, introduced the theme of homosexual parenting through a portrayal of ingrained prejudices among various couples in child custody cases. By bringing together equal rights issues from second-wave feminism with the concerns of the contemporary gay liberation movement, Wandor was one of the first woman playwrights to reintroduce reproductive rights as a central theme in theatre.

Wandor would revisit the issue of same-sex parenthood, and align it with reproductive rights, in *AID Thy Neighbour* (1978), which was written for The Women’s Project, a theatre group that shared some of the same personnel as Gay Sweatshop. *AID Thy Neighbour* premiered at the eighty-seat venue of the Theatre at New End in London on 10 October 1978 as part of a two-play mini-season of plays dealing with feminist and lesbian issues. Staged mainly to promote women’s rights, the play was not a commercial or critical success. However, Komporaly argues that Wandor’s drama showed “the possibility of renewal within a traditional framework: while the comic devices offer the audience an entertaining night out, the political message challenges potentially biased views on sexual politics” (118). Using Komporaly’s premise as a starting point, I argue that Wandor’s drama broke new ground in theatrical representations of reproductive rights by openly staging and challenging the right of all women, heterosexual or homosexual, to access new contraception and conception technologies. I also

explore how Wandor used elements of contemporary feminism, such as consciousness raising and role reversal, to produce a full-length drama with reproductive politics as its central theme.

AID Thy Neighbour was written in response to the 1973 report of the Panel on Human Artificial Insemination, headed by Sir John Peel, which stated that artificial insemination should only be available to a small number of people who could avail themselves of it at accredited National Health Services (NHS) centres. In her narrative, Wandor depicts the bureaucratic and social prejudices experienced by a lesbian couple, Sandy and Georgina, who want to procreate and who approach one of these centres. The NHS tells the two women they do not have a legitimate claim to these services because they are not in a heterosexual relationship like their neighbours Mary and Joseph, who have also come to the NHS. The government bias against homosexual couples continued over the next years when the Warnock Committee was formed in 1982 to address the unchecked use of in-vitro fertilization technologies. Two years later, the Warnock Committee produced the controversial Warnock Report, which states that “a child born to a *married couple* as a result of AIH (Artificial Insemination by Husband) is the legitimate child of that couple. A child born as a result of AID, on the other hand, is illegitimate, and so is liable to suffer all the disadvantages associated with that status” (Warnock Report 4.9; emphasis added).⁵⁵ *AID Thy Neighbour* challenged the then socially acceptable and media-fuelled ideal of a nuclear family by proposing that the new ARTs should not be exclusively available to

⁵⁵ In its recommendations, the report advocated for the establishment of a clear regulation system, which in 1990 would become the Human Fertilization and Embryology Act. However, in the interim, the Warnock Report limited its studies to those embryos that were under two weeks old. The Warnock Report also continued to support the AID guidelines established by the Peel Report with the same vaguely pejorative language where “AID should be available on a properly organized basis and subject to the licensing arrangements described in Chapter Thirteen, to those infertile couples for whom it *might be appropriate*” (Warnock Report 80; emphasis added).

heterosexual, married couples, but should also be accessible to same-sex couples who wished to conceive.

I propose that Wandor begins subverting social stereotypes through her unconventional use of setting in *AID Thy Neighbour*. She locates her play in a literal dollhouse featuring two living rooms with a dividing wall between them. As the action develops, the supporting foundations of the home — the socially constructed walls and divisions — begin to tumble. Mary calls attention to the home's structural fragility, when she tells her lesbian neighbour Georgina: "You know this was one big house when it was originally built. Yours and ours. It was divided down the middle — that's why some of the dividing walls are a bit — well — flimsy. Don't put any bookshelves up on them" (122). With this reference, Wandor suggests these divisions are cultural and not natural creations. Indeed, when Mary warns Georgina not to put books on the shelves, she doesn't only mean the weight of the books will topple the walls, but rather that the ideology that built these divisions — ironically found in these man-made books — is not strong enough to support the current, idealized domestic structure and socially dictated separation. As Wandor metaphorically breaks these barriers down, she draws attention to the fracturing of women's culturally defined roles. Georgina grows more feminine and dainty as the play progresses, while Mary, who starts out as a stereotypical homemaker, turns into an activist who wants to work outside the home.⁵⁶ Wandor's artificial settings work as places of anxiety and transformation for the heroines. At the end of the play, Wandor's women literally tear down the dividing walls to create a matriarchal commune. Wandor presents the new, unified setting as a result of the

⁵⁶ Joseph also changes becoming increasingly feminized to the point where he confesses to Sandy he wants to bear children. Yet, Joseph is afraid to voice this desire in public spaces for fear of being mistaken for a homosexual.

practical application of feminist tactics, such as the reliance on female alliances and the formation of consciousness-raising collectives.

4.3 A Feminist Theatrical and Scientific Community

Writing on the new relationships created by ARTs, Sarah Franklin argues these new technologies promote the creation of a shared female identity because “with the assistance to conception comes also assisted origins, assisted relations, assisted genealogy, and assisted futures. The meaning of such assistance is not merely additive, it is transformative” (“Making Representations” 128). *AID Thy Neighbour* displays all the possibilities of genealogical cross-pollination as Wandor’s protagonists transform themselves into more tolerant, more independent, and more conscientious human beings. Franklin refers to this subjective awareness as another way of “understanding relatedness” (“Making Representations” 128). When new familial and social relationships are formed, new attitudes and social regulations have to emerge to deal with the ethical and moral implications of these, more often than not, matriarchal family units. Indeed, by giving the lesbian couple the power to access AID, Wandor creates a female-led and -centered alliance around a shared interest in maternity. Although at first Wandor depicts both couples desiring motherhood, homosexual Sandy and Georgina eventually *aid* heterosexual Mary in her refusal of maternity. By showing Mary that not every woman has to be a mother to find personal fulfilment, the lesbian couple frees Mary from Joseph’s patriarchal hold. I believe that with these dramaturgical choices Wandor was not promoting a refusal of motherhood, but rather asking her audience to revision maternity as a site for social and personal change.

Wandor further represents the transformative possibilities of maternity through her challenge to religious doctrine and its historically patriarchal application. By referencing the

Second Commandment to “Love thy neighbour as thyself” in her title, Wandor opens the door to optional interpretations of religious dogma when applied to women. Loving your neighbour as yourself implies looking at the “other” as a reflection of yourself. Thus, Wandor has Mary and Joseph apply this dictum by embracing a vicarious, though not church-sanctioned parenthood when they take down the walls between the two apartments and create a communal support system for Sandy and Georgina’s baby. With this reinterpretation of the Second Commandment, Wandor hopes the audience will follow the heterosexual couple’s example, and learn to overcome their own ingrained prejudices against homosexual partnerships.⁵⁷

Wandor further questions culturally established gender hegemonies when she shows Georgina reading Adrienne Rich’s *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution* (1976) in the first scene of her play. Rich’s recently published and often quoted memoir, where she applies feminist theory to examine her ambivalence about motherhood, would have been fresh in the mind of Wandor’s 1978 theatre audience. The title of Rich’s work refers to Shakespeare’s *Macbeth* when the witches tell Macbeth he cannot be harmed because “no man of woman born” can kill him (4.1.81). Yet, at the end of the play, Macbeth dies at the hand of MacDuff who was born *unnaturally* through a crude caesarean. Wandor hints at the malleable definition of the term *unnatural* in *AID Thy Neighbour*. By having the lesbian couple take charge of the *unnatural*, man-made insemination process, Wandor challenges the technological invasion of women’s bodies. Thus, Wandor pits Rich’s narration of a matriarchal legacy, where women

⁵⁷ Wandor’s United Kingdom was just emerging from a racial and social struggle following unprecedented immigration from the colonies. This climate of unease was dramatized over seven seasons in a popular Thames television sitcom titled *Love Thy Neighbour* that ran from 1972 to 1976. The series depicted a working-class white couple in Twickenham dealing with their black neighbours. Wandor may have capitalized on the popularity of the series to lead her theatre audience through a similar exercise in tolerance, though in her case focusing on sexual preference rather than race.

are in control of biological reproduction, against a patriarchal narrative, where men manipulate science to appropriate the reproductive process.

I believe Wandor sets up these and other familiar gender and feminist signposts to alert her audience to her feminist message. When Joseph, Mary's husband appears for the first time for example, he refers to the women in the house as "girls" and continually puts down Mary by telling the others that "I love having a wife who's nearly a feminist. . . . A demi-feminist" (122). Joseph, the journalist, enjoys demeaning Mary by making fun of her intellectual pursuits. Yet, as soon as Joseph has finished bullying the women, Sandy enters "wearing plastic motorbike trousers, a leather bomber jacket, helmet and gauntlets" that she wears for riding the Honda CG125 motorbike that Joseph covets (123). Wandor swiftly and shockingly reverses gender roles by having Sandy take on the alpha male role effectively emasculating Joseph.

By suggesting that a butch lesbian can appropriate the role of a heterosexual male, Wandor applies a popular materialist socialist perspective to the feminist rights issue. Janelle Reinelt writes that socialist theatre practitioners, like Wandor, were interested in the "the relationship of class oppression to sexual repression; and the ideological interpretation of production, reproduction and procreation" ("Beyond Brecht" 151). Reinelt notes that feminists sought to validate their gender's struggle by linking women's historical oppression under patriarchy to generalized class oppression. Furthermore, feminists argued that since sexual reproduction was an important component in the creation and sustainability of the workforce, women's reproductive politics should be an integral part of any public policy discussion. Wandor represents the link made by socialist playwrights between production and procreation through role reversal in *AID Thy Neighbour*. When Joseph complains that Mary's refusal to continue with the fertility treatments has left him "high and dry without even a motorbike to call my own" (162),

Mary responds that when she goes back to work, as a non-mother, she will “put a down payment on one for you” (162). Wandor has Mary assume the patriarchal role as main provider in the household, while validating her desire to transgress and, indeed, refute society’s desire to restrict her to the passive and exclusive role of reproducer.

Wandor’s role reversal also extends to the lesbian couple. While Georgina assumes the traditional female role of reproducing human labour power, Wandor allows her partner Sandy to assume the male role and wander beyond the domestic sphere as the wage earner. Furthermore, when Sandy inseminates Georgina using the phallic turkey baster with the donor sperm, Wandor shows Sandy as once again appropriating the male role, this time within the in-vitro fertilization setting. Hers is a transgressive gender persona that challenges both Joseph’s patriarchal authority and his masculinity.⁵⁸ Wandor reinforces the shift in gender authority by having the women talk and plan their upcoming ART procedures among themselves while marginalizing Joseph from the conversation. Moreover, Wandor makes Joseph’s emotional and verbal castration a recurring theme in *AID Thy Neighbour*. When Georgina tells Sandy that Mary and Joseph are going to have a baby, Joseph proclaims in an authoritarian voice: “When *we* get pregnant” (125). Mary sharply corrects him “Oh, Joe. When *I* get pregnant” (Wandor 125; emphasis added). With this clarification Mary reinforces *her* primary role in the reproduction process while relegating Joseph to a supporting, almost spectator-like role, in the ART situation.

⁵⁸ Wandor’s choice of a butch lesbian as an alternative to patriarchy is problematic today because all the characters in Wandor’s drama are middle-class and white. Looking back at her play, from a standpoint of the gains made by civil rights and equal rights for minority groups, I believe Wandor fails to address the burgeoning economic, class, or racial concerns that led to these political gains. She sets up access or lack of access to ARTs as a white heterosexual or homosexual women’s issue thereby ignoring infertility issues of mixed race couples or visible minorities. Wandor disregards the experiences of non-white women under patriarchy choosing to represent and generalize women’s reproductive rights as a product of a white, homosexual rights movement.

Wandor further diminishes Joseph's patriarchal authority by questioning what she views as his fragile standing within his gender's hierarchy. When the fertility doctor lists the value of sperm based on each donor's careers, he tells Joseph that "all our donors are young professional men, doctors, medical students, even journalists sometimes" (133). As a man of science, the doctor implies that contributions from men who work in scientific fields have more value than donations from men like Joseph who is a journalist. With these dramaturgical choices, Wandor stages how Joseph's masculinity, his potency, and his ability to procreate come under fire from within his own ranks.

To reaffirm Joseph's powerlessness, Wandor aligns her theatrical Joseph with his biblical counterpart, who was a silent and powerless actor in the first assisted reproductive process in history. In the Bible's story of Immaculate Conception, the power over reproduction was in the hands of a male deity who took over Joseph's role as inseminator. The Virgin Mary was a "handmaid" who submitted to the process in a passive, reactive role in this religious reproduction setting.⁵⁹ In *Stabat Mater*, a feminist study of the Virgin Mary, Julia Kristeva questions the underlying didactic intent and gender message delivered by the biblical story which "results in an immaculate conception, untainted by man or sex, but still a conception, out of which comes a God in whose existence a woman does therefore play an important part, provided she acknowledges her subservience" (148). Kristeva claims that any reference made to Mary in the gospels is always in her role as the Mother of Jesus, "in order to signify the fact that the filial bond has to do not with the flesh but with the name; in other words, any trace of matrilinearity is

⁵⁹ When Mary asked the angel how she could conceive "seeing I know not a man", the angel told her: "the Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God" (New King James Vers., Luke 1:34-35). Mary responded with: "Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to thy word" (New King James Vers., Luke 1:38).

explicitly disavowed, leaving only the symbolic tie between mother and son” (136). The biblical narrative ensures that Mary’s physical body disappears as a factor in Jesus’ birth, and that she is only present in her spiritual embodiment of an ideal motherhood, acquiescent to the power of her own child. In the Christian narrative, the power of procreation shifts from the bearer, the woman with the womb, to the donor, and then to the foetus, both male.⁶⁰ To counteract biblical passivity, Wandor has her Mary refuse assisted insemination and instead support Sandy and Georgina in their fight against homosexual discrimination in AID procedures. Thus Wandor creates a Mary prototype who recruits a female community to contest the Church’s stance on other controversial social issues such as homosexuality. Wandor’s Mary becomes the decision maker in the assisted reproductive process, shifting from an idealized, patriarchal model of female obedience into a model of militant activism for women. Wandor reinserts and reasserts women and their reproductive rights into biblical, social, and theatrical history.

Yet, Mary is not the only female character in Wandor’s play uneasy with traditional depictions of maternity. Sandy challenges the cultural, reductive link between women and motherhood when she tells journalist Geraldine that she has never had a “natural” desire to be a mother. Sandy contends she is “perfectly happy as I am. George is very lucky to have me. I shall look after her immaculately” (147). In a subversive conflation of male and female roles, Wandor offers Sandy as a counterpoint to the passive, biblical Joseph who was not allowed to fertilize his wife’s eggs. Sandy cannot impregnate Georgina, but with the aid of ARTs, she can assume the

⁶⁰ Maternal figures in Christianity are contradictory examples of womanhood as the Virgin Mary represents an immaculate conception unavailable to earthly women. Women saints and nuns also represent a marriage to Christ that does not end in maternity and which has female celibacy at its core. Wandor calls attention to this fractured dichotomy in Mary’s final speech, where she tells Joe and her neighbours that she “woke up to the fact” she didn’t want to be a mother (162). Wandor gives her Mary a revelation-like moment that pushes back against the biblical Mary’s submissive and patriarchal biblical annunciation narrative. Through her revised version of Mary, Wandor illustrates women’s conflicted standpoint regarding biblical doctrine.

role of inseminator, the function denied to the biblical Joseph. Furthermore, even though Georgina is the one having the child, Sandy is physically a woman, and thus biologically able to bear a child, a feat that neither the biblical nor the theatrical Josephs can carry out. Sandy, on the other hand, can assume both female and male roles in the insemination and reproductive processes. Through this dissident rewriting of the bible story, Wandor subliminally reinforces the power of all-female family structures where, through AID, either of the lesbian partners can potentially conceive and gestate a child. The women's community created by Wandor to procreate and nurture future generations undermines the traditional, patriarchal role of men in the artificial process of reproduction.

4.4 Manhandling the Reproductive Process

It is important to note that to balance *AID Thy Neighbour's* focus on women's interests, Wandor also explores how men might have attempted to reassert gender control in an assisted reproductive dilemma. When Joseph tells Sandy he wants to bear a child, for example, he claims to be voicing a hidden desire held by all men: "You know, if we had a choice, there's nothing I'd rather do than have our baby. Then I could fertilise it myself and – hey presto . . ." (136). Joseph visualises a rewriting of the act of reproduction as one of prestidigitation, where he could replicate the process of conception without the need to engage in sexual intercourse, biologically or artificially, with another human being. Indeed, in Joseph's revisionist plan, there is no mention of the role, if any, that Mary would have. Joseph's proposal does not account for a period of gestation, labour, or for the years following birth. For Joseph, having a child is a scientific problem, where if one combination of factors does not work, then another one should be used.

Wandor stages Joseph's desire to appropriate the process of conception in a bid to alert her audience to the dangers of unregulated control over ARTs. An example of a practical application of this theory during Wandor's time was the patriarchal control overriding the birth of Louise Brown, the first successful test tube baby. After the milestone birth, scientists revealed how the process of conception could be manipulated under a microscope in a genetics laboratory and outside a woman's womb. They argued that a woman's gestation period had to be closely monitored, and showed how labour often culminated in a caesarean section. Consequently, in-vitro delivery featured a partially sedated woman on an operating table at the mercy of a more often than not male doctor who appropriated centre stage by assuming the mother's role and "delivering" the baby. This assisted reproductive procedure created an undeniable, gendered link between the scientific hand that manipulated an embryo in a Petri dish, and the doctor's hand that extracted a full-grown baby from a woman's womb. Thus, proponents of ARTs branded the process of reproduction as man's labour with women as marginalized and passive participants.

When Dr. Robert Edwards, one of the doctors who aided in the conception and delivery of Louise Brown, died on April 10, 2013, *The New York Times* announced his passing in an article that reiterated how Edwards "essentially changed the rules of how people can come into the world" (Kolata A1). The subtext was that Edwards challenged the laws of nature by setting himself up as an essential conduit for the delivery of human beings. This problematic positioning imagined Edwards as a father figure to the millions of babies born through in-vitro fertilization. Brown reinforced the artificial, patriarchal relationship between Edwards and herself when she told *The Guardian* she had "always regarded Robert Edwards as like a grandfather to me" (Batty n. pag.), although, of course, there was no blood lineage between them. The implication was that she could not have been conceived and safely delivered with just her parents' sperm and egg, but

had needed the aid of a third party. By manipulating the reproductive process, Edwards irrevocably inserted himself, consciously or unconsciously, as a permanent fixture in the Brown family's history. In this case in particular, and because Louise Brown was the first successful case of in-vitro fertilization, there was no possibility for her to publicly disassociate herself from Edwards for the rest of her life. Other tributes continued to highlight and expand Edwards's "grandfatherly" role by mentioning that Edwards "co-developed a technique that helped bring more than four million children in the world" (Jones n. pag.) Although Edwards may have had a vested interest in the life of the first test-tube baby, realistically he could not have successfully maintained a relationship with the thousands of offspring resulting from the procedures he supervised.

Thus, increasingly widespread access to ARTs created new relationships among patients, doctors, and donors, while also redefining family structures. With ARTs, same sex couples could opt for parenthood and establish families with parents who shared a gender. Wandor illustrates this new reproductive rights environment in her play by staging the possibilities of unconventional family relationships where women, rather than a male doctor like Edwards, wield ultimate control. In *AID Thy Neighbour*, Georgina, Sandy and Mary form a female family unit by choice, where the focus becomes the raising of the child. Furthermore, in Wandor's rewriting of the in-vitro procedure, Sandy injects Georgina with a syringe at the Assisted Reproductive clinic. Although the procedure is still clinical, there are no men present at any stage. A female nurse hands the syringe to both women, and Sandy takes the doctor's place jokingly telling Sandy that she never thought she would "aid and abet you to be unfaithful to me with a plastic syringe," to which Georgina responds: "Isn't science wonderful?" (134). The women refer to the clearly phallic insemination experience as a "forging of new frontiers" in a veiled reference not only to

their sexual preference, but also to science's mission to lead humanity into undiscovered territory (129).⁶¹ Wandor stages the constant tension between women's struggle for a more visible and active role in reproduction, and men's desire to mediate women's accessibility to ARTs. In Wandor's subversive rewriting of the assisted reproduction process, women's maternity is a site of female agency that challenges a patriarchal scientific establishment focused on creating a child while neglecting, manhandling, and discarding the mother.

4.5 Fighting a Feminist Backlash: The Rise of Women's Drama in the United States

Like Wandor, American women playwrights asked theatre audiences to visualize how women could use feminist theatre to appropriate men's roles in the process of reproduction. To carry out this task, women playwrights, who had been active in the United States civil rights movement and in street theatre performances, set up all-women theatre groups, such as the New York Feminist Theatre. This company staged one of the most popular examples of theatre as a voice for women's rights in general, and role reversal in reproductive rights in particular through Myrna Lamb's *But What Have You Done for Me Lately?* (1969). Lamb's one-act drama featured a man lying on an operating table who wakes up to find he is pregnant and has no access to an abortion. The play examined the debate on the rights of the foetus, as well as the man's rights

⁶¹ With this scene, Wandor could have been responding to the controversy surrounding the first artificial insemination by donor, which allegedly took place in 1884. Doctor William Pancoast, a professor of Biology at Jefferson Memorial College treated the wife of a Quaker merchant, who had come to him with infertility issues. Pancoast used one of his medical students as a "hired man" to contribute sperm that was then inserted into the anesthetized woman via a rubber syringe (Hard 163). She gave birth to a baby boy nine months later. The woman was never told this procedure had taken place, and the husband only learned what happened years later through a letter printed in the American Journal *Medical World* on April 27, 1909, and written by one of Pancoast's students, Addison Davis Hard. The public's reaction to the "experiment" was one of rejection and horror at what they perceived to be a transgression of social boundaries and an assault on masculinity. The objections were not to the woman being "raped" on the table, or to her being conscious or unconscious during the procedure, but to a man losing his honour, and his sexual potency, to a syringe (Egbert, "Regarding Artificial Impregnation").

over his body. The pregnant man argued he had important work to do and could not be burdened by the “parasite that has been foisted upon me” (Lamb 31). He was appalled at the prospect that the foetus has “primary rights and that my rights are subsidiary” (Lamb 31). By reversing gender roles, Lamb hoped men would be more sympathetic to women’s plight if they could see reproductive rights from a woman’s perspective.

The reappearance of plays on reproductive politics on the American stage also coincided with a more active and visible presence by American women playwrights during the 1970s. In 1972, for example, Marie Irene Fornes founded the New York Theatre Strategy Company, an organization focused on experimental works that would not otherwise be staged. Fornes’s *Fefu and Her Friends* (1976), produced off-off-Broadway, paved the way for drama where the narration of women’s stories by women became the driving plot device. For Dolan, “the new feminist theatre meant to create ‘women-identified’ productions. This work, created by women for women, focused on women’s experience and their connections to each other through gender and sex” (*Spectator as Critic* 85). Unlike Wandor’s play, these new American dramas featured multicultural and polyvocal women’s voices in commercially viable vehicles, as evidenced in Ntozake Shange’s *For Colored Girls Who Have Considered Suicide/When the Rainbow is Enuf: A Choreopoem* (1977). As women’s presence increased on Broadway and other venues, the theatrical establishment also began to recognize women’s contributions to an evolving canon. Fornes won a playwrighting Obie⁶² award for *Fefu*. Shange in turn won the same award for *For Colored Girls* when it appeared off-Broadway at the Anspacher Public Theatre, and a Tony

⁶² Awards given by *The Village Voice* since 1956 to off-Broadway and off-off-Broadway productions.

when it moved to the Booth Theatre on Broadway for a critically acclaimed run of 742 performances.

By the end of the 1970s, women's drama had found unparalleled critical acclaim and commercial success on the Broadway stage. Beth Henley's *Crimes of the Heart* (1978) signalled this theatrical revolution when it became the first play by a woman in twenty-one years to win the Pulitzer Fiction for Drama and the Drama Critics Circle awards.⁶³ A few years later, in 1983, Marsha Norman's *'night Mother* also won the Pulitzer Prize for Drama, and Wendy Wasserstein's *The Heidi Chronicles* claimed it in 1989. These three plays by women playwrights won critical awards within a ten-year span after a drought of critical recognition for women's work during the fifties and the sixties.

Wasserstein's play focused on the difficult legacy inherited by women who lived through the sexual revolution and the second wave of feminism through the character of Heidi, a middle-aged woman who is an ardent feminist, but who has trouble finding a partner because she "feels stranded – marooned by the very values that have made her who she is" (Craig 192).⁶⁴ Wasserstein's heroine lived in the eighties in an American society dominated by Ronald Reagan's extreme right conservative stance with no women in high cabinet posts. In Susan Faludi's popular study, *Backlash: The Undeclared War Against American Woman* (1992), she argues that the Reagan government's policy to advocate for a return to a 1950s family

⁶³ Henley's play had a rocky road to Broadway. Several producers rejected it before it won the Great American Play Festival in Louisville in 1979. *Crimes of the Heart* did not transfer to Broadway until after it had won the Pulitzer during its off-Broadway run. Henley then went on to write the Oscar-nominated screenplay for the film based on her drama.

⁶⁴ In *The Revolution from Within*, Gloria Steinem, wrote about this latent malaise by stating: "I saw women who were smart, courageous, and valuable, who didn't think they were smart, courageous or valuable. . . . It was as if the female spirit were a garden that had grown beneath the shadows of barriers for so long, that it kept growing in the same pattern, even after some of the barriers were gone" (3).

environment was designed to “excoriate all manner of independent women who aren’t doing their duty: women who work, women who use day care, women who divorce, women who have babies out of wedlock” (263). As a result, women’s rights were once again being fought along the lines of reproductive rights, and theatre in turn reflected this militancy. When at the end of *The Heidi Chronicles*, Heidi uses a gay friend’s sperm to have a child, Wasserstein showcases how reproductive rights could successfully prop up feminist rights.

Furthermore, having women’s plays commercially produced created a domino effect where successful women playwrights were able to in turn help up and coming women dramatists. Writing on Pulitzer Prize-winning women playwrights, Carolyn Craig notes that Henley became a “den mother” to various artists in workshops in Los Angeles, and also supervised women’s theatre projects (150). Marsha Norman recommended Wasserstein for a grant from the British American Arts Council so Wasserstein could write *The Heidi Chronicles*. Wasserstein acknowledged audiences were more welcoming to women’s work than in the past when *Uncommon Women*, a play she wrote in 1977, couldn’t transfer from off-Broadway to Broadway at the time because “it was about women and it wouldn’t be a commercial success” (Burleigh 8). However, when *The Heidi Chronicles* found a receptive audience a few years later, Wasserstein felt its success “open[ed] a door” for women’s work (Burleigh 8).⁶⁵ All three women playwrights continued the feminist dramaturgical tradition of reinforcing and supporting collective theatre practice. Indeed, women theatre practitioners relied on these female-centered organizational structures and themes to survive and grow. The Lilith Theatre Company in San Francisco, for

⁶⁵ Wasserstein’s drama had 622 performances on Broadway winning the Tony, the Critics Circle Award, the Drama Desk Award, and the Susan Smith Blackburn prize, in addition to the Pulitzer, thus establishing a record sweep for a single play.

example, consisted of a group of 80-100 women divided along four areas of activity whereby each section would be headed by one woman “who would build a committee to assist her and who would be accountable to the core ensemble. That way the theater group was defined by a structure that did not depend on the work of any one individual woman and established a stronger, more centralized leadership,” according to Canning (100). Lilith also focused on producing plays that were commissioned from playwrights who came from all over the country. The company staged these dramas while offering complementary classes and workshops that reflected the group’s interest in public service work. Within this framework, the company produced two reproductive rights dramas: *Fetal Positions* (1983) and *Breeding Grounds* (1984), the latter coming as a result of an integration of community service organizations interested in promoting reproductive rights issues. *Breeding Grounds* was therefore not just “a performance piece but an event,” as noted by Harriet Schiffer, Lilith’s Artistic Director at the time (qtd. in Canning, 101). Unfortunately, *Breeding Grounds* was also the last play produced by Lilith, as they disbanded soon after when the company could not overcome financial problems.

4.6 Dramatizing the Infertility Epidemic

At the start of the 1990s, women’s reproductive rights were once again becoming a growing public concern with infertility taking center stage. *Time* magazine’s September 30, 1991 cover story “Making Babies” warned that, “America today is in the midst of an infertility epidemic” with 1 in 7 couples over the age of 30 having trouble conceiving (Elmer-Dewitt et al.

n. pag.)⁶⁶ *Time*'s reporters argued that women's choice "to work during their most fertile years have led many members of the baby boom generation to wait so long to have a baby that they are in danger of waiting forever" (Elmer-DeWitt et al. n. pag.). They reasoned that even though the second wave of feminism had given women the opportunity to access the Pill, the sexual revolution had also meant an increase in sex partners and sexually transmitted diseases, which could further affect fertility rates. When Lisa Loomer's *Expecting Isabel* had its world premiere at the Arena Stage, in Washington D.C. on October 7, 1998, 20,143 babies, almost 0.5% of all the births in the United States for that year, had been born through technological assistance.⁶⁷ ARTs — personified by technology and the scientists who controlled them — emerged as a conception option in a progressively more scientific reproductive environment. As I argued earlier in this chapter, the proliferation of ARTs meant women were increasingly and uneasily dependent on a non-female "other" for reproduction.

Loomer stages the gender imbalance created by the technological invasion of ARTs through her main protagonist, Miranda, a feminist who undergoes every possible invasive fertility treatment available to the detriment of her health and self esteem. In *Expecting Isabel*, the fertility doctor, Dr. John Wilde, not only bears a name that conveys images of a historical taming of nature by science, but also embodies male, biased authority by treating Miranda and her husband Nick differently according to their gender. When Nick's sperm fails to fertilize a hamster's eggs, rather than addressing the problem with Nick, Wilde informs Miranda he wants

⁶⁶ *Time* justified this claim by arguing that "last year more than a million new patients sought treatment [for infertility], six times as many people as were treated for lung cancer and 10 times the number of reported cases of AIDS" (Elmer-DeWitt et al., n. pag.).

⁶⁷ The Centre for Disease Control and Prevention in the United States reports that there were 81,899 ART procedures in 1998, the year Loomer's play premiered. The greatest number took place in California, New York, Massachusetts, Illinois, and New Jersey. These procedures included the use of fresh and frozen donors, gestational surrogates, or embryo banking.

to try using an Intracytoplasmic Sperm Injection (ICSI) on her. This procedure throws a woman's body into a temporary menopause "to have total control over ovulation" (26). Miranda will then super ovulate, producing several eggs, which will be extracted, injected and then replaced into her uterus. She is naturally aghast at the invasiveness of this method and complains that "you're going to throw me into menopause, shoot me up with drugs, take out my eggs, shoot 'em up with sperm, and shoot 'em back in me — BECAUSE HE COULDN'T KNOCK UP A HAMSTER!?" (27; emphasis in the original). Wilde's comments gloss over Nick's potency while dismissing and minimizing Miranda's complaints about the fertility drugs' side effects.

Patricia Spallone, when critiquing the new reproductive technologies available in 1989, maintained that ARTs tamper with women's "biochemistry and physiology and the whole living system of our bodies. Men's sperm is not equivalent. There is no violent disruption of life processes to acquire sperm, as is necessary to acquire eggs" (21). Loomer stages gender difference through each partner's role in the fertility process. When Nick has to donate sperm, he is given a few adult magazines, and told to relax and enjoy the process, while Miranda has to undergo multiple fertility treatments with harrowing physical and emotional side effects. The FINRAGE (Feminist International Network of Resistance to Reproductive and Genetic Engineering) initiative, which emerged in the late seventies out of the Second International Congress for Women in the Netherlands in 1984, argued against invasive technology that renders "women's bodies more mobilizable in the service of changing utilities of dominant agencies" (Sawicki 75). Gena Corea, one of the founding members of FINRAGE, went as far as to point out that the majority of reproductive engineers are male, and that an Assisted Reproductive procedure "emerges from a science developed by men according to their own values and sense of

reality” (3).⁶⁸ Loomer reasserts this prejudice when she creates Dr. Wilde as the author of best-selling books on pregnancy and infertility, thereby reinforcing the illusion that men are intimately knowledgeable and familiar with women’s reproductive systems.

In Loomer’s drama, women must rely on men’s knowledge to understand and resolve their reproductive problems. Wilde’s books are how-to manuals with titles like *How to Get Pregnant* and *So You’re Infertile* that alert the reader to a clinical, detached, and academic approach to procreation. When Wilde meets Miranda and Nick, he presents himself to them as a “guide” on their journey and uses the term “we” when describing the procedures to come: “since *we* are not conceiving . . . the Clomid will help maximize *our* chances of getting pregnant each time” (Loomer 20; emphasis added). He not only inserts himself into the reproductive process, but also appropriates Miranda’s womb, to the point where he is speaking for it and her. Loomer calls attention to the effacement of women’s roles where the infertile woman is no longer a co-operator in the reproduction process, but an objectified body through which doctors can practice and profit from their craft.⁶⁹

In Dr. Wilde’s non-genetic futuristic scenario, reproduction would become “a process where a child could be conceived in vitro, and development would take place completely outside the uterus – right up through the time of delivery” (33). Wilde envisions a world in which women, or at least women’s body parts, would not be needed to conceive, gestate, or deliver a child. Furthermore, he admits that he “would create life if I could” echoing Joseph’s sole gender

⁶⁸ This anti-interventionist stance was best illustrated in Sarah Daniels’s drama *Byrthrite* (1987). Her drama criticized the beginnings of science’s appropriation of reproduction by staging the banishment of midwives in the seventeenth century, so that mostly male, general practitioners, with little gynecological knowledge or experience, could assert control over women’s labour.

⁶⁹ Loomer’s doctor tells Miranda to pick up a copy of his newest book on the way out of their first infertility appointment, thus managing to insert an infomercial for a procedure that guarantees him an income, even as he himself cannot guarantee delivery of a product.

reproductive fantasy in Wandor's *AID Thy Neighbour* (33). Nick, in turn, voices a sentiment that also mimics Joseph's desire to control the reproduction process when he says: "If there were some way I could take the drugs – and give the blood – and get the eggs sucked out of me If I could go through the pregnancy, the nausea, the contractions. . . . If I could get cut open" (27). Yet, the reality is that Nick, a freelance sculptor, cannot get a job with insurance benefits to cover the IVF treatments, and is very ambivalent about getting a "job job" in the future (Loomer 28; emphasis in the original). Once again, neither Joseph nor Nick plans for a future beyond the conception process, beyond the walls of the laboratory or the operating room. Wandor's Mary and Loomer's Miranda are more in tune with the realistic, financial aspects of conceiving and raising a child. Indeed, Miranda tells Nick he has to find a job because "I'm busy being a science project in order to have our child" (28). With this statement, Miranda argues that when women cannot work outside the home because they are undergoing in-vitro fertilization procedures, there is a subsequent impact to the economy.

While second-wave feminism had made it possible for women to access equal pay and other workplace rights, these newly acquired freedoms had also created a backlash against feminism because women felt that they had to sacrifice their fertile years to succeed in the job race. As portrayed in Wasserstein's *The Heidi Chronicles*, women who had been ardent feminists felt betrayed by a cause that did not deliver on its promise to do away with gender binaries and give women more choices. Government and media capitalized on this wavering of feminist intent by taking measures to control the female body with the intent of curtailing female social influence. Writing on this issue, Carol Stabile notes that "if the docile female body can no longer be sufficiently disciplined through ideology, it must nonetheless be disciplined. And it is in the spheres of legal and medical discourses that the repressive state apparatus has begun to operate

with more evident violence” (181).⁷⁰ Indeed, in *Expecting Isabel* Wilde’s marginalization of the parents, and more prominently of the female body, reiterates the prevalent and problematic use of ARTs to maintain patriarchal control of the process of reproduction.

Stabile notes that with ARTs “the maternal space has, in effect disappeared and what has emerged in its place is an environment that the foetus alone occupies” (180).⁷¹ Anne Balsamo also calls attention to this elision of female presence through science when during a laparoscopy, “the technological gaze literally penetrates the female body to scrutinize the biological functioning of its reproductive organs. In the process the female ‘potentially maternal’ body is objectified as a visual medium to look through” (93).⁷² The advent of these technological inventions changed how women saw themselves, and revealed the biased ways in which these women were in turn perceived by the medical establishment. As technological advances allowed scientists to see into a woman’s womb, the foetus became more personified. Consequently, women were pushed to the edges of the ultrasound screens, and doctors stepped in to assume the mother role by monitoring the foetus’s needs. Supervising the foetus allowed doctors to pinpoint exactly when it had been conceived, when it should be delivered, and in some controversial

⁷⁰ Mary, in Wandor’s play, rebels against these invasive infertility treatments by sarcastically asking: “Do I have my tubes puffed full of gas, do I have the neck of my womb gently stretched, or do I undergo investigative surgery?” (154). Mary is seen by the medical establishment not as an entity, but as body parts that must be experimented with to produce another human being, or as she puts it “so that I may become pregnant with the aid of a National Health chemistry set” (154).

⁷¹ In an ultrasound, the foetus is a fully formed human being in contrast to the surrounding space of the womb, which is only part of a woman’s body. Emily Martin, in her exploration of representations of the female, argues that, “anthropologists have claimed that the privileging of the visual mode of knowledge is particularly likely to lead to forms of representation impoverishing the complex whole that actually exists” (69).

⁷² Yet, women still found ways to challenge scientific authority by applying a feminist perspective to this technology. Phyllis Chesler, a sociologist and radical feminist activist, wrote about her experience with ultrasound technology as an awakening: “The picture shocked me, as though I had broken a taboo, thrilled me for the extension of my powers, surprised me by its concrete actuality, frightened me by bringing me closer than I am accustomed to being to the nothingness out of which we all come” (38). Chesler’s first person account supplants the technological gaze because her feminist perspective takes over the male role. *She* is the one penetrating and controlling the workings of *her* own body and *its* representation.

cases, when it should be aborted. Doctors justified their technological invasion by arguing that a woman's pregnancy needed to be observed, manipulated and directed to safeguard the developing foetus.⁷³

Scientific agency over a woman's body also redefines hegemonic structures and social relationships. Anne Balsamo, in her work on reproduction technologies, notes that ARTs "provide the means for exercising power relations on the flesh of the female body" (82). For her, motherhood was no longer centered, predicated, or controlled by the female because "the material new applications of new technologies are implicated in, and in part productive of, a new discourse on maternal identity, parental responsibilities and the authority of science" (82). Loomer illustrates the transition from blood relationships to artificial or assisted ones when Dr. Wilde tells Nick that their chances of conception would increase if they used the eggs of a younger woman with a third-party donor sperm, thus negating Nick and Miranda's role in the process. Nick sarcastically points out the impersonality of this new relationship where "we could get a total stranger to carry the child of two other strangers — who've never even shaken hands with each other, no less with us — or her!" (33). The doctor is oblivious to the disruption in the social connections and parental lineage that this kind of arrangement would create. He is only preoccupied with scientifically appropriating the process through naming it, when he tells Nick that in this scenario the surrogate, who would in fact replace Miranda, is called a "non-genetic

⁷³ This rhetoric continues today as evidenced in a statement made by George Church, a genetics professor at the Harvard School of Medicine and one of the founders of the Human Genome Project. Dr. Church argued that he "could introduce parts of a Neanderthal genome to human stem cells and clone them to create a fetus that could then be implanted in a woman" with the aim of cloning a Neanderthal baby (R. Smith A12). The imperative and patriarchal tone in his request is unmistakable when he tells *Der Spiegel* that "I have already managed to attract enough DNA from fossil bones to reconstruct the DNA of the human species largely extinct. Now I need an adventurous female human" (R. Smith A12). To this scientist, the woman's body is merely the conduit for an experiment between the male scientist and the likely male Neanderthal offspring.

but gestational non-social type mother” (33). Loomer challenges the creation of this impersonal family unit by showing how at the end of the play the protagonists regain control of the reproduction process through the adoption of a boy. Nick and Miranda become parents without depending on or being controlled by a scientific establishment. They assume parenthood by foregrounding and relying on human connections instead of impersonal technological or scientific innovations. Indeed, Loomer reinforces the importance of women’s voices and perspectives in the process of reproduction from the first scene of her play. At the start of Loomer’s drama, Miranda addresses the audience directly explaining her desire for motherhood. She reveals she wants to become a mother as a way to connect with a world in which “most of the people I knew were either in chat rooms or fictional” (10). Miranda sees maternity as a means to establish a physical link to the world, in a way that is uniquely human and technologically irreproducible, for now.

Furthermore, when Miranda’s efforts to conceive are thwarted by the men in her life: her husband, her male infertility doctor and her male boss, Loomer creates a community of female support for her through the multiple possibilities of maternity offered by five other women around her. *AID Thy Neighbour* and *Expecting Isabel* challenge science’s attempts to appropriate female reproduction by giving audiences a feminist, mediated, and gendered gaze into the process. Wandor’s and Loomer’s non-traditional representations of motherhood move maternity from the passive space of domesticity, exemplified earlier in the century by Malinda in *They That Sit in Darkness* (1919) and Mrs. Flinker in *Our Ostriches* (1924), to a public and activist stage from where they challenge a scientific establishment set on disenfranchising them. By tackling conception as the other side of the contraception issue, Wandor and Loomer publicize, reinstate and reengage the debate on reproductive rights as part of a broader and ongoing

struggle for women's rights. They lay the foundation for the drama of twenty-first century that would showcase women as main actors in the process of reproduction.

Building on this legacy, in the following chapter I illustrate how Wendy Lill's *Chimera* (2007) and Cassandra Medley's *Relativity* (2006) ask audiences to visualize women penetrating and occupying academic and political spaces, as scientists and producers of reproductive technologies. I believe that Lill's and Medley's dramas reiterate Anna Furse's argument on the impact of new biotechnologies. Furse contends that "no amount of spectacle, insight or wonder provided by technology and no amount of successful IVF statistics can detract from the fact that where the real power lies is not with the tools of such technologies themselves, but with those who control them" (165). Thus, these recent playwrights create a new scientific environment where women are no longer passive, helpless patients in fertility doctor's offices or operating tables, but rather active creators of groundbreaking reproductive technology. By appropriating the language and knowledge of science, Lill's and Medley's women leap into laboratory and university settings to reappropriate the process of conception as a woman's milieu and field of expertise.

Both playwrights also tackle the murky legal quandaries of ARTs in the new century as legislation struggles to keep up with the rapid pace of scientific discoveries. Lill's *Chimera* looks at the moral implications of trading and discarding human embryos, while Medley's *Relativity* resurrects the ghost of eugenic practices by questioning who should make the decision to reproduce. One notable dramatic addition to the representation of reproductive rights is a renewed emphasis on the mother-daughter relationship. Lill and Medley rescue the filial, female bond in an attempt to push back against the patriarchal scientific assault and domination of the reproductive process that had occurred in Wandor's and Loomer's time.

Chapter Five: Wendy Lill and Cassandra Medley

When the journey from birth to death is rerouted, lengthened or curtailed, meaning too is changed. In each of these different settings (the scientific, the literary, and their intersections in various forms of medical writing), the practical and symbolic resources of creatures that border on the human (animals and human embryos and fetuses, as well as tissues cultured from them) are used to reshape that birth to death journey and thus redefine the human. This robs human beings of some old certainties and enables us to imagine new options.

— Susan Squier, *Liminal Lives: Imagining the Human at the Frontiers of Biomedicine* (2004)

5.1 Introduction

The plays in the previous chapter illustrated how Assisted Reproductive Technologies (ARTs) gave prospective parents the option of deciding *when* and *how* to conceive children. In a not too distant future, couples will have an array of fertility choices as newer technologies, such as pre-diagnostic implantation and stem cell research, become more widely available. Indeed, the advent of pre-diagnostic implantation, for example, heralds a futuristic reproduction scenario where parents may be able to abort foetuses with defects. More troubling is the possibility that with these procedures, would-be-parents will be able to select desirable genetic characteristics to create ideal offspring in an eerie echo of controversial eugenic principles and practices that emerged during the Modern period. In this chapter, I explore the moral, ethical and racial quandaries that plague an emerging, controversial, and unregulated genetic field through Canadian playwright Wendy Lill's *Chimera* (2007) and American playwright Cassandra Medley's *Relativity* (2006). Lill's and Medley's plays surfaced at a time when scientific innovations and their regulation were undergoing ethical and public scrutiny. *Chimera*, for example, was written as a response to the debate surrounding the Human Reproductive

Technology Act in Canada in 2003. Medley's play, in turn, premiered in the United States, the year the California Institute of Regenerative Medicine was set up as an organism to counter the Republican government's ongoing curtailment of funding for stem cell research. *Chimera* and *Relativity*, like *AID Thy Neighbour* before them, were therefore produced not only to instruct the general public on scientific advances in ARTs, but also to respond to and generate debate on current public and social policy issues.

In the early twentieth century, Stopes and Sanger deployed their scientific knowledge of birth control to enhance their credibility as authorities on reproductive rights. Almost a hundred years later, at the start of the twenty-first century, Lill's and Medley's protagonists also look to their academic credentials to gain the possibility — though not always the reality — of changing a gender-biased, political stem cell research environment. While Wandor and Loomer created women who were at the mercy of a male-dominated science that treated them as objects for experimentation, Lill and Medley showcased women who were at the forefront of genetics research. Their heroines comfortably inhabited and ran scientific laboratories while inquisitively peering through the microscopes. They manipulated the Petri dish instead of passively occupying it. On stage and in real life, these female scientists wielded the reproductive and genetic knowledge that was withheld from their non-academic counterparts in earlier dramas.

However, having a science-based education did not always automatically translate into activist agency for either Lill's or Medley's protagonists because stem cell research continued to foreground the rights of the end product — the embryo, foetus, or child — over the rights of the mother. As Carol Stabile states in her work aptly titled "Shooting the Mother," "in order for the embryo/fetus to emerge as autonomous — as a person, a patient, or individual in its own right — all traces of the female body (as well as the embryo's presence as a parasite within that body)

must disappear” (180).⁷⁴ By controlling the development of the foetus, scientists marginalized women from the reproductive process while also repressing upsurges in reproductive and feminist rights activism. Therefore, I argue that the women featured in the plays in this chapter experience gender disempowerment from a process that consciously devalues the labour of the mother, even when advances in women’s rights have made it possible for the scientist and the mother to be one and the same.

Since Lill’s and Medley’s dramas stand at this crossroads of science, technology, theatre, and politics, I begin my analysis by contextualizing these dramas in the political framework in which they emerged. Lill’s play premiered at the Tarragon Theatre in Toronto on January 9, 2007 and ran until February 11, 2007. *Chimera* was based on Lill’s personal experience as a Member of Parliament for the New Democratic Party for Dartmouth, Nova Scotia during the passing of the Assisted Human Reproduction Act, a legislation that regulated new ARTs, in 2004. With her theatrical rendition of this parliamentary event, Lill aimed to bridge the gap between special interest audiences and the general public. Lill’s theme is reminiscent of Stopes’s public defence of her testimony before the National Birth Rate Committee, which Stopes dramatized in *Our Ostriches*. Hence, I study *Chimera* as an example of a feminist, autobiographical drama. Moreover, some reviewers have pointed out that Lill performed a chimeric act with her play, as it incorporates elements of a journalism exposé, a scientific report, and an activist drama.

Medley’s work also focuses on the ethical quandaries of genetic science by using melanin or skin pigmentation as a marker of racial hegemony. *Relativity* was commissioned by the Alfred

⁷⁴ Stabile spells foetus as *fetus* throughout her paper following the spelling most commonly used in American medical and technical journals.

P. Sloan Foundation, which sponsors works on science and technology, and encourages a public understanding of science that bridges “the two cultures — the humanities and the sciences — through support of books, radio, film, television, theatre, and new media to reach a wide, non-specialized audience” (“Public Understanding of Science” n. pag.). The play received its world premiere at The Magic Theater in San Francisco on May 8, 2004, and its New York premiere on April 26, 2006, as part of the First Light Festival that featured dramas exploring the intersection of science and technology. In *Relativity*, all three main players are not only women, but also successful scientists. Thus, Medley’s work echoes some of the themes of gender bias recurrent in Lill’s drama, but expands them to incorporate the race factor. Medley’s contemporary African American women grapple with reproductive politics and mirror the social struggle for recognition fought by their Modern period counterparts. Furthermore, Medley’s heroines are just as ambivalent and conflicted about motherhood as the women featured in Burrill’s and Grimké’s dramas. Although the sacrifices that mothers and surrogate mothers make in *Relativity* are not life-threatening ones, like lynching, the results are still devastating for the mother-child relationships.

5.2 Understanding the Political Environment That Breeds a *Chimera*

Three years before the premiere of Lill’s *Chimera*, Canadian journalists and politicians had begun to question the lack of ethical regulations surrounding assisted reproductive practices, and in particular genetic tampering whereby embryos could be created with pre-determined characteristics. The Assisted Human Reproduction Act was passed in Canada as an attempt to regulate the field, but the legislation was so controversial that it became fodder for heated debates between legislators and the public. The upheaval that surrounded the passing of this Act

led regulators to seek public consultation before considering further amendments to the legislation, including the subsequent creation of a regulatory agency. In one instance, this public consultation took the form of theatre-based health policy research through the staging of *Orchids* (2005). This work was based on data from a survey called “Issues Related to the Regulation of Pre-Implantation Genetic Diagnosis (PGD) under the Assisted Human Reproduction Act” carried out by the Human Reproduction Implementation Office. *Orchids* was written by three academics specializing in Applied Ethics, Theatre, and Obstetrics-Gynaecology.⁷⁵ It is worth noting that *Chimera* also reflected Lill’s plurality of interests, as she was a former journalist and radio dramatist, as well as an award-winning playwright.⁷⁶

Orchids premiered for select audiences in Vancouver, Toronto, and Montreal in the fall of 2005, addressing the ethical debate surrounding the creation of designer babies through pre-implantation genetic diagnosis. As a theatrical experiment in public policy influence, I believe this drama laid the groundwork for *Chimera* by illustrating how theatre could be used to discuss, disseminate, and even challenge public opinion. Unlike commercial theatre productions, *Orchids* was produced with joint funding from The Canadian Institute for Health Research and Health Canada. It was a social experiment designed to measure the impact of theatre on the development of health policy. The reproductive rights play focused on the story of two women, Rose and Heather, who are at a clinic requesting selective implantation, and on the two (male) scientists

⁷⁵ The cross-disciplinary trio of academic scholars who wrote and directed *Orchids* were Dr. Susan M. Cox, an Associate Professor and Michael Smith Foundation for Health Research Scholar at the W. Maurice Young Centre for Applied Ethics at the University of British Columbia in Vancouver, British Columbia; Dr. Magdalena Kazubowski-Houston, an Assistant Professor at the Faculty of Arts at Wilfrid Laurier University in Waterloo, Ontario; and Dr. Jeff Nisker, Coordinator of Health Ethics and Humanities, and Professor of Obstetrics-Gynaecology and Oncology at the Schulich School of Medicine & Dentistry, at the University of Western Ontario in London, Ontario.

⁷⁶ Lill further projected her polyvocal stance in her choice of characters for her reproductive rights drama giving voice and stage presence to a journalist, a lobbyist, a member of parliament, and a geneticist.

who assist them in their quest. While Rose wants pre-implantation selection because there is a history of Tourette's syndrome in her family, Heather already has Tourette's and wants to avoid passing it to her child. Rose is also a graphic artist who designed the posters of orchids displayed on the walls of the clinic. She chose orchids as a theme for reproductive rights because these flowers can be genetically modified. The imagery of orchids is used by the clinic's doctors to symbolize the possibilities of perfecting human development.⁷⁷

As an overtly didactic drama, *Orchids* was staged free of charge to invited audience members who included doctors, nurses, health advocates, and journalists, as well as patients undergoing fertility treatments.⁷⁸ To emphasize the primary role of science on reproductive practices, the playwrights conducted their theatrical experiment in a setting similar to a laboratory environment. They hired observers to take field notes of spectators' reactions as the narrative developed, and engaged the audience in taped post-performance discussions. The clinical ambiance of the setting was further reinforced by the presence of a mental health expert who was ready to provide support to anyone in the audience who found themselves traumatized by the experience of watching the play. By humanizing and staging the ethical issues raised by stem cell research, the authors of *Orchids* gave audiences the opportunity to place themselves as vicarious participants and policy makers through the feedback collected during and after the

⁷⁷ The orchids on the posters show multiple images of "perfect" babies intersecting with the word "love." Genetic manipulation is thus seen as appropriation of "natural" sexual intercourse. This subliminal message carries a problematic conflation of emotional and biological concerns. The mostly male doctors at the clinic use the poster to evoke a stereotypical, romanticized idealization of sexual intercourse while inserting themselves as mediators during the conception process. The message these scientists are selling is that "perfect" babies can only be produced through (male) scientific intervention in the reproduction process.

⁷⁸ *Orchids* has been performed throughout Canada, the United States and Australia. In 1997, there was a command performance at the Museum of Civilization in Ottawa for health policy developers and politicians. Although there is no tangible evidence that Lill attended this performance, she was an MP during that period and would have received an invite. The most recent Canadian performances of *Orchids* took place in 2005-2006 in a tour sponsored in part by Health Canada who wanted citizen deliberation on the ethical dilemmas surrounding Preimplantation Genetic Diagnosis (Nisker).

performance. After analyzing their data, the scholars concluded that the three-way communication established between citizens, government and researchers “emphasizes participants’ mutual roles in questioning and co-constructing knowledge through the shared experience of the play and subsequent dialogue” (Cox et al. 1479). Thus, this theatrical experiment demonstrated that drama can be an effective tool to promote discussion on topical issues. In her seminal text *Performing Science and the Virtual*, Sue-Ellen Case reinforces the value of joint science and theatre ventures by arguing that theatre has become “the social mechanism of the new science, installing human agency at the center of virtual space” (27). As activist theatre, *Orchids* demanded and stimulated audience engagement with the scientific material. Moreover, *Orchids* became an early forum for stakeholder engagement on ART legislation, allowing for public debate on issues that would later come under parliamentary ruling. Since this play was a theatrical forum that merged political, scientific, and feminist interests, I believe it should be considered as a precursor and springboard for Lill’s *Chimera*.

5.3 *Chimera*: A Problematic Gendering of Science

Lill wrote her play as a response to political controversies surrounding the creation of and subsequent amendments to the Assisted Human Reproduction Act in 2003 and 2004 respectively. In *Chimera*, Lill stages not only her own experience with parliamentary debates, but how these events were reported and represented to support or subvert special interest agendas.⁷⁹ Like *Orchids*, *Chimera* is fact-based theatre. Lill’s play is recorded history, (her)story in this case, as it focuses on Lill’s and her spokesperson Clare’s frustrations with a gender-biased

⁷⁹ Lill has always been heavily involved in activism. She was nominated four times for the Governor General’s Award for her earlier work, which explores such wide-ranging activist topics as women’s suffrage and native rights. During her time in parliament she was also an advocate of cultural rights and disability causes.

political system. Lill interlaces a variety of scientific and political interests through subversive constructions of gender and social roles. In *Chimera*, Lill's avatar is Clare McGuire, who is a rising Summerside, PEI Member of Parliament and Minister of Justice about to celebrate the one-year anniversary of the passing of Bill C-13, the Human Reproductive Technology Act. The celebration is marred by public, verbal attacks in Parliament from George Fanning, an MP from White Cloud, Alberta. Fanning criticizes the cross-species experiments that genetic scientist Nell Harrier is undertaking to find a cure for autism. The news that Harrier is injecting human cells into monkeys sparks controversy in parliamentary circles and the press. Lill's play narrates how Clare struggles to stay politically afloat amidst the ethical, financial, and scientific objections from Fanning, journalist Roy Ruggles, and lobbyist Edward Lloyd.

Chimera foregrounds the connection between gender, political and cultural spaces from its opening scene when journalist Roy appears on a bare stage and addresses the audience. Roy informs spectators that there are events that have happened which now need retelling, and proceeds to do so. The remainder of the play unfolds in flashbacks and the final scene finds Roy once again in the present facing the audience. In his opening speech, Roy references a canonical text: Charles Darwin's *The Origin of Species* by saying: "If we could but dimly see. . . . If we could turn our imaginings to this teeming awesome race, the true nature of this struggle" (Lill 7). I propose that Roy's monologue is a Brechtian *gestus* designed to make spectators aware that they are being manipulated on various levels. As Diamond states: "Because the *gestus* is effected by a historical subject/actor, what the spectator sees is not a mere miming of a social relationship, but a reading of it, an interpretation by a historical subject who supplements (rather than disappears into) the production of meaning" (*Unmaking Mimesis* 53). Spectators read the signs they see on stage based on their own experience, and see the speaker as an actor, a

commentator, and as a projection of their own selves. Diamond argues that when the gestic moment occurs, the spectator “becomes historicized – in motion and at risk” (*Unmaking Mimesis* 53). Although Lill bookends her play with a male voice of authority, she subverts it by revealing at the end that it was Nell, the woman scientist, who gave Roy the seminal book he used to reinforce his argument. Roy’s performance becomes a fragmentary and fragile positioning of gender for everyone in the theatre, on and off the stage. Lill restages Darwinian history through a feminist lens using the imagery of a woman’s hand guiding the action on a parliamentary and a theatrical stage. Through this circular narrative choice, Lill establishes a female-driven interconnectivity and interdependence between science, literature and drama.

Roy’s opening monologue is also the starting gun that triggers a multi-player race through bureaucratic loopholes, ethical dilemmas, and social prejudices. At the start of the play, Roy subtly warms up the spectators for the marathon ahead when he alerts them to the upcoming “teeming, awesome race” (Lill 7). He conflates the meanings of the word “race” to make it both inclusive and exclusive, as it signifies the human race as a whole, as well as a contest with only one possible winner. But there are no winners in Lill’s play, except perhaps Lloyd, the lobbyist who has his own malleable agenda. Lloyd believes challenging the Act now will be beneficial because “you gotta take the long view. If we don’t kick open the Act, all the research will go offshore. And thousands of jobs with it” (Lill 81). By focusing on fighting the Act as it stands now, all the players — the Ministers, the universities seeking funding, the activists — will be too tired to complain when the industry asks for amendments to the Act a couple of years in the future. As Clare’s assistant, Doyle, tells her: “No one is saying the Act is perfect. It’s a product of a thousand compromises. But it’s better than nothing. . . . Think of it as a shack on a beach. In a rainstorm” (Lill 88). In *Chimera*, everyone arrives bruised, limping, and emotionally shattered

to the finish line. Yet, this line does not mark an end to the race because science and the rules that govern it continue to steamroll forward into an uncertain future. Roy worries that even though Canada may have introduced ART regulation, other countries where chimeric research has been carried out have not, which means questionable research continues beyond the reach of Canadian legislative authorities.

Lill believes that the problem of unregulated ART research can be addressed by filtering scientific knowledge through women's hands. Her focus on female intervention can be seen when Nell, as the genetic scientist, plants seeds of doubt in Roy's mind that in turn fuels the play's central debate. When Nell hands Darwin's book to Roy, she tells him that most people focus on Darwin's theory of evolution but forget his studies on interconnectivity. "Darwin discovered that any pressure applied, any slight variation — such as the erection of a fence, or the decrease of bees in a garden — would completely change the landscape. . . . Each being has an impact and changes the flow. The introduction of any slight variation can change everything," as Nell tells Roy (Lill 94). Through this feminist revision of history, Lill encourages her audience to acknowledge their own power to change things, if only they too decide to act, as Clare, Nell, and Lill have done.

Lill continues to foreground this link between science and female agency when Nell points out that twins carry some of their sibling's cells while in the womb, and "mothers carry some cells from their offspring in their blood" (131). With this imagery, the playwright opens the door to the possibility of cross-gender breeding through the female body. An example of Lill's proposal can be seen in a study recently published in the September 26, 2012 edition of *PLOS ONE*, a peer-reviewed, open access journal. The study found evidence of microchimerism in women's brains when male DNA was discovered inside the brain of female patients suffering

from Alzheimer's disease. Scientists speculated that women could have absorbed these cells when they were pregnant with a baby boy, when they shared a womb with a male twin, or when they received a non-irradiated blood transfusion. Although the research was carried out only on female patients, an article in *Postmedia News* citing and responding to this work reflects a general public uneasiness with this kind of gender invasion where "the finding also raises the hypothesis that, if male DNA can infiltrate a woman's brain, it might have some 'masculinizing' affect [sic] on the female brain" (Kirkey A8).⁸⁰ The possibility that women could be "harbouring male DNA and male cells in the human brain" revives the mythical dread of women appropriating and controlling male domains (Kirkey A8). In "The Cyborg Goddess," Tudor Balinisteanu argues that in the myths of science fiction, women have been kept apart from the masculine domain of technology, and always looked upon as a subversive force that must be contained and controlled. Women, like nature stand at the sight of an otherness "whose taming insures human progress. The scientist is thus 'called to arms,' overtaking the leader role of the questing warrior" (405). I believe that Lill's drama transmutes and translates this anxiety by reversing gender roles when Nell's influence on Roy produces "feminization" of his perspective on the world. Diamond stated that in theatre "the body is not a fixed essence but a site of struggle and change" (*Unmaking Mimesis* 52). While Diamond addressed her comment to the representation of a *female* body on stage, Lill once again reverses gender perspective and applies this physical malleability of the performative body to the central *male* character in her play. When Roy distances himself from the nurturing, feminine influences in his life – his sister Mary

⁸⁰ It is important to note that the article does not mention reciprocity studies whereby female cells could be transferred into male brains. The main concern expressed by scientists is that "no one had ever looked at whether the cells could cross the blood-brain barrier, and live in the human brain, potentially for decades" (Kirkey A8).

Colin and his childhood friend Clare – he flounders, and is unable to sustain meaningful relationships that could have translated into personal growth. He only manages to regain his emotional and social footing through his newfound relationship with Nell. This fruitful merger begins quite appropriately in Nell’s garden, as Lill aligns Nell with the metaphorical Mother Nature. In fact, I propose that Roy can only re-animate himself when he reconnects with the women in his life, and when he re-values their contribution to his moral upbringing and to society in general. Furthermore, I believe Roy’s transformative journey from cynic to tentative activist is a real-life representation of the controversy surrounding the application of stem cell research in Canada.

Chimera is indeed an example of the activist transformation that Lill hoped, in turn, to effect on her audience. It calls attention to the need for more proactive participation from the public by pointing out inconsistencies in the Assisted Human Reproduction Act (Bill C-13). Clause 5 of this legislation argues that “creating a chimera or transplanting a chimera into either a human being or a non-human life form” is banned. Yet, this same legislation allows “the alteration, manipulation or treatment of any human reproductive material for the purpose of creating an embryo” (Canada Law clause 10.1), and “the alteration, manipulation, treatment or making use of an in vitro embryo” (Canada Law clause 10.2). Lill illustrates these discrepancies through Nell’s frustration with the political system:

[the politicians have created] a web of inconsistencies and prohibitions. . . .

The Act allows me to do all manner of things to help a woman to meet her reproductive goals. I can superovulate her, store her embryos, even freeze them. If she doesn’t want her foetus, I am allowed to flush it down the drain. But there are

restrictions to prevent me from using discarded embryos to do research to save thousands of lives. (41)⁸¹

Hence *Chimera* highlights women's dissatisfaction with a biased and complicated legal system mired with politicians bent on ignoring women's contributions to its creation. Lill illustrates this scenario when Clare is manipulated and ridiculed by her colleagues and the press as the token woman on the scientific discussion panels. The gender divide is exacerbated when Clare flounders in interviews because she lacks in-depth knowledge of scientific issues and their consequences.

Lill notes that part of the problem lies in Clare's upbringing. Clare is a product of a hegemonic social system as she comes from a family where her father was a veterinarian while her mother "was roaring around with some good cause or another" pitting opposing images of the male scientist against the female social butterfly (Lill 67). Clare adds that her father one day told her that a scientist had just created a "geep," a cross between a goat and a sheep, and said, "hang on to your hats folks. We're going places we've never been before" (Lill 67). In retelling parts of her family's history, Clare interprets her father's "we" as gender exclusive referring to science and scientists who are busy making these discoveries, while women like her, her mother and Lill, as the playwright and real-life Member of Parliament, are "roaring around"

⁸¹ Canada's complicated regulation of reproductive rights mirrors the conflicted reports and laws that emerged a few years earlier in Britain and the United States. In Britain, the 1984 Warnock Report tried to mollify both sides of the ethical debate by arguing that whereas embryos needed to be protected, they could also be used in research, as long as they had not yet reached fourteen days after conception, when a "primitive streak," known as the development of the nervous system, first appeared (Warnock Report 66). At this point, the embryo showed features consistent with those of a human being, and therefore it should be protected as human. In the United States, the Stem Cell Therapeutic and Research Act of 2005 states that stem cell research should be limited to adult stem cells, bone marrow and umbilical cord tissue, and does not allow discarded embryos to be employed in research. On March 9, 2009, President Barack Obama modified this act to allow for the use of embryonic stem cell for research as long as a human embryo was not destroyed, discarded, injured, or created specifically for research purposes. This amendment meant that restrictions on federal funding of stem cell research could be lifted to encourage scientific progress in this area.

ineffectively making fools of themselves during parliamentary debates and news shows. In *Chimera*, Lill, Nell and Clare are all publicly voicing their concerns, but failing to make an impact on public policy or regulations.

Paradoxically, I believe Lill's drama reveals her own complicity in this gender situation through her own biased stereotypical narrative where male voices have the dominant and active roles. In Lill's text, Roy remains the leading man throughout the play, even when he needs women to help him survive. On the other hand, Clare's role becomes more and more insignificant as the play progresses. Men make forceful and effective deals in offices and bars while women feel uncomfortable and squirm in these powerful domains, or are simply absent from them. The only time women speak their minds in Lill's play is when they are surrounded by nature in public or private garden settings. In *Chimera*, men are able to communicate and actively participate in any environment, whereas women can only speak, survive, and have some agency within a domestic setting.

Through *Chimera*, Lill resurrects old-fashioned ideas about women's roles in society and problematically subverts her own feminist agenda – a standpoint that harks back to the views presented in earlier plays, like Glaspell's *Chains of Dew* and *The Verge*, where women could only express their views within domestic spaces. In *Chains of Dew*, birth control activist Nora Powers gives homemaker Diantha the knowledge of contraception that allows Diantha to step outside the boundaries of her domestic space, yet Diantha's mobility is immediately curtailed by her husband who fears his wife's independent streak. In *The Verge*, Claire retreats to her home nursery/laboratory where she finds comfort in experimenting with plants when society shuns her for refusing to be a traditional mother and wife. While *Chimera* represents the reality of the gender prejudice that Lill experienced in political and social circles as a member of parliament, I

believe that Lill, as playwright, misses the opportunity to use theatre as a vehicle for feminist activism. She narrates the events accurately, but does not offer her audience solutions to overcome entrenched gender divisions. Rather than giving women the authority to speak from center stage, Lill's women speak their minds from the margins or through men's voices.⁸²

Though *Chimera* was not as directly associated with policy development as *Orchids*, its focus on the topical and controversial theme of stem cell research did allow theatre audiences to see the various interests at play in genetic funding. Yet, any political power that this drama may have had, or any activist force it may have kindled, was destined to remain buried by the playwright's choice to quietly represent gender hierarchies instead of loudly subverting or challenging them. Thus, *Chimera* became a static, historical document unable to create social change through its own public reproduction.

5.4 *Relativity*: Proactively Merging Feminist and Reproductive Rights

Unlike Lill's *Chimera* which features women's desires as subjugated or dependent on men's agendas, Medley's *Relativity* foregrounds women's interests and scientific authority through three powerful, African American women scientists: Claire Reid,⁸³ the leading

⁸² Reviewing *Chimera* during its premiere, Richard Ouzounian, theatre critic for *The Toronto Star*, argued that because of Lill's overuse of clichés and stereotypical characterizations, "what makes for a stimulating philosophical debate doesn't always translate into gripping theatre" (D02). This sentiment was echoed in Nancy Copeland's review in the *University of Toronto Quarterly* where she notes that "Lill has difficulty turning the play's ideas into drama" (90).

⁸³ It is intriguing that Glaspell, Lill, and Medley chose a version of the name Clare-Claire (albeit with different spellings) for their protagonists. The name means clear, bright, and famous. In the modern period plays, it was also associated with the light of knowledge. Glaspell's Clare has scientific knowledge, while Lill's Clare can only pretend to have it for the benefit of the media that follows her every move. Medley's Claire attempts to convince unbelievers of the benefits of melanin. Her efforts are blocked by her own daughter Kalima, who has the scientific knowledge Claire lacks about genetic composition. Although all three Clare-Claires attempt to bring the light of knowledge to the masses, they end up buried in the murky waters of the ethical and moral issues surrounding hybrid breeding.

proponent of melanin science; Kalima, her daughter and an emerging geneticist; and Iris Preston, a prominent geneticist and Kalima's new boss. As these three women address genetic hegemony from their individual perspectives, elements of the eugenics agenda that haunted most of the birth control plays of the early twentieth century resurface.

In *Relativity*, Claire alerts her daughter Kalima to the resurgence of eugenics veiled as Assisted Reproductive Technologies. To support her stand, Claire quotes an ad for Nordicbank.com, an egg donor bank where people can purchase “a blonde-blue-eyed baby,” and warns her daughter that the proliferation of these websites implies a “potential threat of genetic annihilation” for African Americans and other minorities (Medley 4). Medley shows how these advances in molecular biology and DNA revive a form of scientific racism, which could come from society at large or from within a defined racial group. For Claire, the menace of eugenics lies just outside her doorstep in the form of miscegenation. Therefore, believing that melanin people are superior, Claire encloses all melanated people — who also happen to be all African Americans — in an insulated and segregated bubble of misinformation to protect them from the threat of a white incursion which could lead to possible racial domination.

Even though Claire is in denial about the lack of scientific proof for the melanin theory, she preys on her audience's fear of unregulated science, as exemplified by scientists experimented on African Americans:

Never forget: the *Tuskegee Syphilis Experiment* of the 1930's where they sterilized our black⁸⁴ men, and the sterilization of poor women of colour right on up to the

⁸⁴ See footnote 16 in chapter 2 for definitions and use of *African American* and *black* as racial terms throughout the dissertation. When quoting directly, I am leaving each author's preferred term intact, therefore quotes from Medley's play will have *black*, while quotes from Talvin Wilkins, the director of the play, read *African American*.

1970's — black and brown women who *believed* they were just having routine childbirth or medical exams, but who were in fact having their tubes tied and, or hysterectomies without their consent! (Medley 42)⁸⁵

Claire resurrects the image of the objectified and appropriated African American body whose reproductive rights are historically and intrinsically linked to race.

I also believe Claire's words conjure up, in the mind of Medley's contemporary audience, the use and abuse of Henrietta Lacks's cells over the past sixty years. Lacks was an African American woman born in 1920 who had cervical cancer. She went to Johns Hopkins University hospital where George Gey, a cancer specialist bent on finding a cure for the disease, treated her by giving her a hysterectomy and radiation treatment. Following these procedures, Lacks was shocked to find she could no longer have children. In her biography of Lacks, Rebecca Skloot states that Lacks told her family she would not have had these treatments if she had been informed they would render her infertile. During these procedures Gey had also removed cells from Lacks's cervix without her consent. As he experimented on Lacks's cells, Gey discovered that they reproduced themselves continuously, and remained immortal unlike most other lines of cells, which had a short shelf life. The HeLa cells, as they were called, in an abbreviated version of Henrietta Lacks's name, were then produced en masse. Although in the first few years, Gey gave the cells away for free to other laboratories, later on a company called Microbiological Associates used his samples to reproduce more cells and sold them for profit. Lacks's cells went

⁸⁵ The Tuskegee Syphilis Experiment became (in)famous for its lack informed patient consent. African American men were given free medical care and public assistance as part of a treatment for an unexplained blood disease. These men were never told they were being treated for syphilis, and part of the experiment involved withholding medicines and treatment. As a result, thousands of African American men died of syphilis, as did their wives and unborn children who were also exposed to the disease. When this abuse of medical power came to light, it led to reforms in the regulations regarding ethical treatment of human beings during research processes.

to multiple laboratories to be used in research into treatments for herpes, leukaemia, influenza, haemophilia, and Parkinson's disease, as well as reproductive experiments. Skloot states in eerily chimerical terms that suggest enslavement that "like guinea pigs and mice, Henrietta's cells have become the standard laboratory workhorse" (4). To date, there have been more than sixty thousand articles written on the HeLa cells, and about three hundred articles a month continue to be produced on related research.

Although Lacks was unable to produce children of her own, scientists reproduced parts of her for decades. As Skloot notes, "before the cloning of whole animals, there was the cloning of individual cells – Henrietta's cells" (99). Even though Lacks's cells generated millions in profits for the laboratories who harvested and sold them, her family did not profit from any of the sales of her cells or subsequent experiments. Indeed, when Lacks died in 1951, she was buried in an unmarked grave because her family lacked funds for a tombstone. Skloot hints that Lacks's social standing, gender and race may have all been factors in the scientists' negligent actions. She points out the paradox whereby "black scientists and technicians, many of them women, used cells from a black woman to help save the lives of millions of Americans, most of them white" (97).⁸⁶ Although the story of the HeLa cells was first publicized on March 24, 1976, in a *Rolling Stone* magazine article by Michael Rodgers, her contribution to science has only received belated private and public acknowledgement in the last ten years. On August 7, 2013, the Lacks

⁸⁶ The HeLa cells contributed to major breakthroughs in medicine, such as the development of the polio vaccine. However, these cells were also used indiscriminately in controversial research procedures like those carried out by Chester Southam, a virologist who feared the HeLa cells could actually be causing cancer. To prove his theory, Southam injected patients at the Jewish Chronic Disease Hospital in Brooklyn without informing the patients he was carrying out these experiments. Southam was subsequently condemned by the media because his experiments brought up images of the plight of Jewish prisoners in concentration camps during World War Two. Southam had his license suspended for a year, but ironically became President of the American Association for Cancer Research, in 1968, just a year later.

family finally reached an agreement with the National Institutes of Health, to be given “some control over scientists’ access to the cells’ DNA code and to receive acknowledgement in the resulting studies” (“Henrietta Lacks” n. pag.) To date, though, the Lacks family still awaits any form of monetary remuneration.⁸⁷

Talvin Wilkins, director of the New York production of Medley’s *Relativity*, alludes to the consequences of this type of unregulated experimentation when he explains the importance of locating the play within a complex social framework “next to the mapping of cloning and designer babies and the threat to the people of colour in relationship to the new technology”(Armstrong 22). He further cautions against the untested long term effects of these procedures by wondering if the new technology will be owned “by global corporations that want to establish a particular control. Will our traits be selected?” (Armstrong 22). Medley’s main intent, according to Wilkins, is to question “*who* controls and *who* makes the decisions” (Armstrong 22; emphasis added). Wilkins’s words resurrect African American women’s struggle to find a place in a biased science history when he says that, “the play establishes the position for African Americans that we must be participants in this debate and not just let it happen to us” (Armstrong 22). Medley refuses to let the African American body be objectified or gazed at by a largely white theatre-going public preferring to challenge gender and racial preconceptions.

⁸⁷ The laws regarding informed consent have changed substantially particularly with regards to donating embryos and cell lines. The California Institute for Regenerative Medicine, established in 2004 for example, abides by a code of Medical and Ethical Standards Regulations Title 17, which states that women donating fetal tissue must sign a statement saying that the donation is done for research purposes and made “without restriction” (Section 1000085(a)). Donors also have to acknowledge that “cell lines may be used in future studies which are not now foreseeable” (Section 100100(c)). These regulations also specify that: “derived cells and cell products may be used in research involving genetic manipulation” (Section 100100(D)), and further note that “although the results of research including donated materials may be patentable or have commercial value, the donor will have no legal or financial interest in any commercial development resulting from the research” (Section 1001000(I)).

Medley dramatizes African American women's struggle to appropriate their own narrative by representing the roles they played in the scientific world. At the start of *Relativity*, Claire contextualizes African Americans' standpoint for her daughter Kalima: "What if I told you that research and experimentation in genetics and cloning are affecting you right now, this very moment as you sit here, today. Think about this, take this in. Brand new organs, new kidneys, hearts are actually being grown inside animals right now, at this very moment" (4). Claire wants Kalima to understand that today's experiments are possible only because of the sometimes unethical research that came before them, such as those conducted in Tuskegee and with the HeLa cells.⁸⁸ Medley vividly stages this problematic, historical legacy as a clash of traditional and scientific beliefs in a climactic scene when Iris attempts to give a speech at Ujamaa House, her alma mater. *Relativity* presents both sides of the story in a volatile female centric debate intended to showcase the power of women voices inside and outside academic circles. At first, Iris tries to blend into the African-themed celebration by using "stylish pants and colourful Afro-centric looking blouse" (Medley 64). Yet, her speech is incessantly interrupted by Claire's disembodied voice coming through a loudspeaker spouting her melanin theories. By piping in Claire's voice, Medley creates the illusion of Claire having the agency to enter and occupy an academic space where her thoughts and theories are in fact neither acknowledged nor respected. Unfortunately, the more Iris tries to fight Claire's intrusion, the more flustered she becomes. Iris struggles to convince her audience that "there's no clear-cut 'black or white' anybody!" even as Claire's voice asks: "Is there a biological reason for the racism we suffer from whites?" (Medley 66). Iris counters the stereotypical images of oppressed African Americans in recorded history

⁸⁸ When Lacks's cells were inserted in laboratory mice in the mid 1960s, they created the first cell hybrid giving a foundation for the mapping of the human genome.

with her own experience by telling students how she stood on picket lines, faced the police, and risked expulsion so that the present generation could take its place at her university. Neil Genzlinger, the *New York Times* reviewer for the 2006 production of *Relativity*, describes the visceral impact of this scene: “Though the students are unseen Ms. Paley’s [Petronia Paley, the actress who plays Iris] reactions are so vivid that it seems as if she were actually taking a physical beating along with a psychic one” (E3). This scene becomes a *gestic moment* in the play, one that in its metatheatricality — with the multiple power point screens, the dancing, the drumming, and the breaking of the fourth wall to address the audience — “explains the play, but it also exceeds the play, opening it to the social and discursive ideologies that inform its production” using Diamond’s definition of the term *gestic* (*Unmaking Mimesis* 53). Medley demonstrates how African American theatre cannot avoid its own historicity through its on stage representation and repetition of African American culture.

Soyica Colbert, in her book on the African American theatrical body, compares this reproductive and iterative movement to that of the DNA dyad. Just like the double helix in the dyad is in perpetual motion, constantly repeating a pattern and reproducing itself, Colbert argues that,

black⁸⁹ dramatists use the space of the theatre to create an atmosphere that capitalizes on the political potential the perpetual nature of the dyad generates, which gives black dramatists and audiences an ongoing opportunity to redo the past. . . . Black dramatists use the present to rethink the past and reorient the future. (13)

⁸⁹ See footnote 16 in chapter 2 for British usage of the term *black* by British scholars like Colbert.

The immediacy of theatre performance allows for a “closed geographical circuit” where the audience can engage fully in an empathetic and repetitive exchange with the actors (Colbert 13). Amanda Cooper, in her review for *Time Out New York*, calls attention to this interconnectivity by stating that in Medley’s drama “worlds of thought bloom from striking, simple lines that reflect both on philosophical approaches and life choices” (159). *Relativity* offers a performance of African American history, lineage, and reproduction — both biological and theatrical — that stands in counterpoint to Lill’s emphasis on Darwin’s theory of interconnectivity. Medley’s three African American women scientists (Claire, Kalima and Iris) are a counterpoint to Lill’s two white scientists (Nell and Darwin), as they claim the right to question the origins and future survival of the species.

5.5 Matriarchal Relationships as Sites for Discursive Authority

In *Chimera*, Clare and Nell cannot exert any political or academic authority because they are surrounded by men who contain and control these women’s rhetoric and mobility. In *Relativity*, on the other hand, Kalima finds her voice and agency by establishing alliances with other powerful women. Kalima’s mother-daughter relationships with Claire, her real mother; and with Iris, her mentor and surrogate mother define the woman/scientist/writer/daughter that Kalima becomes at the end of the play. With her focus on matriarchal bonds, Medley follows the lead of Burrill and Grimké whose birth control narratives found a receptive audience among the readers of Sanger’s *Birth Control Review* because the desire for motherhood was a universal theme that could be embraced by all women regardless of race. Emulating the work of her modern African American counterparts, Medley stages an authentic African American experience that erases racial differences as it highlights the similarities of the shared experience

of motherhood. When Kalima tells her mother that DNA “sequencing shows humans are all ninety-nine-point-nine percent genetically identical,” she is pleading with her mother and the theatre audience to see all the players in this drama in terms of shared human cells, and not differential melanin pigmentation (Medley 15). Medley knows the filial is loaded with historical baggage and makes her representations of motherhood sites for both gender contestation and appropriation.

The possibility or impossibility of reproducing women and reproducing mothers, in academic, scientific and political circles becomes once again the catalyst that drives *Relativity*. Dolan calls attention to the fracturing of identities through the generalized perception of feminist theatre as a white woman’s project. She states that “racism has become a bone of contention in the women’s movement, as racial and ethnic minorities stake out their differences from the dominating white feminist voice” (*Spectator as Critic* 86). Feminists, like Dolan, argue that the root of discord is in the way patriarchy subverts and degrades female associations, such as the matriarchal legacy. For Dolan, a “focus on mother/daughter relationships is the primary content of cultural feminist theatre, and crucial to its formulation of a feminine aesthetic” (*Spectator as Critic* 86). Medley aims to rescue this female alliance, particularly as it relates to the mother-daughter relationship, and redefine it through African American experience.

In Grimké’s *The Closing Door*, the threat to African American lives lies outside the home, represented by the possibility of lynching that can happen when children step beyond the threshold. In Medley’s *Relativity*, on the other hand, it is the child who severs the link with the parent as Kalima breaks away from her mother and melanin ideology. Medley stages Kalima’s romantic relationship with Dan, a white colleague, for example, as a challenge to her mother’s belief system. With this alliance, Kalima is not only disregarding melanin principles, but also

tampering with the so-called purity of the African American race through any mixed-race offspring they may conceive. It is interesting to note how Medley uses Kalima's interracial relationship to challenge gender and racial stereotypes. Medley objectifies Dan, the only white actor in the play, in a scene where he appears half naked waiting for Kalima to come home. Dan has in fact prepared dinner for Kalima who walks through the door with her briefcase and the mail. Not only does Medley reverse the gaze, making the white male the desired "other," but she also reverses gender roles presenting Kalima as the figure with financial and social authority.⁹⁰

Medley's opening set up in this scene also reinforces gender conflict as Kalima tells Dan that she has been awarded the co-writing spot with Iris, and was in fact chosen over him. Dan hints that she was not selected as part of an "equal process" because he believes Iris was looking for an African American scientist all along (Medley 58). When Kalima tries to argue that she was chosen on merit, that is to say based on her published work, Dan counters that he has published just as much as she has. Running out of scientific excuses, Kalima sinks to a response that may have come directly from her mother: "Eons of you folks granting each other the *real* 'preferential privilege', and now, y'all get in a funk just as *my* people take our place at the

⁹⁰ Medley reinforces female agency in an intriguing manner by emphasizing that Dan is watching a *Star Trek* episode about the Borgs in her stage directions and in the dialogue accompanying the scene. With this dramaturgical choice, I believe Medley consciously reminds her audience of a popular example of how women can exert political authority in a scientific environment. The Borg were an alien civilization featured prominently in *Star Trek: Voyager*, the only version of *Star Trek* on television, to feature a woman commander of the Starship Enterprise in Kathryn Janeway, played by Kate Mulgrew, and one of the few long-running television dramas with a woman as the protagonist. The episode which Medley may have been referring to is the last one of the series which premiered in May 2001, and pits two women in a battle of wills: the Borg Queen and Admiral Janeway. The interesting parallels with Medley's drama are that Admiral Janeway goes back to the past to give her younger self, then Captain Janeway, the knowledge she needs to defeat the Borg fortress. She then allows the Borg Queen to "assimilate" her (The Borgs take over humans by joining with them through their circulation system and converting them into half humans, half Borgs). The assimilation kills the Borg Queen because Admiral Janeway had previously injected her own blood with a pathogen that poisons the Queen when she absorbs Janeway's blood. The mother-daughter relationship established between Janeway and her younger self, and the need for a tainted blood sacrifice certainly parallel some aspects of Medley's play. Since Medley's play appeared at the Festival of Light featuring theatre that deals heavily with science, the audience may have also been familiar with this contemporary reference.

‘table’” (Medley 59). Not only does Kalima’s diction change from Harvard-educated discourse to a street-corner lingo, but she also brings in historical oppression as justification for her promotion. In the past, she had criticized her mother for bringing up visible minority arguments, yet in this scene she resorts to using it to defend herself. Kalima cannot escape her fate as Medley’s historic chimera, an amalgam of two people with two diverging takes on genetics, and a conflated, fragile and uneasy product of ongoing racial conflict.

5.6 Women’s Evolving Roles in Science and Theatre

The problem for Lill’s and Medley’s would-be activist women — and for Lill and Medley themselves as women playwrights — lay in overcoming the gender barrier in *Chimera* and the double-edged obstacle of gender and race in *Relativity*. These dramas contend that when women reproduce and redefine their roles in society by becoming hybrids and embracing various roles, such as those of a feminist, politician, and/or scientist, they risk becoming outcasts. I propose though that this multiplicity of roles also enables women to revise the way they see themselves. In *Chimera*, developments in new reproductive technologies and genetics give Nell a broader view of her own position in society as an integral part of a chain, and not just a marginalized, alienated academic. In *Relativity*, Kalima’s experiments implanting cloned organs into mice allow her to envision the possibility of creating new organs and new human beings in a not too distant future.

Donna Haraway, in her popular work on gender issues in a technological future, argued that “by the late twentieth century . . . we are all chimeras, theorized and fabricated hybrids of machine and organism; in short we are cyborgs” (150). Haraway called attention to the malleable and transgressive possibilities of chimeras and cyborgs when she stated that the “cyborg is a

condensed image of both imagination and material reality, the two joined centres structuring any possibility of historical transformation” (150). The double positioning is problematic as Ray, in Lill’s play, argues that chimeras are destined to become the visible minorities of this fragile world. They are beings who must remain voiceless and powerless unless “they’ve got blue eyes and can sing ‘Oh Canada’” (Lill 85). Roy believes these new hybrid organisms can only be socially accepted, and perhaps gain some authority, when they exhibit the same physical characteristics as the dominant, desirable race, and when they swear loyalty to those currently in power – which in Lill’s drama are one and the same. Yet, Nell and Kalima still imagine the possibility of having enough knowledge to replicate not just body parts, but to create a being — human or hybrid — whose brain and heart can be rebooted to function without culturally created and socially ingrained gender and racial prejudices. For theatre audiences, the public anxiety of interspecies breeding in Lill’s drama, and Clare’s fear of miscegenation in Medley’s narrative represent the horror of creating a new race that cannot be categorized, regulated or contained within the current social structure. As Wilkins states, the issue continues to be *who* controls this new being. Since the social structures do not change, the answer remains contested along gender fault lines.

As these women’s dramas show science has not yet found a way to completely efface women from the reproduction process since their cells, if not their bodies, are needed to conceive. When a sperm enters an egg, the fertilization process produces totipotent cells, which then develop into a human being. The embryo produced carries pluripotent and multipotent cells, which can divide themselves and produce organs and tissue. Yet, these cells cannot produce a whole organism, like the totipotent cells, because they lack extra embryonic tissues found in the

placenta, the uterine lining, and the umbilical cord.⁹¹ These life-bearing tissues are naturally produced and secreted in a woman's womb when she is pregnant, and they are key contributors to the nourishment and growth of the new being the woman harbours. Therefore, in spite of biological and genetic advances in science, the actual creation of a whole organism still depends on the contribution of components from two genders – not one – thus challenging one gender's claim to sole authority over the reproduction process.

The emerging fear is that new reproductive technologies, like cloning, could bypass the need for a woman's womb and challenge gender authority. The following chapter illustrates how cloning resurrects ethical and moral issues associated with gender rights. The question now becomes who will/should be cloned, and who can afford to be cloned? Will it be the white majority hinted at in Lill's play – that is to say, those men and women who are drafting the regulations, carrying out the experiments, and writing the plays? Or, will it be the visible minorities and, in that case, will the question of eugenics arise again? More worrisome is the trend towards gender selection that Lill hints is prevalent in cloning debates. If cloned human beings in the future will be mostly male, what effect does this preferential gender cloning have on women and the progress made by women's rights? Finally, is cloning the ultimate frontier in birth control, and what does it say about a society that chooses to embrace it as an alternative to natural reproduction? In the final chapter of this dissertation, I answer these questions through an analysis of Caryl Churchill's *A Number* (2002) and Liz Lochhead's *Blood and Ice* (2003). These

⁹¹ In 2012, the Nobel Prize in Physiology or Medicine was awarded to British researcher John B. Gurdon and Japanese scientist Shinya Yamanaka for “the discovery that mature cells can be reprogrammed to become pluripotent” (The Nobel Prize Organization n. pag.). Their timely research revealed a way of reversing embryo development, where adult cells could become embryonic pluripotent cells. Cells in adults with diseases can now be reprogrammed to find out how the disease emerged, how it can be prevented, and ultimately how it will be treated. However, this cell manipulation process also opens up more possibilities for scientific control of embryonic development.

two plays showcase how women playwrights struggle to stage feminist theatre that responds to the discovery and implementation of new reproductive technologies.

Chapter Six: Caryl Churchill and Liz Lochhead

One may account for the surge in new plays about natural sciences by the increasingly vexed and complex ethical issues that they address — a reflection of our collective societal concern with where science is leading us as we become capable of manipulating our bodies and our surroundings in new ways.

— Kirsten Shepherd-Barr, *Science on Stage: From Doctor Faustus to Copenhagen* (2006)

6.1 Introduction

In the previous two chapters, I have shown how reproductive politics continue to be debated within a biased scientific environment. The plays by Wandor, Loomer, Lill and Medley featured women attempting to exert agency over male scientists who manipulated in-vitro fertilization techniques and carried out ethically questionable stem cell research practices. Often, the struggle for control hinged on overcoming gender dependency since natural or assisted reproduction still relied on women's bodies, or parts of them, particularly women's wombs. The successful cloning of Dolly, the sheep in 1997 introduced cloning as a possible — though still not proven — process of reproduction. With cloning, a man could generate multiple clones of himself bypassing the need for any reproductive interaction with women, including the use of her womb. In theory, a human clone could be produced from the cells of a single individual regardless of gender. At the start of the twenty-first century, British playwright Caryl Churchill wrote *A Number* (2002) and Scottish playwright Liz Lochhead created *Blood and Ice* (2003) as

dramas that addressed single-gendered reproduction processes.⁹² The work of these playwrights features assisted and natural reproduction scenarios contingent on the presence of a woman at home, in the science laboratory, in the fertility clinics, and on stage.

It is important to note that women were not the only group threatened by single-gendered reproduction. The reality of conception practices like cloning also resurrected some of the fears expressed by proponents of eugenics during the Modern period. Sanger and Stopes, for example wrote plays and editorials about the consequences of unchecked reproduction where the rise in the population numbers of a particular race could shift the political and economic power in favour of that group. Writing on the social consequences of biomedical innovations, Susan Squier warns of the destabilizing effect of unregulated reproduction practices that revise “not only our definition of ‘human’ but also the broader dominions on which it rests: our membership and dominant position in the animal kingdom” (“Negotiating Boundaries” 112). In *Relativity*, Medley forewarned how a minority group who could afford cloning could control mass reproduction of itself and design a legion of ideal “blond, blue-eyed boys” (4). Hence the threat of cloning effectively reframes the reproductive rights debate by shifting the focus from who *can* be cloned, to who *should* be cloned. The presence of multiple clones of an original implies an exponential growth in the authority that the original and originating gender has over the rest of the population.

⁹² Lochhead first wrote and premiered a version of this play in 1982 at the Edinburgh Fringe Festival to poor reviews. The author herself admits she produced a “garbled first script” (vi). I am using the 2003 version, which she calls her “umpteenth and final version,” and which met with greater critical success when it premiered at the Royal Lyceum Theatre in Edinburgh (vi). Although Lochhead’s play was staged almost exclusively in venues in Scotland, Churchill’s work has received worldwide productions and critical acclaim contributing to a widespread awareness of its reproductive rights message.

In *A Number*, Churchill dramatizes the fallout of a specific unregulated cloning experiment where a man named Salter clones multiple versions of his biological son in a futile search for an idealized version of the original. Churchill's drama is structured along various conversations that Salter, has with his biological son, Bernard (also called B1), and two of the twenty clones he has created, called B2 and Michael Black. By way of short but incisive exchanges, Salter's offspring, be they biological or clones, question their father's justification for cloning as they struggle to find their own place in a brave new technological world. In this chapter, I show how Churchill undermines male subjectivity and agency by representing Salter's authoritarian standpoint as an insubstantial cultural construct that can be dismantled from within its own ideological foundation.

Moreover, the breakdown of family relationships between Salter and his sons highlights men's inability to reproduce and sustain themselves as a gender without a woman's presence in their lives. The absence of women on stage in Churchill's drama reiterates the chaos that results in a world devoid of maternity. In earlier chapters, I have shown how other women playwrights relied on female communal associations to cement women's roles in scientific, social, and theatre communities. Churchill reverses this trend by showing how Salter privileges the interests of the individual over the common good. She stages men's appropriation of the conception process as a solitary, individual reproduction endeavour motivated by personal hubris. I believe that with the theatrical representation of an ill-fated, all-male cloning experiment, Churchill calls attention to the need for a return of women's voices in the regulation and application of reproductive practices.

When Churchill creates Salter as the sole parent, I also argue that she dramatizes the perils of refusing maternity in a theatrical warning akin to Grimké's and Glaspell's cautionary tales.

The possibility or reality of motherhood cannot be seen physically on stage in Churchill's drama because the figure of the mother is a threat to Salter's authority and to established gender binaries. Komporaly argues that the work of women playwrights "addressing ardent issues – such as the desire for a child in conditions of reduced fertility or disability, as well as the practical challenges of being a parent – appears in tandem with a search for a new dramatic language, stemming from the playwright's desire to expand the boundaries of dramaturgy and experimentation in performance" (166). I propose that Churchill creates this "new dramatic language" through emotional and verbal slippages that occur during the sons' conversations with their father. By studying Churchill's use of language and through her deployment of mimesis, I show how Salter feels threatened by his more articulate offspring, and by his wife who, although never physically seen on stage, is present in the biological composition of each of their children.

While in *A Number* Churchill presents her feminist standpoint through men's voices, as happens when the sons speak about the ethical questions regarding cloning, in *Blood and Ice* Lochhead delivers her feminist perspective on reproductive rights by reinserting the female body on stage. *Blood and Ice* focuses on Mary Shelley's pregnancies, miscarriages, and the deaths of her infant children during the time she was writing *Frankenstein*. In Lochhead's play, the creation of Shelley's canonical novel emerges as a primitive, fictionalized version of ARTs, where a female writer creates a male Doctor Frankenstein who in turn gives birth to another male Creature in his laboratory by a method similar to today's version of cloning. Hence, I contend that *Blood and Ice*, like *A Number*, explores and stages themes of single-gendered creation and refusal of maternity.

It should be noted that although Lochhead's play features a woman protagonist, the playwright does not give Shelley much agency regarding reproductive rights. By dramatizing

Shelley as a woman in shifting pregnant and non-pregnant states, Lochhead implies that Shelley has no control of her own biological reproduction. With no access to birth control, and in danger of losing her husband to other women, Lochhead's Shelley, appears to have no reproductive rights in her marriage. Yet in the end, Lochhead does give Shelley some authority over her social reproduction and definition of self through Shelley's application of her knowledge of science and her skill as an author. Consequently, Lochhead depicts Shelley as a visionary writer who imagined the artificial reproduction of a human being through cells in a science fiction narrative before stem cell research and cloning. Therefore, I believe it is appropriate that *A Number* and *Blood and Ice* close this dissertation as these dramas showcase how women playwrights use theatre to look back at the origins and look forward to the perils of unchecked reproductive practices. Churchill and Lochhead forge the latest, though not last, link in a matriarchal legacy of women's drama about reproductive rights.

6.2 Staging the Reproduction Process Without Women on Stage

The women playwrights mentioned in the previous chapters of my dissertation all chose to deliver their reproductive rights message through a woman's voice regardless her of social standing, race, or career. In *A Number*, Churchill explores the issue of reproductive politics in a drama devoid of women's roles, voices, or presence. Instead, she analyzes the results of cloning attempts undertaken by laboratory technicians who use "a speck" of cells from B1, Salter's original son's body, to create twenty clones (15). I believe Churchill pushes back against this gender onslaught and male appropriation of reproduction in part by showing the fissures and cracks in Salter's illusory and uneasy occupation of the domestic space. At the start of the play, Churchill describes the play's setting in the following terms: "The scene is the same throughout,

it's where Salter lives" (2). This vague acknowledgment and description of a domestic space is part of Churchill's strategy to present an environment that would be both familiar and alien to the audience. By not defining the space as a *home*, Churchill hints that Salter may not know how to create a family space. Churchill hopes the audience will understand the difference between the disastrous nature of male-occupied setting where Salter and his clones clash with, albeit idealized and not always realistic, representations of home as a peaceful environment when the domestic space is created and controlled by women.

Although Salter's living environment is presumed to be a home, the non-specific nature of Churchill's description also calls to mind images of sterile laboratories. In *A Number*, Churchill conjures up images of places filled with activities and data that reflect fact-finding missions in stark opposition to the emotional connections that Salter desperately seeks to establish. In a September 13, 2005 review for *The Washington Post*, Peter Marks describes Churchill's drama as "a family tragedy in a Petri dish" amalgamating the private space of the family with the public space of science (CO1). I argue that when scientists use artificial reproduction technologies, they replace the female womb with a Petri dish, thereby inverting the insemination process from the most private of actions into one that takes place literally under the gaze of a microscope. In the 2004 New York Theatre Workshop's American premiere of Churchill's play, designer Eugene Lee reinforced this clinical view when he "created an interior fashioned after medical operating theatres of the nineteenth century. Lee arranged the audience in seats set on a steep, high-rising slope, looking down on a clean, harshly lighted space, suitable for the performance of autopsies" (Brantley, n. pag.) The performers became specimens under a microscope as the spectators observed and judged the implications of the cloning experiment.

6.3 Salter's Clones as Imperfect Replications of Gender

In *A Number*, Salter claims he wants to use artificial reproduction to create “one just the same” as his original son, B1 (14). Yet his experiment only produces physical duplicates because each of the clones is in fact quite different physiologically from B1. Though he successfully resurrects his original son through cloning, Salter is unable to control the clones’ unease with their own replication. Dion Farquhar, in *The Other Machine*, her study of innovative reproductive technologies, states that in all reinscription “the original term is never simply reproduced and continued. There is always a slippage, a space of and for difference” (38). For Salter, the slippage is a challenge to his control as a parent and to his own place in the world. The more the clones question Salter’s reasons for cloning, the less they are likely to respect him or to want to be a part of the utopic filial bond Salter seeks.

An example of the strained parent-child relationship can be seen in Salter’s talk with one of the clones, Michael Black. Through their stilted conversation, Churchill shows how this clone has very little in common with the original son, or with Salter himself. Salter struggles to find a connection with his offspring by asking him to dig deep into his cloned memory bank, as seen in the following excerpt with Churchill’s original punctuation:

SALTER: I was somehow hoping

MICHAEL: yes

SALTER: further in

MICHAEL: yes

SALTER: just about yourself

MICHAEL: myself

SALTER: yes

MICHAEL: like maybe I'm lying in bed and it's comfortable and then it gets slightly not so comfortable and I move my legs or even turn over and then it's

SALTER: no. (59)

Michael looks like B1 and B2 physically, but he is a hollow shell of Salter's original son, with none of the memories — original or recreated by Salter — that could establish a familial link between him and his father. At the end of the play, Salter has to acknowledge that Michael is only a representation and performance of the original son. The real tragedy in Churchill's drama, however, is that Salter cannot accept that Michael Black as a clone is leading a more successful life than his original son.

Cloning “is not a process of genetic mix, but of genetic duplication. It is not reproduction, but a sort of recycling,” as Lori Andrews argues in her dissection of parental relationships created by this new technology (127). Salter's sons are copies of the original with the same body parts arranged in the same order, but the final product is sometimes a being whose main concern in life is to be seen as an original individual, and not a copy.⁹³ Anne Balsamo questions the troublesome link between the original and copies where the copies are made up of fragmented parts: “When the human body is fractured into organs, fluids, and genetic codes, what happens to gender identity? When the body is fractured into functional parts and molecular codes, where is gender located?” (6). I propose that in *A Number*, gender identity is distinctly male and patriarchal thereby reinforcing the single gender reproduction that takes place in the Genesis

⁹³ Churchill calls attention to this piecing of the body in her 2009 HBO adaptation of her play, where the scenes of Salter talking to his sons are intercut with scenes in a laboratory showing a scientist measuring various anatomical parts of a clone. In these scenes, the clone is never seen in his entirety, or as a whole human being. The audience only sees a foot being measured, a back being prodded, or a head being inspected.

story where God, as the creator of the human race, is socially perceived as male, as a “He” who creates man in “His” own image.

Unfortunately, the single-gendered reproductive experiment replicated in Churchill’s drama does not imply a higher, more advanced process of reproduction, but rather a regression in the evolutionary ladder. In 1803, Erasmus Darwin introduced the term “solitary reproduction” as a primitive form of procreation akin to asexual conception through binary fission. Darwin argued that solitary reproduction happens within some lower forms of plants and insects where the DNA inside the cell replicates itself, moves to two opposite poles, and the cell then splits into two exact copies, in an echo of the cloning process. In sexual reproduction, on the other hand, the DNA of two cells is shared and a new pattern is formed. The unique pattern in turn becomes a possible DNA source for another unique reproduction. Writing on the history of solitary reproduction, Anne Mellor quotes Darwin as saying that “the most perfect order of animals is propagated by sexual intercourse only” (98). Churchill evokes solitary reproduction in her drama where Salter is not interested in reproducing with women, but rather in reproducing himself.

In addition, in *A Number*, Churchill not only addresses the moral dilemma of unchecked single-gendered reproduction, but also the global implications of an unregulated and gender-dominated reproductive rights process. Jay Newton-Small, in an article on the selling sperm abroad which appeared in the April 16, 2012 issue of *Time* magazine, paints a daunting, exploding population landscape where one donor in the United States had sired 70 children, and another in the United Kingdom had 1000 children in the course of thirty years. “Such stories prompted Britain to restrict the number of children a donor can spawn, including his own, to 10. The FDA has no limits on the number of offspring a donor may have, but most banks say they limit men to 25 or 30 children,” says Newton-Small (51). Yet, a donor may make donations at

multiple banks, or in banks overseas where demand for first-world sperm is high, and thus go unnoticed. The ethical quandary arises when society condones and profits from a small number of men spawning children to whom they have little or no connection, as shown by the lack of emotional link between Salter and the latter clones.⁹⁴

Churchill may have been familiar with ethical quandaries surrounding unregulated reproductive practices through the well-publicized cloning experiments carried out by Davor Solter, a developmental biologist at the University of Philadelphia, who spent the 1980s and 1990s researching DNA patterns. Solter published a controversial editorial in *Science* in 1984 arguing that the cloning of mammals was biologically impossible because “mothers, even human mothers, add proteins to their DNA in particular patterns, leaving some genes open and others blocked. Fathers pattern their DNA in a different way. And embryos can develop only if they have DNA with both maternal and paternal patterns,” as narrated by Gina Kolata, in her account of the scientific path to cloning (*Clone* 145). Twelve years later, in light of new scientific discoveries, Solter retracted his comments and in another widely circulated editorial in *Nature* argued that cloning “can no longer be considered impossible; it might be a good idea to start thinking how we are going to make use of such an option” (Solter 25). Since the idea of solitary reproduction in mammals was now a reality, Solter no longer questioned the feasibility, but rather the moral implications of carrying out these experiments.⁹⁵

⁹⁴ Newton-Small also states there is an ambiguously named “Donor Sibling Registry” where donors can contact their offspring, and children sharing the same donor can contact each other, in an eerie replication of Churchill’s drama where B1 hunts down B2 (52).

⁹⁵ Although Solter was a key public figure in the controversial scientific road to creating the first clone, I could find no proof that Churchill may have read about his work. However, the similarity in the names Solter-Salter is worth noting, as is the timeline. Solter acknowledged the viability of cloning and Dolly’s birth in 1996 when Churchill was writing her play.

Churchill's Salter, however, refuses to acknowledge his social responsibility to the son he produced naturally, or to the offspring he cloned. In *Performing Science and the Virtual*, Case argues that Salter "works to absolve himself from his role as a damaged origin — a father caught in the act. The ambivalence this character creates around origins and effects resonates with the new, ungrounded role of the father in the cloning procedure" (160). Though Churchill never makes it clear whether Salter is the scientist behind the experiments, it is worth noting that Michael Black is a mathematician. The paradox is that although math is a more exact and less controversial science than the malleable biology, it is Michael who has managed to create happier, well-adjusted human beings by naturally procreating two children of his own. Michael survives only when he negates his father's role and emulates women's nurturing tactics. This clone becomes a prototype of the new father who chooses to conceive with a woman in a post-cloning world. Michael and his wife produce a boy and a girl recreating a male-female line that acts as a counterpoint to Salter's failed patriarchal experiment. When in the last lines of the play, Salter asks him if he is happy and if he likes his life, Michael responds: "yes I do sorry" (62). Michael apologizes because he knows it is not the answer his father wants to hear, and because his happiness is not of his father's making. While Salter disrupts the social order through his unregulated reproduction, Michael reasserts heterosexual reproduction, and its accompanying gender structures, as the normative procreation process.

Case also notes that Salter marginalizes himself from society by refusing to create a connection with Michael's family. Salter claims no origin and offers no resolution. In *A Number*, Salter does not stop the cloning process, and cannot bring himself to kill the original clone who threatens the success of the experiment. Indeed, Salter is in denial about the genetic legacy he has unleashed on the world. In one of the more emotional speeches of the play, Salter tells B1

that no matter what terrible things he did as a parent, at least he didn't commit infanticide: "I spared you though you were this *disgusting thing* by then anyone in their right mind would have squashed you but I remembered what you'd been like at the beginning and I spared you" (Churchill 51; emphasis added). Yet, Churchill shows Salter's original son, committing fratricide and suicide when B1 who is a direct carrier of Salter's genes, kills B2 and then kills himself. Churchill does not give Salter absolution for the role he plays in the killings since Salter was the creator of B1, the murderous offspring. Instead, Churchill highlights the undeniable and indissoluble patriarchal legacy between them in one of the most harrowing scenes of the play when Salter does not recognize B1. Salter thinks the son he is greeting at the door is B2 and welcomes him with open arms. B1, used to Salter's rejection, realizes what has happened and forces Salter to "look in my eyes. No, keep looking. Look" (34). B1 is in fact telling Salter to look into a reflection of his own failings as procreator.

Following the failure of Salter's cloning experiment, his sons try to force him face the consequences of male appropriation of the reproductive process. Salter deflects their accusations by telling B2 to focus on his rights as a clone to sue those responsible for its failure. Salter argues that scientists "have stolen from you and you should get your rights," "they've taken a person from you," and "they've damaged your uniqueness, weakened your identity" (Churchill 14-15). What are a clone's rights in Salter's reproductive situation? Is the clone the property of the cloned individual? Is he/she just a resource for organ harvesting? Does he/she have the same rights as the original? The critical questions are where do the legal rights of the clone begin and end, and what is the clone's filial relationship to the original? A 2001 article in *Time* magazine approached this conundrum by asking: "If a woman gives birth to her own clone, is the child her daughter or her sister?" (Gibbs n. pag.). Leon Kass, a University of Chicago bioethicist who

would be part of George Bush's advisory panel on stem cell research, critiqued the lack of regulation on cloning where "everyone thinks about cloning from the point of view of the parents. No one looks at it from the point of view of the clone" (Gibbs n. pag.). Churchill takes up this dilemma from the opening line in her play when B2 repeats the phrase: "A number," which can refer to his name, his position as one of many on a Petri dish, as well as his unknown rights with regards to his father and to other clones (10). Churchill's play is indeed about visualizing the idea of an intangible number, which could imply both one and many. B2 needs to feel that he is *the* "one," while Salter's needs to mask the truth of the clone's true origin (11). There is a continuous slippage of identity as parent and children struggle to find their place in the new cloning hierarchy.

In *A Number*, cloning also embodies the menace of mimesis, an "almost the same, but not quite" imitation of the original, as defined by Homi Bhabha in his theory of postcolonial mimicry (381). According to Bhabha, mimicry becomes a "double vision, which in disclosing the ambivalence of colonial discourses also disrupts its authority" (383). Churchill explores challenging established authority when she adds one scene at the end of her HBO television adaptation of *A Number*. Instead of ending her drama with Salter and Michael's conversation as she does in the stage version, Churchill shows Salter walking into a large library where he meets up with the nineteen cloned versions of his son. The clones in the television version are distinctive from each other only in terms of haircuts and costumes. As HBO programming targets audiences who expect to be intellectually challenged and engaged, a visual rendition of cloning would not have been needed, so the addition of this scene is a curious dramaturgical choice. I believe Churchill's intent was not to visually illustrate cloning, but rather to reinstate Salter's authority as the maker, and as the *unique* figure among the clones. By placing him in a

room where everyone else is the same, Churchill defines Salter as the *other*, the original, and the one who carries and controls the difference.

It is also noteworthy that in a world of clones, B1, as the original son, is also seen as the outsider. He is an unwanted offspring who did not live up to his father's expectations. Salter discards B1, emotionally if not physically, and takes the Frankenstein experiment one step further by remaking the discarded son over and over again, until a satisfactory version of the original emerges.⁹⁶ Furthermore, when Salter cannot establish a natural connection with his original or cloned sons, he resorts to misguided efforts of mimicry. To replicate an imagined and idealized father-son relationship, Salter tries to anticipate what his offspring may be thinking. He adapts his own speech to mimic and reflect what the clones are saying, as in the following exchange:

B2: Some time before I was born there was

SALTER: another son, yes a first

B2: who what, who died

SALTER: who died, yes. (20)

Earlier in this conversation, Salter had been lying to B2 making him believe he was the original son. When B2 realizes he is only a clone, Salter is forced to change his story and discourse.

Salter's rhetoric becomes a key dramatic and narrative component of Churchill's drama. In *A Number*, I believe Salter never calls his sons by name because he cannot bring himself to publicly acknowledge his genetic link. Before DNA testing, men's claim to paternity depended

⁹⁶ In the *Frankenstein* novel, Dr. Frankenstein's brother William dies at the hands of the Creature he has created. I believe Churchill may be revisioning this murder in *A Number* when she has B2, Salter's favourite clone, die at the hand of his genetic "brother," B1.

on the woman's *word* that he was the father. The absence of women in Churchill's drama means Salter can only relate to their — Salter and his wife's — offspring through a chaotic, desperate, and often fragmented language. Without his wife, Salter cannot find the right words, the right formula to produce a viable and desirable filial relationship. Salter's clones also depend on rhetoric to recreate themselves as both semblances and refusals of the original. Each clone, though in theory an exact copy of the original, defines himself as an original when he speaks. Reviewer Ben Brantley qualifies this visual/verbal collision in Churchill's play, as moments when "the same images bleed into an anything-but-classic portrait that portends a scary, brave new family for which the rules have yet to be written" (n. pag.) Michael Black, for example, appears disjointed to Salter who cannot connect with this clone who looks like his offspring, but does not behave or speak like B1 or B2.

From Churchill's perspective, the clones stand in a liminal mimetic space, where discourse and imitation of the other does not necessary translate into social acceptance. Women playwrights struggling for recognition and space in a male-dominated theatre were all too familiar with this marginalized standpoint. In Glaspell's *The Verge*, Claire's husband, daughter, and lover could not accept nor visualize Claire as both a woman and as a scientist. Claire, in turn, could not find the words to bridge the social gap. I believe women's absence in Churchill's play represents a veiled social anxiety regarding reproductive rights and women who set out to control and rewrite the rules of reproduction. As the woman behind the curtain, Churchill's voice speaks through her all-male cast in the ultimate act of gender ventriloquism. By blending her voice with the characters' discourse, and the socio-political ideas circulating at the time, Churchill not only animates the male voices, but also deliberately deploys these voices as vehicles for feminist ideology.

Churchill roots her feminist standpoint on reproductive rights in *A Number* on her representation of the female womb as a site for feminist power. In her play, the misfit offspring who emerge from technological wombs prove that neither a woman's womb, nor a woman's nurturing influence can be replicated. B1 complains that when he was young, he cried in the night in fear, but no one came to console him. His father's lack of attention created B1's resentful nature. The implication is that the mother, had she lived, would have been a calming presence, and one which could have thwarted the growth of the child's vindictive streak.⁹⁷ Churchill intimates the influential power that a woman could have had on Salter's sons, when Salter mentions that B1's mother was killed by a train. Salter's unconscious desire to eliminate and control any trace of female presence is evident in the phallic imagery associated with an oncoming train. In Salter's world, a woman on stage represents a challenge to the power of his authority because she possesses a natural reproductive system which cannot be replicated by man. Moreover, Salter's offspring refuse to follow Salter's life script, and spout Churchill's feminist rhetoric instead.

6.4 Re-inserting the Female/Feminist Gene

By retelling the story of Mary Shelley's natural and literary procreations in *Blood and Ice*, Lochhead uses the distorted female body as a site to demand and command attention for women's reproductive rights. She harnesses the transgressive duality of a pregnant woman's body in performance. In her lifetime, Mary Shelley had two miscarriages, gave birth to two daughters who died in infancy, and to a son, William, who died when he was three and a half

⁹⁷ Lill hints at a similar causality in *Chimera* when Roy can only find himself when he begins looking at his past through the eyes of the women in his life. Roy is only able to grow and have sustainable relationships with those around him when he reattaches himself to his womb and childhood memories.

years old while she was writing *Frankenstein*. Lochhead sets her play in the midst of these overlapping births and deaths with Shelley as the pivotal axis who describes these losses in anguished terms when she mourns for William: “While I still grieved for my baby girl, I had to watch you sicken, some fever, no one knew the cause of it. I had to watch you burn and freeze and die in my arms, only nine months after Clara! Once I was a mother. Now I was a mother no more” (48). Shelley’s body changes from pregnant to non-pregnant with her miscarriages, moving from motherhood to non-motherhood. She is forever shifting from representing two people with her pregnant body, to one person, to two again throughout the play. Writing about monstrous motherhood, Barbara Almond takes gender appropriation one step further when she adds that “Mary Shelley is Frankenstein’s creature; he is the monster within her” (58). I believe that as a pregnant woman, Shelley was both Creator and Creature embodied in one person, a feat of double positioning that could not be accomplished by any man.

Since men cannot reproduce, a pregnant woman represents an unknown entity. She harbours a hidden creature who can emerge as human or monster. Heather Latimer, writing on performances of reproduction, notes that “since women’s bodies change shape during pregnancy, they have the ability to simultaneously be one and more than one and are therefore a threat to a world of boundaries and individuation. . . . Women are therefore seen as anomalous and deviant vis-à-vis the phallic norm and a sign of difference or otherness” (81). The menace of this shared space can be understood through Teratology, the science of monsters. The body of a monster was read as “signpost at the crossroads of the supernatural with the earthly,” according to Rosi Braidotti’s writings on feminism and the history of monsters (136). The mother’s body then

becomes the carrier and harbinger of divine intervention as she gestates and gives birth to this in-between creature, the monster.⁹⁸

The alignment between embryo and monster can be seen in the introduction to *Frankenstein*. When Shelley commands her “hideous progeny [to] go forth and prosper,” she amalgamates her own creative endeavour with the female birthing process (xxvi). Lochhead revises this conflation between the art of writing and the reproductive process in the first scene of *Blood and Ice* when the Creature addresses Frankenstein with words taken directly from the novel. Lochhead has Shelley respond taking over the role of Frankenstein thereby asking audiences to acknowledge Shelley’s authority as both author of the novel and maker of the Creature:

CREATURE: Frankenstein, why did *you* make me?

MARY: Well, it wasn’t for the money anyway. Nor for the wager, or the challenge of the competition. (Lochhead 5; emphasis added)

The Creature continues to address Shelley as Frankenstein asking her to “tell me about the night you made me, Frankenstein” (5). Lochhead does not allow a male Frankenstein to appear on stage to reinforce Shelley’s agency as sole creator of human and fictional offspring. Lochhead further conflates this authority through subversive representations of maternity. According to

⁹⁸ The association between monsters and the female has been best exemplified in Ridley Scott’s *Alien* tetralogy, which came out in 1979, 1986, 1992, and 1997, roughly at the same time as the dramas studied in these last three chapters. While movies and their sequels receive more financial investment and one could argue popular dissemination than dramas, the fact that this action franchise addresses the same reproductive rights issues as the plays is a sign of the public’s interest in these ideas and in this feminist revision. All four films pivot around Ripley, a heroine who battles against a female alien’s unchecked reproduction. Throughout the series, Ripley is the victim of artificial insemination, stem cell research and, in the last film, cloning by men and the alien creature. Scientists take cells from Ripley’s body to give “the gift of a reproductive system” to an alien female creature, so that she may emulate Ripley’s natural reproduction (*Alien: Resurrection*). In an eerie reversal of gender power, the alien’s offspring kills its mother at birth and seeks Ripley out as its “natural” mother. One of the most redeeming qualities of this franchise is that the survival of the human race is predicated on the decisions made by a woman, and in the quasi-maternal alliances she establishes with others.

Margaret Homans and her study on links between monsters and the maternal, “it is neither the visionary male imagination alone that Mary Shelley protests, then, nor childbirth itself, but the circumvention of the maternal creation of new beings by the narcissistic creations of male desire” (393). Like Churchill who challenges Salter’s selfish reasons for appropriating the reproductive process, Shelley also calls attention to the hidden agendas behind enforced procreation and women’s submissive roles within the reproductive process.

Lochhead subverts the popular image of a mother as weak and passive from the start of her play. Although she begins by showing Shelley mourning the loss of her firstborn, Lochhead quickly negates the image of the *mater dolorosa* by having Shelley see herself as a scientist with the power to reanimate her child. Shelley tells the audience she imagines her hands touched her child, “rubbed it before the fire and it lived!” in an echo of Frankenstein’s spark of life that animates the Creature made up of dead body parts (4). By appropriating multiple roles as a homemaker, wife, mother, and writer, Lochhead’s Shelley is a woman ambivalent with predicated female roles. As the daughter of Mary Wollstonecraft, Shelley inherits a matriarchal, feminist legacy and is constantly straining against nineteenth century gender constraints and social conventions.

Furthermore, Shelley’s reproductive system allows her to be someone who can transition from one contained or defined state into another, during and after pregnancy. Braidotti persuasively argues that, “the female pregnant body is posited both as a protective filter and as conductor or highly sensitive conveyor of impressions, shocks and emotions. It is both a ‘neutral’ and a somewhat ‘electrical body’” (149). During Shelley’s time, men were wary of female-centered transmissions of ideas, which they believed were bred in a woman’s visions – her dreams, her nightmares, and her witnessing of traumatic events that occurred around her when

she was pregnant. Braidotti talks of studies where women were cautioned against reading during pregnancy because it could “inflamm[e] their inflammable imagination” (147). Some theories went as far as to say that women who viewed demonstrations, public executions or rallies gave birth to monstrous or deformed offspring. In the eighteenth century, men believed women should be confined to secluded environments to avoid contaminating those around them with the products of their imaginations.

Lochhead links the theory of a woman’s body as a conductor for both life and creativity through Shelley’s struggle to come up with a story during the contest that pitted her creative skills against Percy’s and Byron’s efforts: “I did not want to write you anyway. Nothing came to me, no ideas. I was empty. Everybody was engaged on his creation, except me” (28). In her own introduction to the novel, Shelley relates the torturous inquiry that she underwent every morning, when the men would ask: “Have you thought of a story?” (23), and “each morning I was forced to reply with a mortifying negative” (23). The discourse is reminiscent of the one used by society to pester women who are struggling to become pregnant. Shelley’s confidence in her abilities as a writer must have also been eroded by this daily questioning, as she works to merge female creativity with female reproduction and fails to produce an offspring until she dreams up her novel, *Frankenstein*.

When Shelley wrote a story on reproductive practices, she opened a public discussion on reproduction that included women as active rather than passive participants. Shelley’s focus on the birth process in her novel had a purpose; Mellor notes that Shelley “illuminates for a male readership hitherto unpublished female anxieties, fears, and concerns about the birth process and its consequences. At the same time, her story reassures a female audience that such fears are shared by other women” (41). Like Stopes who used her own need of sexual education as an

autobiographical credential to market sexual education manuals, Shelley transformed her personal experiences with pregnancy and loss into a cautionary tale for other women. Case argues that the “reproductive traffic among females introduces an order of reproduction or representation outside the confines of Plato’s or Christianity’s, or Derrida’s or Lacan’s structural dependency upon the Father in the role of progenitor” (159). Neither Shelley’s narrative nor Lochhead’s representation are as overtly didactic as Stopes’s work, but they do communicate the perils and apprehensions surrounding pregnancy and female authority in the nineteenth century and today.

In fact, Lochhead conveys and reiterates some of these reproductive concerns in *Blood and Ice*. After enduring yet another miscarriage, Shelley tells Percy that she does not want to be pregnant again. “I have lost my last. Seven years, Shelley. I’ve put three tiny coffins in the earth, lost two unborn babies in the womb. Our union trails a cortège of dead infants in its wake,” says the distraught mother (61). Mrs. Flinker in Stopes’s *Our Ostriches* and Malinda in Burrill’s *They That Sit in Darkness* expressed similar views about enforced reproduction. They were all overwhelmed mothers who needed birth control to curtail an unchecked and often deadly reproduction. When Shelley refuses to procreate with Percy, Lochhead suggests the poet then turns to other women to satisfy his desires. The situation echoed a general fear expressed by the women who sent letters to Stopes and Sanger, pleading for birth control information as a way to keep their husbands at home. Lochhead and Shelley call attention to the community of women readers whose voices need to be heard using writing as a subversive tool for activism.

Within these alliances, women also created an inclusive space where they could gestate feminist ideas. Evelyn Fox Keller describes life as “the secret of women” where “secrets function to articulate a boundary: an interior not visible to outsiders, the demarcation of a

separate domain, a sphere of autonomous power” (178). Lochhead suggests this inside/outside gendered space of reproductive knowledge when Shelley tells her sister that “before William was born, when I was first pregnant, with my little girl that died . . . he [Percy] used to hold the great globe of my belly as if it were the whole world, and press his face against it (42). Shelley’s pregnant form is at once an image of possession and of impotence, as Percy struggles to see into a woman’s womb to understand the experience of being pregnant.

In Lochhead’s drama, Shelley’s appropriation of feminist matriarchal agency has some of the elements of contemporary reproductive experiments, like the 1997 cloning of Dolly the sheep. Describing this milestone in assisted reproductive technologies, Case calls attention to a historical and genetic link between female cells throughout this cloning process where

using cells from an adult sheep’s mammary glands, the scientists grew a tissue culture, then injected the nucleus from one of those cells into an oocyte, or unfertilized egg, zapped it with a small jolt of electricity and planted it in the womb of a surrogate mother. Dolly’s DNA matched exactly that of the mammary cells, making her a cloned copy of the donor ewe. (159)

Case notes that the cloning process is carried out using female organs, and a surrogate female womb. Moreover, the practice of “zapping” an unfertilized egg is reminiscent of Shelley’s artificial reproduction scenario where the Creature in *Frankenstein* was also brought to life with a jolt of electricity.

It should also be noted that neither Lochhead’s play, nor Shelley’s novel, divulge the mechanics of artificial reproduction. The secrecy surrounding the science needed to conceive keeps the reproductive process contained within the realm of the feminine, in the imagination of women playwrights and writers. Examining the evolution of monsters in literature, Marie-Hélène

Huet argues that Shelley's reluctance to share the technical details was not due to her lack of scientific knowledge — which did not make sense given her worldly education — but rather “reflects the fact that the generation of monsters remains Nature's ultimate secret, never to be shared and impossible to reproduce,” like women's wombs and their reproductive powers (144). In *Blood and Ice*, Shelley's mind is the womb that conceives and gestates her “hideous progeny,” which she then unleashes on society through her writing.

6.5 Women's Theatrical Legacy

Latimer contends that just as Shelley's novel “was written at a time where what it meant to be a ‘man’ was rapidly changing through the industrial revolution, our own political situation questions what it meant to be a ‘human’ in the wake of new scientific and reproductive technologies” (117). I argue that with these plays, women playwrights disputed what it meant to be a woman, a woman writing about science, when science was and continues to be increasingly technological and patriarchal. Diamond in *Unmaking Mimesis* states that “in the woman-authored text . . . the gestic moment would mark both a convergence of social actions and attitudes, and the gendered history of that convergence” (57). These gestic intersections are evident in the subgenre of reproductive rights dramas through the multiple roles taken on by women playwrights. Stopes was a scientist and founder of birth control clinics; Wandor was a journalist, critic, and historian; Lill was a legislator and a journalist; and Glaspell was one of the first feminist playwrights whose work was commercially produced. For the past thirty years,

Lochhead has had high-profile advisory roles in Scottish civil society on issues of primary and secondary education, and was named the National Poet for Scotland in 2011.⁹⁹

Churchill in turn is regarded in the United Kingdom as a cultural icon. She has long been known for her collaborative work with theatre groups like the Monstrous Regiment Theatre Company, a consciousness-raising, radical feminist theatre company founded in the 1970s, whose name is associated with the way activist women were perceived during the suffragette movement. Churchill also wrote *Vinegar Tom* (1972), a play about the persecution of women during witchcraft trials and the social ostracizing of women who were different from the norm for this theatre company. Since then, Churchill's aim "to make those larger connections is one that resonates with the political impulse behind and in her plays: often to see how the personal, marginalized lives of ordinary men and especially women are situated in an epic damaged and damaging economy of an increasingly globalized capitalism," according to Elaine Aston in *The Cambridge Companion to Caryl Churchill* (147). Thus, *A Number*, appearing a few years after the cloning of the first mammal in 1997, and while the National Health Institute was in the public eye for its policies on embryo rights, should be acknowledged as a representation of the impact of these events on women's rights.

Furthermore, Aston, in a 2013 article on Churchill's influence on politics, argues that Churchill's work and its focus on Brechtian dramaturgy, "encompassed a temporary and temporal accommodation of that which is not yet but which, in the space of performance, it is possible to imagine ourselves closer to seeing, feeling, or achieving" ("But Not That" 150).

⁹⁹ Adrienne Scullion, in her biographical annotations to a retrospective of Lochhead's work, describes how the playwright "adopts a classic feminist strategy of retelling history from women's viewpoints and uses a feminist dramaturgy to reimagine both history and the history play" (120). Some of Lochhead's most renowned plays, such as *Mary, Queen of Scots Got Her Head Chopped Off* (1987), follow this revisionist history.

Churchill's drama reminds theatre practitioners that "while theatre is designed to make something happen *for* the audience, something should also, in that process, happen *to* the audience," according to Aston ("But Not That" 150; emphasis in the original). The playwrights studied in this dissertation all hoped to retrain their audiences to see the theatregoing experience as an act that could be transmuted into social activism. These women artists struggled to create social awareness by staging ideas germinated in feminist circles and then circulated via theatre to a wider audience.¹⁰⁰ In addition, these women playwrights reasserted themselves as mediators and guides in the reproduction process, by literally taking over the role of scientists, progenitors, and deliverers of offspring — be they humans, chimeras, clones, or monsters — into the world. The plays featured in this chapter, and in this project as a whole, have showcased how women's texts about reproduction have weathered critical maelstroms to evolve from marginalized "hideous progeny" — in Shelley's conflicted and conflictive definition — into canonical texts, now worthy of personal and public recognition in literary, educational and theatrical contexts.

¹⁰⁰ In *Chimera*, Lill gives Nell, and indirectly herself, final power as creator and author of the narrative. When Roy uses the words he has heard from Nell, he is reiterating her role as gestator of the cyclical narrative. Roy says Lill's drama is "the story. My story, our story, out of the drawer at last" (96). Furthermore, when Roy closes the play by marveling at "how infinitely complex and close fitting are the mutual relations of all organic beings to each other," he is evoking the power of female inclusiveness over male divisiveness and alienation of the self (96).

Conclusion

A woman's future in her lifetime always contains the issue of whether or not she will use her eggs to become a mother. What this might mean is the matter of human drama, both on stage and off.

— Anna Furse, *Performing in Glass: Reproduction, Technology, Performance and the Bio-Spectacular* (2006)

My research began with a need to address an endemic marginalization of women's work in the theatre where as Jill Dolan argues, women's drama emerges every few years as "a kind of discovered species" ("Making a Spectacle" 562). I expanded on Dolan's argument by noting that if women playwrights and their work had to be "discovered", their work could not be appreciated as part of a continuous dramatic history. Pioneering theatre historians, like Elaine Aston, argue that "understanding the cultural and material conditions of theatre past (and present) is central to a feminist re-framing of theatre history, which has its own questions to ask about how and why women's work has been 'hidden' or marginalized" (*Feminism & Theatre* 2). In my dissertation, I strived to show how the work of women playwrights can achieve more public and critical recognition through a study of a shared thematic history around reproductive rights. When Anna Furse describes a woman's destiny as depending on "the issue of whether or not she will use her eggs to become a mother," she is calling attention to a woman's power to control her future and social standing (149). A woman's potential maternity, her *choice* to reproduce, carries transformative power for both the individual and for the female gender as a whole. Furse describes female authority in reproductive terms where "a baby girl carries all the eggs she will ever need in a lifetime inside her ovaries. And inside each of these eggs is the genetic material which, if fertilized, could make another baby girl, who contains the potential future of another

baby (girl) inside her *ad infinitum*” (149; emphasis in the original). By harbouring a natural ability to reproduce others like her; the woman on stage becomes a symbol of female influence over the future of humanity. The plays examined in my dissertation thus show how women extend control over natural and artificial reproduction processes to create new models of motherhood and new sites of authority for female voices. The possibility of social transformation inherent in biological or assisted reproduction is a rich source of scholarship for now and the future. Some of these areas for fertile scholarship are the representation of childless women as advocates for reproductive rights, the innovations of didactic science theatre, the advantages of engaging reproductive rights drama with other media, and the exploration of performance-based studies when applied to revivals.

One of the paradoxical issues that emerged in the application of this female agency was that women playwrights often gave authorial voice and feminist agency not to the woman who desired motherhood or who was already a mother, but instead to the childless woman who was sometimes ambivalent about maternity. In the Modern period plays, Stopes’s Evadne, Glaspell’s Nora and Diantha, and Burrill’s Lindy are child-free protagonists who nevertheless advocate for the rights of mothers who cannot access birth control. Playwrights writing in the latter part of the twentieth century also embrace this theatrical choice by voicing their reproductive politics through women characters who are not yet mothers, such as Wandor’s Mary, Loomer’s Miranda, and Medley’s Kalima. A significant point of commonality in these representations is that these women always model feminist action because as potential mothers, they have vested interests in the outcomes of reproductive rights legislation. As a result, women playwrights present these heroines as either witnesses to advocacy, or as activists seeking to convert other women to the cause. When these protagonists create, perform, and deliver a reproductive rights message,

regardless of their maternity status, they also reinforce the inclusive and egalitarian nature of this feminist issue.

As seen above, and throughout my dissertation, women playwrights embraced the multiple advantages associated with staging work that had reproductive rights as a central theme. Male playwrights, on the other hand, have shown little interest on writing publicly on the subject. The most notable practitioner to address procreation practices, since Lawrence Langner's superficial attempt at critiquing birth control in *Wedded* at the start of the twentieth century, has been scientist Carl Djerassi. He has transformed his self-proclaimed "science-in-fiction" novels about in-vitro fertilization into "science-in-theatre" projects like *An Immaculate Misconception* in 2000 (x). Originally, Djerassi had a strong link to the birth control movement, having been at the helm of the team that invented the Pill in the 1960s. Yet, his involvement with contraception issues since then has been mostly academic, definitely not political, and only marginally theatrical. *An Immaculate Misconception* played off-Broadway at Primary Stages for a limited ten-performance run in October 2001. Like Langner's work, Djerassi's drama was billed as a "comedy" where a woman scientist uses ICSI (Intracytoplasmic sperm injection) to fertilize her frozen eggs with her married lover's sperm without his consent. Throughout the play, Djerassi deployed elements of didactic theatre, such as power points and clips from real life fertility experiments. He also wrote two other companion pieces: *ICSI: A Pedagogic Wordplay for Two Voices with Audiovisuals* (2002) and *Taboos: A Play in Two Acts* (2006), which once again played for limited runs in fringe or academic venues.

It should be noted that there is a point of commonality between Djerassi's work and Stopes's plays in their shared intent to bring science to theatre audiences. Indeed Djerassi confesses that "one of his objectives as a scientist-turned-literary-author is to smuggle scientific

issues into the minds of an uninterested or even antagonistic public, by means of the most dialogic form of literature, drama” (Preface, *Sex* vii). Through his dramatic text, Djerassi championed the cause of educational theatre by stating that “didactic is a dirty word in theatre circles and it shouldn’t be. Didactic means to inform and amuse. The two are not mutually exclusive” (Horwitz 7). Djerassi’s comment echoes the original purpose of Glaspell’s Provincetown Players to give Broadway audiences intelligent and entertaining theatre fare. As a university professor, Djerassi wrote plays to disseminate his scientific knowledge. There are other twenty-first century men and women playwrights who also play with the idea of science as theatre. French director Jean-François Peyret works with neurobiologist Alain Prochiantz to stage *Ex Vivo/In Vitro* (2011), a performance piece sponsored by the French Ministry of Culture to bring to light issues concerning in vitro fertilization. Anna Furse received funding from health agencies to stage *Yerma’s Eggs* (2003), another performance piece that included workshops on infertility, and that like *Orchids*, involved post-performance discussions with the audience. Theatre continues to provide a space to instruct, clarify, and debate complex and current scientific concepts.

It should be noted that the approach to the methodology applied when using theatre as an educational tool can often differ depending on the playwright. Like Langner before him, Djerassi also took up playwriting as a creative exercise with no social agenda or interest in challenging gender structures. Moreover, while Djerassi admits that scientific research is for him a “collegial activity” where the research of one person depends on the research of another, he also contends that “writing is solitary” because “in its final form, the production – thanks to the contributions of dramaturg, actors, and director – usually has little resemblance to the playwright’s original piece”(Horwitz 7). This solitary method of playwriting is in marked contrast to the collaborative

work undertaken by many of the women playwrights discussed in my project. Glaspell worked within the nurturing, creative environment of The Provincetown Players; Wandor wrote for The Gay Sweatshop, an artists' collective; and Churchill collaborated with the Joint Stock Theatre Company and *Monstrous Regiment*.

When women's drama addresses reproductive rights, it also often reveals an intertextual engagement between theatre and other media. These representations of collaborative work merit further exploration in future scholarship. The relationship between theatre and other genres can be seen in Stopes's texts where she used *Vectia* and *Our Ostriches* to promote her sex education manuals and birth control clinics. Stopes, Wandor, and Lill also introduced popular literature, such as the work of Havelock Ellis, Adrienne Rich, and Charles Darwin into their dramas to highlight the timeliness of their work. The impact of these cultural exchanges can be more clearly appreciated in the relationship between the early birth control plays and the short films that told the same stories. When film became popular at the start of the twentieth century, early documentaries and fictionalized narratives of birth control dilemmas were produced to support information that appeared in periodicals like Sanger's *Birth Control Review*. Lois Weber, for example, produced two films: *Shall the Parents Decide?* (1916) and *The Hand that Rocks the Cradle* (1917) on reproductive rights as propaganda for Sanger's activist endeavours. Sanger herself created an autobiographical documentary, *Birth Control*, in 1917 to promote her cause. These films complemented and often illustrated the dramatic narratives featured in Sanger's journal.

A more recent example of this multidisciplinary relationship can be found in the work of Polish playwright Anna Wakulik who recalls using books and films as major sources for *A Time to Reap*, a reproductive rights drama that premiered at The Royal Court Theatre on February 22,

2013. To bolster her dramatic argument, she introduced ideas from *Underground Women's State* (2009), a documentary by Claudia Snochowska-Gonzalez, and the film's companion book *How is Your Hypocrisy* into her drama. Wakulik also incorporated information from Tadeusz Boy-Żelénski's essays "The Hell of Women" published in 1931 but still relevant today because as the Polish playwright argues "the discussion on women's rights and family life started a long time ago in Poland and I don't think it's moved on" (Wakulik n. pag.) Thus, *A Time to Reap* becomes a palimpsest layered with all the traces of the activist work — in dramatic, documentary or literary form — that came before it.¹⁰¹

For Wakulik and other non-British or -American playwrights, reproductive rights dramas are both a passport and model to follow in their journey to bring their work to audiences at home and abroad. My dissertation focused on American and British playwrights because the feminist movements originated in both countries. Yet, feminism has had a ripple effect and spread globally responding to the circumstances and needs of each country, and in turn questioning some of the premises of the original movement. Therefore, the work of playwrights addressing the impact of reproductive rights and feminism all over the world merits future study, particularly as it makes its way to Western venues. Indian playwright Sharmila Chauhan, for instance, was a graduate of the Royal Court's Theatre program who premiered a reproductive rights drama, *The Husbands*, in 2014 at the Soho Theatre in London. In an interview about her

¹⁰¹ In the twenty-first century, the immediacy of television makes this mass medium a more accurate marker of circulating public interests. The popular television series *Law & Order: Special Victims Unit*, which bills itself as presenting crimes taken from the headlines, had no less than three shows on questionable conception practices. "Waste," about harvesting stem cells aired on November 15, 2002; "Birthright," a show about stolen embryos, premiered on September 21, 2004; and "Design," an episode dealing with the manipulation of in-vitro fertilization, went on the air on September 27, 2005. *A Number* (2002), *Relativity* (2006), and *Chimera* (2007) were written and premiered within the same five year span thus also asserting their roles as dramas that responded to current reproductive rights issues.

play, Chauhan notes a shared global interest in feminist rights by arguing that her work “explores the very current issue of female genocide in Asia and also its repercussions. However — in its imagining of a matriarchal society — it also explores female sexuality, power and the role of women — all ideas which are very pertinent to the West today” (Chauhan n. pag.). Indian playwright Manjula Padmanabhan’s *Harvest* (2003) premiered in LaMaMa in New York. The play addressed the ethical issues that emerge when organ donation becomes organ harvesting. Showcasing the work of women playwrights, like Wakulik, Chauhan, and Padmanabhan on Western stages allows audiences to appreciate a wider range of reproductive rights concerns, which in turn may lead to finding points of commonality for global feminist activism.

In developing countries dealing with strong religious opposition and outbreaks of AIDS, access to contraception continues to be a contentious issue, as noted in the 2011 World Contraceptive Use Report issued by the United Nations, which states that in forty-six developing countries, located mostly in Sub-Saharan Africa, Melanesia, Micronesia, Polynesia, only forty percent of women have access to contraception (UN, Dept. of Economic and Social Affairs n. pag.) Conversely, developed countries in North America have the highest prevalence of contraceptive practices (78%), followed closely by Europe (73%). It is nevertheless encouraging that “contraceptive prevalence has increased by more than half a percentage point per year since 2000” in developing countries (UN, Dept. of Economic and Social Affairs n. pag.) Moreover, at the 2005 World Summit, leaders from all over the world committed to “achieving universal access to reproductive health by 2015” (UN, Gen. Assembly Res. 60/1, 57g). Therefore, although the birth control narratives by Stopes, Burrill, Grimké may be judged as period pieces if performed today for Western audiences, the same plays can be highly relevant when staged in other global settings.

Thus reproductive rights becomes a lens through which it is possible to see and create a “mapping of new [histories]” as predicted by Gale and Bush-Bailey (Overview 2). An example of mapping as theatrical practice occurred when Glaspell’s *Chains of Dew* was revived by the Orange Tree theatre company in 2008. Critics attending this production looked beyond the dated theme to rescue the seething anger that came through in Glaspell’s dialogue. Contemporary audiences could relate to the frustrated efforts of feminists Diantha and Nora, and their resentment towards a patriarchal status quo. Twenty-first century Western women in the audience may not have had to fight to access birth control as Glaspell’s heroines did, but they could still identify with the protagonists’ activist endeavour, and in turn translate it into contemporary feminist debates.

Aston highlights the need for these crossover conversations in her most recent work, *A Good Night Out for the Girls: Popular Feminisms in Contemporary Theatre and Performance* (2012), by pointing out that “where and when we identify political potential in the works and genres studied is not necessarily or solely a matter of the productions themselves but, crucially, is consequent upon the complex interactions between locations, contexts, issues, sensibilities and audiences” (10). I have strived to address the performance aspects of plays by Stopes, Glaspell, Medley, Lill, and Churchill by using some of the critical reviews and scholarship available. Since my work addressed the premiere of the plays, there is little information on audience reception to allow for a more nuanced performance-informed scholarship. However, since many of the plays have been revived, and continue to be seen on global stages, studying these revivals could be fruitful area for a future performance-based study. When Wolff looks at Glaspell’s *The Verge*, she argues that Glaspell is encouraging “an ongoing participation in the creation of meaning — a reciprocity between audience and performer” (140). This intersection is worthy of

further study because it is a site for cultural revision. In her seminar work on theatre audiences, Susan Bennett notes the importance of studying the live experience of theatre because “cultural systems, individual horizons of expectations, and accepted theatrical conventions all activate the decoding process for a specific production, but, in turn, the direct experience of that production feeds back to revise a spectator’s expectations, to establish or challenge conventions, and, occasionally, to reform the boundaries of culture” (207). Performance studies can therefore enhance the understanding of the complex set of cultural factors at play during the staging and production of women’s drama to gauge public attitudes and responses to women’s work, which can in turn be used as guidelines for future theatrical endeavours.

When women on stage narrate, challenge, and take control of the reproductive process, they are being active contributors to public policies, and role models for future generations of legislators, activists, scientists, and playwrights. Reproductive rights drama can also become an ideal praxis for feminist theory because as Aston and Harris note, feminism has always been a “self-reflexive. . . evolving ‘body’ of political ideas and impulses” (“Feminist Futures” 3; emphasis in the original). Moreover, when these stagings illustrate a reciprocal engagement between theatrical and activist objectives, the emergent dialectic relationship can also offer theoretical resolutions to real-life problems. Shepherd-Barr notes that when playwrights incorporate science in their work they are “continuing to do what all great dramatic art has done: to frame difficult and important questions in an accessible and vivid manner, and allow the audience to draw its own conclusions as to the possible answers” (51). Women’s drama can imagine and stage practical applications of legislative measures surrounding reproductive rights to gauge the impact and consequences of these potential scenarios. Pamela Cobrin defines this dramatic leap as “creationary mimesis” whereby characters on stage perform ideas or ideals that

have not yet been applied or tested in real life (18). Since creationary mimesis suggests that “life could imitate theatre,” then feminist theatre becomes a proactive rather than reactive force for change (18). I see the plays outlined in my dissertation as testing sites and political forums for emerging political debates in a manner that is — like the reproduction process itself — imaginative and regenerative. By staging and maintaining a women-centered approach to reproductive rights, feminist playwrights ensure that women’s drama plays a significant role in the evolution of the as yet unknown, but always interwoven, future of women’s rights and theatre.

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