

Drama and Pornography: Sarah Daniels's *Masterpieces* and Anthony Neilson's *The Censor*

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There is something awesome about the way that pornography can move our bodies, even when we don't want it to and even if we don't approve of the images that make it happen.

—Carol J. Clover¹

Two Plays about Pornography and Censorship

According to British playwright David Hare, drama invites the audience to compare what is said with what is shown, therefore allowing the audience to arrive at an independent judgment:

Judgment is at the heart of the theatre. A man steps forward and informs the audience of his intention to lifelong fidelity to his wife, while his hand, even as he speaks, drifts at random to the body of another woman. The most basic dramatic situation you can imagine; the gap between what he says he is and what we see him to be opens up, and in the gap we see something that makes theatre unique; that it exposes the difference between what a man says and what he does.²

As a textual and visual medium, drama is indeed particularly good at exposing lies and illusions. In Hare's example, the visual trumps the textual, perhaps in accordance with a socialist playwright's notions of objectivity. After all, seeing is believing. Why is it, then, that playwrights and directors find it hard to determine what the audience sees? Far from offering a neutral space for scientific inquiry where the audience is offered the means of empirical verification, theatre draws attention to the complexity of representation.

How difficult it is to control the image is the subject of the following discussion. It deals with two plays about pornography and censorship, a subject that in very practical ways involves the problem of visibility and its effect on characters and

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audience. Sarah Daniels's *Masterpieces* (1983) is a play of the early 1980s—a decade of issue-based theatre. It shows how a young woman, Rowena, is driven to kill a man after watching the 1975 movie *Snuff*, purportedly a pornographic document of an actual murder. In Daniels's vision, the pornographers are men; the would-be censors, women. Anthony Neilson's *The Censor* (1997) was produced fourteen years later, in a very different political climate. The pornographer now is a woman; the censor, a man. The play shows how a female director seduces a sexually repressed male bureaucrat so that, instead of X-rating her sexually explicit movie, he commends it for release to mainstream theatres. But here, too, violence and death are part of the narrative. The play ends with the news that the director has been brutally murdered while abroad. Obviously, neither play fares well in the retelling. Both are sparse on the page but were memorable and haunting on the stage. They received excellent Royal Court Theatre productions that made them stand out among the customary fare of the London season at the time. And because of their subject matter, they aroused considerable critical controversy.

Both plays present opposite sides of an argument about the impact of pornography. Written at the height of the feminist antipornography movement, *Masterpieces* offers a deliberately controlled account of the harmfulness of pornography. In doing so, it not only advocates but also incorporates censorship as a radical feminist strategy. In an attempt to instruct rather than arouse, pornography, the very subject of the play, is strictly withheld from the viewer. In contrast, *The Censor*, written by a man at the height of feminist dissension over pornography, appropriates the language and gestures of pornography to promote a philosophy of sexual healing. Staged as a peep show, the play requires a small audience to huddle side by side on bleachers in the darkness while a red curtain of light is slowly raised upon the play. Characters face each other in long silences, heavy with the promise of the unspeakable, while actions and movements accord with a pornographic choreography of increasingly transgressive acts, from mutual masturbation to public defecation and copulation.

Without too much exaggeration, one could suggest that this shifting emphasis of theatre's intended effect, from instruction to arousal, typifies the difference between the two decades these playwrights represent. With plays such as *Byrthrite* (1986), *Neptune* (1986), and *The Gut Girls* (1988), Sarah Daniels (1956-) established herself, alongside the *grande dame* of British theatre Caryl Churchill, as the leading playwright of issue-based plays in the eighties.³ Unlike Churchill's, Daniels's fame did not last beyond that decade. She is still considered, however, "one of the feminist 'canonicals.'"⁴ Like Churchill's, her access to major London stages was facilitated by the Royal Court Theatre that extended to her the George Devine Award in 1983 and made her writer-in-residence in 1984. *Masterpieces*, still one of her most controversial plays, was written for and produced by the Royal Court Theatre Upstairs in October 1983.

Though *Masterpieces* earned Daniels a London Theatre Critics Award for most promising playwright from *Plays and Players*, the general tenor of the play's critical reception in the mainstream press was one of mockery. Irving Wardle called it not a play but a "consciousness-raising séance" full of "shrieking insult."⁵ This did not negatively affect the play's shelf life, as it continues to be produced in theatres, schools, and other venues to promote awareness of pornography's effects on society. Today, Daniels, who also works for radio and television,⁶ continues to write plays that respond provocatively, often wittily, to social issues—such as child abuse in *Beside Herself* (1990)—and that put women, and often the lesbian experience, center stage. Among her recent work is a humorous play about a murderous woman, *Flying Under Bridges* (Wafford Palace, 2005), based on a novel by Sandi Toksvig, and a play about the disabled, *Who's Afraid of Virginia's Sister* (Chicken Shed Inclusive Theatre Company, 2006). Her work has moved back to the fringe, and her name is all too often absent in recent discussions of British theatre.⁷

A taste for controversy and a penchant for writing plays in which violence suddenly erupts are traits shared by Scottish playwright Anthony Neilson (1967-). Like Daniels, Neilson also made successful forays into television, as cowriter of *Prime Suspect*, and into film, as writer/director of an award-winning Channel 4 film *The Debt Collector* (1999). In every other respect, Neilson, a writer who burst onto the review pages of the mainstream press in the 1990s, could not be more different than Daniels. Plays such as *The Penetrator* (1993) earned him a place alongside the better-known playwrights Sarah Kane and Mark Ravenhill, who also emerged during the New Writing Boom of the 1990s. These writers of "in-yer-face theatre," as Aleks Sierz explains, are influenced by a culture of violence and of visual explicitness, from the spread of graphic novels to ubiquitous Internet pornography. Scholars of British drama are divided about the importance attributed to that "boom," especially about the way it is sometimes contrasted with the "low" of issue-based plays of the eighties, a prominent decade for feminist theatre. The fact remains that the 1990s saw the emergence of a different kind of drama, darker and more despairing, that in its portrayal of graphic violence hearkened back to the "neo-Jacobean" plays of the seventies. They were still often written by playwrights with leftist political leanings, but in contrast to the theatre of Edward Bond and Howard Brenton, their violence remains unmitigated by utopian longing. "Thatcher's children," as these "in-yer-face" playwrights are referred to, were mainly sons—indeed, they were sometimes referred to as the "brat pack." In the nineties, British theatre was once again devoted to issues of masculinity, which seems invariably "in crisis."⁸

The critical epithet for Daniels is "strident"; for Neilson it appears to be "juvenile." *The Censor* is one of those plays bound to be unfairly judged because the public imagination congeals around one particularly disturbing scene. In the way Bond's *Saved* (1965) is remembered for the stoning of a baby in its pram, Brenton's

Romans in Britain (1980) for its depiction of male rape, and Kane's *Blasted* (1995) for its cannibalism, *The Censor* has become the play that features a scene of a woman defecating. Although it won both the Writer's Guild and Time Out awards for Best Fringe Play, it also met with much scorn among well-established British critics. It met with similar derision among American reviewers, when the play was produced at 29th Street Rep in New York. David A. Rosenberg in *Back Stage* (April 23, 1999) called it a "70-minute, intermission-less annoyance," "unctuous and even, considering the subject matter, juvenile." For Peter Marks in *The New York Times* (April 29, 1999), *The Censor* is a "primitively constructed play" that serves as a poor excuse for a playwright who "can't keep his mind out of the toilet." The dialogue that leads up to the defecation scene is compared to the "window dressing employed by blue movie makers to apply a patina of intellectuality to their profane surfaces." The scene itself, which is indeed acted out with perplexing realism, is said to be "degrading" and of a "shocking repugnance."

The strength of critical opinion may have sought to match the outrage these plays had inflicted upon it. They are written with a fanaticism that recalls the obsessive atmosphere that is also that of their subject, which may explain the vehement response they provoked. Both Daniels and Neilson intended to shock, deliberately thwarting reviewers' expectations of fairness, if not of decorum, but they did so in radically different ways. *Masterpieces*, with its episodic structure and its foregrounding of argument, takes a bow to Brechtian theatre, while *The Censor*, with its emphasis on physical presence and ritual enactment, seeks an Artaudian immersion in spectacle. In a more fundamental way, though, the plays are surprisingly alike. They both deal with the power of pornographic images to radically transform the beholder. In both cases, watching pornographic material leads to enlightenment as well as to violence. Intellectually and emotionally, the heroes of both stories are radically transformed, but at a terrible cost: the violent death of another.

Masterpieces: Censorship as Theatrical Strategy

After she leafs through pornographic magazines and watches the movie *Snuff*, Rowena's feelings of physical insecurity become unbearable. When a man approaches her, she pushes him under an oncoming train. In the 1984 Royal Court Theatre main stage production, this was acted out convincingly with intense sound and light effects. In terms of composition, though, it is not the carefully prepared-for climax of a gradually intensifying action. Time shifts backwards and forwards among the seventeen scenes of this intricately constructed play. Although the murder scene is acted out near the end, in scene fourteen, it is announced and discussed early on, in scene two, when Rowena, charged with murder, declares to be neither guilty nor innocent and instead questions laws that hold no provision for women's experiences. Scene nine depicts Rowena's confrontation with the court psychiatrist

in charge of examining her sanity and offers further opportunity for discussion. Shifting the chronological order here ensures that interpretation precedes event: before the violence is visualized, it has been framed by an argument—in this case, a particular kind of feminist argument. When the audience finally gets to see the violence, it should understand that Rowena does not kill the man; pornography does.

Daniels wrote the play to illustrate ideas, mainly those of Andrea Dworkin's *Pornography: Men Possessing Women* (1981) and of "Women Against Violence Against Women," not to put ideas into play.¹⁰ *Masterpieces* is a *pièce-à-thèse*, not an evenhanded exploration of the relationship between pornography and violence. Tracy C. Davis commends *Masterpieces* for being "episodic, asequential, multiple cast, [and] employ[ing] direct address, and many localities . . . [which are] all experimental/Brechtian devices that promote objectivity."¹¹ But, whatever reason Daniels may have had for abandoning plot-driven structure, it was not to promote objectivity, at least not in the way that term is commonly understood. The play denounces the deceptive nature of what currently passes for "objectivity," a ritual dance of pro/con arguments that invariably ends up defending the status quo, codified in the Law whose real purpose is to legitimize Patriarchy. *Masterpieces* is unapologetically subjective, a play written in anger and dismay, as Daniels admits.¹² In an interview, she states that she wanted to avoid having her play become the subject of interpretations praising the subtlety of its argument:

Masterpieces is an issue-based play and in that sense it is didactic. I don't necessarily think I would write like that anymore, but I don't feel apologetic for it. People said it was like a sledgehammer, but it was more like a scream really. If it had been more subtle, I don't think it would have had the impact that it did.¹³

Daniels makes no secret of having stacked the deck in an attempt to determine the outcome of the game. "I tried to ensure that nobody could misinterpret *Masterpieces*," she says, and adds, "I felt so strongly about the ideas in the play that, in an attempt to guard against being misunderstood, I censored myself from writing the detail and contradictions which give a character depth."¹⁴ The result is a symmetrically structured cast and a rigorously selective exposition. Of the three couples, the men represent three different degrees of offensiveness (hypocrisy in Trevor, condescension in Ron, and blatant misogyny in Clive); the women, three different reactions to victimization (eccentricity in Jennifer, withdrawal in Yvonne, and aggression in Rowena). The exposition takes the form of several direct addresses of an informative nature delivered in Brechtian style.

At the beginning of the first scene, the "Baron," a member of the establishment, reveals how much money is to be made in the pornography business. This provides

an opportunity for Daniels to inform the audience of the scale of the problem and of the way it is enmeshed in the fabric of society: "In the last few years the tax man has gleaned over two million pounds from me. . . . Profit margins are high. Our trade makes more money than the film and record business put together."¹⁵ A peddler and a consumer then expound some of the liberal justifications for pornography. The peddler emphasizes the democratic, nonrepressive atmosphere of the business, spoiled by the occasional "criticism from the frustrated politicians and their pathetic fanaticism for censorship"¹⁶—the latter, a passing reference to the Thatcher government's return to "Victorian values." The consumer completes this with an offhand, "Let's face it, alcohol and cigarettes can kill people, looking at pictures never hurt anyone."¹⁷ The play disproves this: pornography is not an innocent fantasy or an idea. In glorifying real acts of violence against women, pornography teaches men to objectify women.

In stark contrast to the men's exercises in bad faith are the women's monologues, painfully self-searching and self-revealing testimonies of courage and endurance. Scene one offers a glimpse into the origins of Yvonne's chronic unhappiness. As the only girl among brothers, she explains, her isolation deepened when she witnessed the oppressive self-resignation of her mother.¹⁸ Later, in scene seven, a prostitute, Hillary, is allowed a long monologue about the tribulations of a working-class girl. Brainy enough to navigate safely through the muddled world of sexual liberation and contraceptives, she finally got snared by one "accident," a defective condom. From then on, it went downhill to unemployment and prostitution. In scene eight, while Rowena for the first time in her life looks at pornographic magazines, three voice-overs of female porn stars vindicate the arguments of antipornography feminists: "I went to a meeting once where these women were talking about the links between violence and pornography. Huh, I told them it was a load of puritan bullshit. . . . It never occurred to me to take into consideration the abuse I'd suffered personally."¹⁹

Geometrically arranged, these informative statements suggest the kind of difference that does not make a difference, being a series of assertions that pose as argument. Three monologues delivered by one and the same male actor, who also plays the obnoxious Clive, present the standard views of maker, distributor, and consumer of porn. Three monologues presented by three different female voices represent the position of the victims. Only the women's monologues represent individual, concrete instances of lived realities. Differences in attitude toward pornography are neatly gendered. All men love pornography, although not all are willing to admit it. All women are appalled by pornography, although not all are ready to do something about it. So, variety of characters does not amount to variety of opinion but rather serves the function of thematic confirmation by the simple means of repetition and gradual intensification. The tripartite structure of the play's "argument" does not represent a balanced triangularity but a threefold increase of affect that expresses a desire for completeness and closure.

As a result, the play leaves one with an oppressive sense of inevitability that contributes to its most attractive feature, the strength of its convictions.²⁰ Shaking up the chronological order of events (in this case, by informing us of the crime before it is committed) can have many effects: in *Masterpieces*, far from opening up debate, it is meant to close it down. The story of *Masterpieces* is conventionally structured, hinging around two moments, Rowena's discovery of pornography (the play's moment of *anagnorisis*) and her subsequent violent reaction to a man who approaches her in the train station (the *peripeteia*). The first, the discovery or recognition scene, is weakened by the fact that the audience never gets to see the evidence that motivates Rowena into killing a man. The death of another human being is a high toll to be paid for what remains an abstract insight. The play must convince us that, when she watches pornography, Rowena undergoes a violent experience that can make her react as vehemently as she does. To make the shock and, thus, the effect of knowledge greater, Rowena's ignorance is made extreme, even to the extent that it risks becoming implausible. For a social worker with enough years of service to be close to promotion, Rowena has led a curiously sheltered existence. She is scandalized to learn that her husband sometimes looks at pornographic magazines his colleagues keep at the office. Though the country is said to be awash in pornography ("These things go into millions of homes"²¹), Rowena has never seen any herself and is, thus, disproportionately upset when she leafs through magazines Yvonne has confiscated from her students.²²

In good Aristotelian fashion, recognition triggers reversal: through the magazines, Rowena becomes aware of the violent nature of gender relationships—violence she feels so threatened by that she is compelled to reciprocate. The play draws attention to this mechanical linking of perception and cognition in a recognition scene that also produces the reversal:

Psychiatrist. And you claim, Mrs. Jefferson-Stone, that looking
at pornography was the turning point?

Rowena. Yes.

Psychiatrist. Enough of a turning point to make you try to kill
a man?

Rowena. Yes.²³

In front of a man, a representative of the establishment to boot, Rowena does not attempt to argue her point of view. Her monosyllabic responses indicate that what she has discovered is an esoteric Truth, unacceptable to the uninitiated majority and impossible to communicate in the language of society, represented by the Law and Psychiatry. When the psychiatrist suggests she has "lost all sense of reality," she responds as a mystic might have: "Quite the opposite. I gained all sense of reality."²⁴

That reality is represented by an all-encompassing theory of pornography the

audience is expected to take for granted. For the initiated, pornography is what lurks behind the veils of patriarchal mystification; it is the reality of male power that, uncovered, all at once makes sense of women's unhappiness and frustrations.²⁵ Officially, though, this reality does not exist. Even in front of a female judge, Rowena stands no chance at being understood. As Catharine MacKinnon says about women and the law: "No law imagines what happened to you, the way it happened. You live your whole life surrounded by this cultural echo of nothing where your screams and your words should be."²⁶ While pornography is legally protected as free speech, women who feel endangered by it are not. If the laws give priority to freedom of expression, the play argues, it is because they are made by men for the protection of men's pleasures—or, in Rowena's words, "the laws are a load of cock."²⁷ She is, therefore, unable to truly defend herself in court—or, as MacKinnon puts it, "You learn that language does not belong to you, that you cannot use it to say what you know, that knowledge is not what you learn from your life, that information is not made out of your experience."²⁸

For Rowena, pornography reveals what men truly think of women. Her husband's refusal to condemn it signifies his complicity, and his anger signals the correctness of her view.²⁹ From then on, men and women in the play are openly at war with each other, and reasonable conversation is no longer possible.

Rowena. Shut up Trevor.

Trevor (*to Yvonne*). You make me sick.

Yvonne. The feeling's mutual.

Ron. Just bloody well piss off.

Rowena. No, you piss off yourself.

Trevor. Shut up.

Yvonne. No, you shut up.

Trevor. You stupid bitch.³⁰

As confrontation scenes go, this one provides no opportunity for great eloquence, but it does adequately convey the total and fundamental estrangement of the sexes. After dialogue like this the couples separate, the only remaining allegiance being that of gender: the men, predictably, go to the bar; the women remain behind.³¹

Rowena ends up killing a man named Charles Williams, who leaves behind an unnamed widow. More is not disclosed about him, not even what he said to Rowena before she pushed him onto the track. Indeed, all that is accidental, since the play's action revolves around a dark, unexamined center called "pornography," the focus point for a residue of ill feelings that is beyond verbalization or ratiocination. Deliberately not shown, it is represented by the ominous carrier bag that Yvonne hauls on stage, which is filled, she informs Rowena, with the magazines she has confiscated from her students. When Rowena looks at them, a stage direction

stipulates they have to be held “in such a way that the audience is not exposed to their contents.”³² The verb “exposed” instead of “shown” implies the vividly imagined danger and offensiveness of pictures that are never revealed and, therefore, need not even be truly present on stage. Far from protecting the audience, Daniels incites its lurid imagination. And this is not the only instance where the play unintentionally demonstrates the perversity of censorship.

It is left to the audience to look at Yvonne’s bag and conjure up a horror commensurate with that of pushing a man under a train. The audience is told that ads in the magazines feature the leather and chains of fetishistic pornography, and Rowena concludes with a simple, “How they must hate us.”³³ For Yvonne, pornography is “violence, violence against women” and “a bloody conspiracy” in which all men are involved.³⁴ Its ultimate reality is “snuff,” movies in which the victim, usually a woman, is killed during the sex act.³⁵ At the end of the play, Rowena recounts to a sympathetic policewoman the climactic scene of *Snuff*. She does so at great length and very much in the classical tradition as a report from a distant battlefield in the bloody war of the sexes:

Well, the first part was badly made and like a lot of films it contained a good deal of violence and shooting. I think it was loosely based on the Charles Manson story. *Then it changes, it becomes real.* It’s a film studio during a break in the filming. The director is near a bed talking to a young woman. He gets turned on and wants to have sex with her. They lie on the bed and he kisses her. She then realizes that they are being filmed. She doesn’t like it and protests. There is a knife lying on the bed near her shoulder. He pins her down as she attempts to get up. He picks up the knife and moves it round her neck and throat. There is utter terror on her face as she realizes that he is not acting. She tries to get up but cannot. The film shows shots of his face, which registers power and pleasure. He starts to cut into her shoulder, and the pain in her face . . . *It’s real . . .* Blood seeps through her blouse. Her arm is held down and he cuts off her fingers. It is terrible. *I have watched a woman being cut up and she is alive.* He then picks up an electric saw. And I think no . . . no he can’t use it. But he does. Her hand is sawn off . . . left twitching by her side. Then he plunges the saw into her stomach, and the pain and terror on her face. More shots of his face of power and pleasure. He puts his hands inside her and pulls out some of her insides. Finally, he reaches in again and pulls out her guts and holds them above his head. He is triumphant.³⁶

The killing of a man is counterbalanced by Rowena's witnessing of the killing of a woman. While the content of the scene she describes is graphic, it contains neither nudity nor any of the typical visual clichés of pornography. This is why "power and pleasure" is repeated twice: it is the operative phrase that codes the scene as pornographic, the genre defined as the objectification of women for the sexual enjoyment of men.³⁷ "The power of men in pornography is imperial power," Dworkin reminds us, "the power of the sovereigns who are cruel and arrogant, who keep taking and conquering for the pleasure of power and the power of pleasure."³⁸

The scene is dwelt upon at great length because it is said to have "really" happened: it illustrates that moment when representation turns into reality, just as in pornography, too, acts are not simulated but really happen. The detailed description of the dismemberment of a woman by a "triumphant" man obliterates any thought of what must have happened to Charles Williams who, when pushed under the train, must have been dismembered as well, though swiftly and mechanically. The scene is not described; the audience is not asked to imagine it. Williams's death remains a device—a traumatic event that forces Rowena to confront the Law and to articulate her newly gained political awareness. The man and the incident did not even assume narrative reality, while the woman in *Snuff* was "really" murdered. The difference is crucial, central to how Daniels situates the play in reality. With this description of a real murder, Rowena's account breaks through the confines of fiction to intervene in the real world. This, then, is the moment when the play becomes most authentically "political."

Except that, in this case, the mutilation and murder did not really happen. Daniels admitted she had not seen the movie but had relied on Dusty Rhodes's description of it in the *Revolutionary and Radical Feminist Newsletter* of 1982. Rhodes believed that the actress had been "actually mutilated and murdered in front of the camera—'snuffed out'" and that "many 'snuff' films have been made since then."³⁹ So, Rowena's newly gained and costly truth is validated by her having seen evidence that not even Daniels has looked at. That the scene on which the veracity of the play's argument rests lacks empiric verification may seem strange. After all, Rowena's account of the "real" dismemberment, as opposed to the fictional but unimagined one of Charles Williams under the train, turns *Masterpieces* from a play into an intervention into lived reality. But as with the pornography in the carrier bag, not seeing has become essential. The concrete image is not to be trusted to the vagaries of interpretation. For the uninitiated, the concrete instance, variant rather than type, is misleading and should not be allowed to interfere with the pre-established conviction that reality for women is best symbolized by a man triumphantly holding up the entrails of a woman.

In fact, Rowena's monologue could only have been written on the basis of hearsay—that is, of a mythical vision of pure masculine evil, imagined far more vividly than realized in the movie. Her account, which dwells with horrified

fascination on every gruesome detail, adds a patina of perfection to the awkward, obviously fake scene in the actual movie, which was so disastrously mismanaged, so lamentable in every way, that it has survived to this day mainly because of the accounts of it that *Masterpieces* and other feminist writings of the period provided.⁴⁰ This is a case where the procensorship feminist, because of a refusal to see, unknowingly colludes with the “pornographer”—in this case, producer Allan Shackleton, who added the “snuff” scene to Michael and Roberta Findlay’s 1971 low-budget slasher movie *Slaughter*; retitled it *Snuff*, and in 1976 marketed it with the promise, “The film that could only be made in South America . . . where Life is CHEAP!” When the movie arrived in the UK in 1983, protests against it became a rallying point for antipornography feminists who believed that the woman had been killed, a notion Shackleton did not hurry to dispel as it boosted ticket sales. Police officers accompanied by medical doctors were called in to study the scene; the actress was finally located and interviewed.⁴¹ It’s “reality,” after all, was part of the illusion—and Daniels was right to distrust the image because it could not have spoken as clearly as she did.

The Censor: Pornography as Theatrical Strategy

Whereas *Masterpieces* depicts a country under siege by violent pornography, *The Censor* reminds the viewer of Britain’s stringent censorship laws: “[T]here are things you just cannot legally show here, and that isn’t a matter of opinion, it’s a matter of law.”⁴² And indeed, the UK, with the exception of Ireland, has some of the toughest antipornography censorship laws in Western Europe. In the eighties, under Margaret Thatcher, when *Masterpieces* was produced, there were even concerted attempts to prevent displays of “girlie magazines” (*Playboy*, *Penthouse*, *Hustler*).⁴³ *The Censor* draws attention to the prevalence of censorship, the arbitrariness of its laws, and the human price to be paid in their implementation. With long pauses and solemnly executed ritualistic action, the play can seem overly ponderous; in fact, much of its seriousness is tongue in cheek, and, at times, the play seems on the point of succumbing to its own risky humor and ribald irony.

Neilson delights in exploring the humorous side of sexual misery and the absurdities of censorship. After all, individuals have to do the censoring: people supposedly protected by the rigors of the law and a “strong constitution” have to look so that others will not have to see.⁴⁴ The play subverts many of the hallowed certainties of the antipornography debate—the idea, for instance, that pornography is abhorrent to women because it focuses on men’s sexuality or that it enforces repetition, turning otherwise complacent men into selfish sex-fiends. In *The Censor*, the pornographer is a woman and the censor, an impotent man. Her movie is one of the worst of its kind, which is why it has appeared in the censor’s basement office. At one point, admittedly in high dudgeon, the censor summarizes it as follows: “It’s two people, on a bed—wanking and shagging and sucking each other off!!

That's all it is! There isn't even any dialogue!"⁴⁵

Miss Fontaine wants the censor to believe that her movie, which consists entirely of sexually explicit images, has a story to tell. But, for the censor, the presence of hardcore material makes the story irrelevant. His position is best articulated by MacKinnon, for whom pornography is not a story but a behavior. As it is not an idea, pornography is not open to interpretation and not to be protected as "free speech."⁴⁶ In Britain, the Williams Report on Obscenity and Film Censorship came to a similar conclusion, stating, "[P]ornography is not a representation of real sex but a real practice of sex using representations."⁴⁷ Certain images are, thereby, legally deprived of ideational content, even if they appear in the kind of pornographic movie that Miss Fontaine has made. "It's unusual," he admits, "[u]sing the same two actors throughout—not always ending in ejaculation, the order of the episodes . . . You might be subverting conventions—but at the end of the day, it's still just hard-core pornography."⁴⁸ For the censor, whether or not sexually explicit images are pornographic is not a matter of form or interpretation; it depends on whether they fall inside or outside a legal grid. When a movie is considered to be pornographic, then the kind of formal considerations Miss Fontaine raises become irrelevant.

To save her movie, Miss Fontaine teaches the censor to decode its explicit images. The movie is episodic, consisting entirely of sex scenes without discernible plot, but Miss Fontaine insists that the images cannot be discussed in random order and that the close-ups of genitals are telling "the story of the lovers."⁴⁹ The censor, she claims, has "lost the ability to see"; his "eye stops at the image":

Censor. And what is there to see in a penis exactly?! A penis is
a penis, is it not?
Fontaine. What about when it's your wife's lover's penis?⁵⁰

The censor's education requires his being weaned from this habit of tautological reasoning. In good psychoanalytic tradition, Miss Fontaine takes nothing at face value. Nothing is ever what it seems; even the apparently transparent is obscure. To refuse it interpretation points to psychological resistance that should be traced back to past trauma. Because intellectual distance protects the censor from the movie, Miss Fontaine makes it personal. When she takes her shirt off, it is the censor who stands exposed—vulnerable and evasive. From their first confrontation, the pornographer holds him in the palm of her hand—in their next encounter, literally so, delving into his pants to take intimate measure of his resistance. Aroused and embarrassed, the censor becomes a compromised viewer who participates in the images he is supposed to judge. In the hardening and softening penis on the screen he discovers his own ambivalent reaction to being masturbated by the pornographer. Invested with personal meaning, the images transform into a screen memory, a

cinema of the mind recounting a story he recognizes as his own: as the penis waxes and wanes, he recalls his own lonely childhood spent in close proximity to a sick parent, early knowledge of the pain caused by sexual betrayal, and, later, a sexual outsider's voyeuristic obsession with pornography.⁵¹

In Miss Fontaine's philosophy, minds not pictures are pornographic. The pornographic mind remains stuck in the image, unable or unwilling to acknowledge that it has a story to tell. Her art is informed by the belief that the relationship between seeing and knowing is complex and that no image is ever just about itself. The visible merely serves as a prompt for the imagination where the work of art comes into being. This happens also to be an argument for censorship, or, at least, for the importance of indirection and suggestiveness. As the censor points out,

Without censorship, there'd be no allegory, no metaphor, no restraint—I mean—*Brief Encounter* is a story about two lovers, but you don't have to see Trevor Howard's penis thrusting in and out of Celia Johnson, do you?

Pause. She smiles.

But you'd like that wouldn't you? You'd like to see Trevor Howard's penis thrusting in and out of Celia Johnson! That's exactly what you'd like!⁵²

Brief Encounter (1945), David Lean's movie adaptation of Noël Coward's short play *Still Life* (1936), tells of an impossible love between two middle-aged people who intend to elope but end up parting for good. The power of its romantic vision is determined by what is left unsaid and undone, but, therefore, not unimagined. The imagination—or, at least, Miss Fontaine's imagination—perversely adds prurient detail to the sanitized image. Why would it not be able to do the opposite? Explicitness is deceptive, excluding more not less—therefore, potentially offering more room for the imagination. Denying the image metaphorical suggestiveness is motivated by political rather than aesthetic reasons. Pornography specializes in showing what is left out from common depictions of reality and derives its power from what fascinates because of its customary absence. Accordingly, Miss Fontaine's art is about what is not shown, what has been “excreted” from the image. If *Brief Encounter* is about “Trevor Howard's penis thrusting in and out of Celia Johnson!” then her pornographic movie of genital encounter is really “a story about two lovers.”

The same principle of complementing narratives governs the play as a whole. Its action consists of two alternating stories seamlessly interwoven through well-planned and skillfully executed transitions. Both are love stories of a kind. One takes place in a basement office and tells of the growing intimacy between censor and pornographer. The other shows the bureaucrat at home where he maintains

physical and emotional distance from his wife whose infidelities he is unwilling to discuss. Each tortuously long pause in the couple's constipated conversation conjures up pornographic details of the sexual union between wife and lover. At one point, these intrude upon the scene in the form of a time-coded censorship report delivered to the audience by means of the censor's voice over:

Fifteen forty-seven: outer labia.
 Sixteen o two: inner labia. Penetration by inorganic device.
 Sixteen twenty-three: anal penetration by same. Digital insertion
 to vagina.
 Additional oral stimulation of vagina—sixteen forty-two⁵³

Even though his wife reminds him that “there are feelings involved,”⁵⁴ the censor is professionally conditioned to separate sex from feelings. Trapped in pornographic images, he is unable to use them as a key to his wife's existence—to her unhappiness, suffering, and desires.

Central to both narratives is the censor's entrapment: he is stuck in an unspeakable moment of his personal past that will later be revealed, stuck in the basement office having been passed over for promotion, and stuck in a marriage with an unfaithful wife.⁵⁵ The audience is asked to relate one level of the narrative to the other: the censor's inability to see the story behind the sexually explicit images of Miss Fontaine's movie to his inability to come to terms with his wife's infidelity. This incapacity of the censor's imagination finds its physical correlative in his sexual impotence, explained by his having been held prisoner by one particular taboo image—a woman defecating—that fills him with shame. When that image is acted out in front of him by a person he has come to trust and love, it is integrated into his reality, and his impotence ceases. He is now also free to respond to his wife and to address the problems in his marriage.

The play combines various key concepts into an implied aesthetic, psychological, and political argument. Pornography will remain violent and degrading, Miss Fontaine reasons, as long as it caters to the needs of self-hating men, such as the censor, who repress their own fantasies.⁵⁶ Psychoanalytic theory undergirds other assumptions in the play. For instance, repression is made to serve as the psychological counterpart of censorship, and both are explicitly related to excretion, as concept and behavior. Neilson's argument starts with the Freudian insight that nothing can disappear without leaving a trace. Absence communicates as effectively as presence—by way of silence, hesitations, denials, lies, or remonstrations. The play's dialogue is heavily punctuated by pauses, instances of characters' self-censorship when the audience is meant to sense the weight of the unspoken. Early in the play, when Miss Fontaine intimates that the censor may have been duplicitous in calling her back to his office after she has sexually

provoked him, he reacts first with a long silence, then offers her a definition of his own neurosis in the form of an ironic denial: “Because I know what you think: that I’m a prude, a stuffed shirt—some sort of repressed, anally retentive apparatchik. . . .”⁵⁷ Unwittingly, he keeps dropping clues. “D’you know what they call this place, Miss Fontaine? (Pause.) ‘The shit hole.’”⁵⁸ Later, Miss Fontaine will squat on the floor in literal fulfillment of this figurative appellation. The unspeakable cannot be silenced, revealing itself compulsively through verbal and visual puns.⁵⁹

It is only by uncovering the trauma and by reenacting the taboo that the censor will be set free. This happens late in the play, in the tenth of its fourteen scenes:

Miss Fontaine lays newspaper down on the floor.

The Censor watches.

Fontaine encourages him to touch himself.

She raises her skirt and squats. The Censor watches, touching himself more vigorously.

It takes her a while, but eventually she defecates.

She cleans herself, then moves away.

The Censor is in a state of extreme arousal.

She beckons him to come forward and make love to her.

*He does.*⁶⁰

The taboo, says Freud, combines “the sacred and the unclean,” evoking a reaction of “awe and aversion.”⁶¹ Long, ponderous silences in the preceding scenes have indeed prepared the audience to sit in silent awe while Miss Fontaine squats over the newspaper. This is one of those moments, not unlike Rowena’s retelling of the movie in which a woman was “really” murdered, when theatre is on the point of breaking loose of its fictional restraints. The uncomfortable and confusing realism of the scene, acted out in close proximity to the audience, turns the scene into an experiment that seeks to verify the play’s central tenet about the meaning of explicit images. Will the audience remain stuck in the image or will it be able to look beyond it and use the image to understand the play? While the spectator is still figuring out whether the defecation “really” happened, the play has moved on.

Conclusion: The Ratio of Visibility

Masterpieces’ advocacy of censorship followed uncomfortably close upon one notorious attempt at reinstating theatrical censorship after its abolishment in 1968. The case involved the depiction of a male rape scene in Howard Brenton’s *Romans in Britain* (1980), a play that seeks to critique the British presence in Ireland by comparing it to the Roman invasion of Britain. The clash of cultures is vividly depicted when a Roman soldier rapes a young Celt. To impress upon the audience the shocking nature of this violent scene, director Michael Bogdanov decided it had

to be acted out center stage in full view of the audience. And what a well-aimed spotlight could not make visible, language pitilessly revealed: “Arseful of piles,” says the soldier raping the druid. “Like fucking a fistful of marbles. . . . And I’m covered in shit.”⁶² Still, what had the audience actually seen? To what extent had the soldier’s language guided their eyes into believing that sexual intercourse was taking place? At the obscenity trial instigated by moral crusader Mary Whitehouse, much of the discussion revolved around whether her solicitor, who had been sitting in the back row, could from that distance have distinguished between the actor’s thumb and what he thought had been the tip of his penis touching the other actor’s buttocks.⁶³ Did the solicitor know what he had seen or had he seen what he thought he already knew?

The Censor takes the uncertainty in the decoding of images not only as its subject, in the relationship between censor and pornographer, but also turns it into spectacle, in its relationship with the audience. *The Censor*’s theme of sexual explicitness and borrowing of the clichés of pornographic posturing offer an erotic promise that, in the end, remains largely unfulfilled. Miss Fontaine’s pornographic movie is not shown but narrated in the censor’s clinical reports or his clumsy attempts at poetic paraphrases. On the level of spectacle, movements of seduction and consummation are carefully choreographed for maximum suggestiveness, while true explicitness is reserved for language. In the play’s most controversial scene, the actress squats down, boldly facing the audience yet protected by a wide skirt that reaches not quite to the ground. In the silent ritual she enacts, the abject assumes sacramental significance. The abject, says Kristeva, is that which has been “ejected” to create the “possible, the tolerable, the thinkable.”⁶⁴ Miss Fontaine becomes the priestess of perverted love, healer of the wound that gapes between language and reality. As she defecates, the censorship office literally becomes the “shithole” it figuratively already was, happily restoring the “anally retentive apparatchik” to genital potency. As Miss Fontaine wipes and gathers up the newspaper, spectators receive fleeting visual proof that the word has indeed assumed reality. It is a difficult scene to execute correctly, as the abject is here taking the form of a visual pun that teeters dangerously between the solemn and the ridiculous.

In its appeal to the imagination, *The Censor* is not that different from *Masterpieces*. Less a peep show than a confidence game, its effect relies on a combination of physical proximity and obscurity; in other words, on the careful managing of spectacle. *Masterpieces*, however, suppresses the pornographic image altogether, implying that it cannot be trusted to convey what the playwright wants it to say. And yet, at her best, Daniels is a playwright with a fine ear for the slipperiness of meaning. The title of her play evokes playfulness, combining a sexual pun (that particular “piece” or appendage that turns someone into the “master”), with allusions to “art” (a “masterpiece”) and objectification (women as “pieces” for the “masters”). So does some of the dialogue, as in the following instance, when verbal

punning unexpectedly enters a mudslinging contest between husband and wife:

Clive. If I'd imagined for one minute how you'd have turned out, I'd never have married you.

Jennifer. And if I'd known you'd knock off three secretaries concurrently, maybe I'd have thought twice about marrying you.

Clive. At least they didn't nag.

Jennifer. Nag? You know why the dog is considered man's best friend? Because you can hit, shout at and abuse dogs and they still come back for affection.

Clive. Whereas women sulk.

Jennifer. Or worse still, kick back and commit crimes of disobedience. A nag by any other name.

Clive. Then I suggest you stop making yourself hoarse.

Jennifer. Ha, ha, ha.⁶⁵

One word calls up another in a series of mischievously misleading associations. If this can happen to language in the heat of battle when characters speak forcefully, how then would an image, even an explicit one, speak more consistently? And that, ultimately, confirms what Linda Williams argues in *Hardcore* (1999), the book that heralded the beginning of academic pornography studies: "As soon as I began really to look at a large number of films across the genre's history rather than to generalize from a viewing of one or two films, I found that film pornography did not so neatly illustrate such objectification. I found, in fact, that these apparently self-evident texts were fraught with contradiction."⁶⁶

In *Masterpieces*, pornography has to remain an abstraction in order to maintain the illusion of an unambiguous difference between the sexes. It is said to be a trail of documents men leave of their sexual crimes so that they can be enjoyed vicariously and repetitively. But not reducible to any of its concrete instances, it becomes emblematic of male sexuality as a whole: blatant, primitive, and devoid of interiority. This makes men completely knowable so that their sexual desires can be scrutinized and mocked: "And what has my husband got to entertain himself with? (*She picks up the cassette case.*) *Violate the Bitch*. Don't you have something a little more romantic, say in French with subtitles, *Violiez la biche*, so much prettier don't you think?"⁶⁷ But, when women are not confronting men with the ugliness of their fantasies, what do they fantasize about? To sustain the women's moral superiority, the play remains silent about their sexual desires.

Because sexuality is problematic, the women dream not of sex but of childhood, "[w]hen the only thing you had to worry about was forgetting your dinner money for school."⁶⁸ Sexual maturity is a burden, so menopause, for Jennifer, is when "at

last” she’s “starting to blossom.”⁶⁹ But even then it’s a blossoming blighted by regret and despair. The feminist horticultural club she has joined specializes in childish pranks that are pathetic in their desire to shock: Jennifer’s flower arrangement consisted of “a lovely dried set in an oasis and for the base . . . [her] diaphragm.”⁷⁰ Even Jennifer realizes “that was a load of rubbish.”⁷¹ The picnic scene portrays one moment of harmony among the three women, and it is markedly asexual, with the women happily reminiscing about childhood and dreaming of a well-financed escape (“I’m going on holiday to Greece . . . I wondered if you two wanted to come with me. . .”).⁷² The inverse of the men’s groaning and moaning *pornotopia* is a rather tepid *gynotopia* that requires only the sound of gulls and waves.⁷³ But even this limited hope is dashed, as in the following scene when Rowena pushes a man under a train.

The universe of *Masterpieces* is dismal and hopeless, recalling Dworkin’s dark vision of an all-encompassing, inescapable masculine evil: “In the system of male sexual domination explicated in pornography, there is no way out, no redemption. . . .”⁷⁴ Neither is there in *Masterpieces*.⁷⁵ The play does not raise the possibility for these women to find fulfillment in an alternative, lesbian, sexual relationship. They are trapped in an impossible and repugnant heterosexuality, in a world where not having sex becomes a source of satisfaction:

Psychiatrist: And in the last six months before you left your husband, your sexual life was unsatisfactory.

Rowena. No. We didn’t do it, which was very satisfactory as far as I’m concerned.⁷⁶

Tellingly, the play ends with words that reveal not what Rowena desires but what she doesn’t “want,” though it does so in the libidinous, ecstatic language of refusal that is also that of Dworkin:

For centuries, female reluctance to “have sex,” female dislike of “sex,” female frigidity, female avoidance of “sex,” have been legendary. This has been the silent rebellion of women against the force of the penis, generations of women as one with their bodies, chanting in a secret language, unintelligible even to themselves, a contemporary song of freedom: I will not be moved.⁷⁷

After Rowena is arrested and recounts the ending of *Snuff*, a sympathetic policewoman concurs with her, saying, “No. It happens. I’ve seen photos, hundreds of photos of little girls, young women, middle-aged women, old women . . . with torn genitals, ripped vaginas, mutilated beyond recognition.” Rowena’s conclusion in the last lines of the play, then, is another way of suggesting a deceptively

unproblematic continuum from representation to reality as well as from the extreme to the apparently innocuous: “I don’t want anything to do with men who have knives or whips or men who look at photos of women tied and bound, or men who say relax and enjoy it. Or men who tell misogynist jokes.”⁷⁸ In the end, there is no gap and, thus, no dialectical tension between words and deeds, fantasy and behavior, representation and reality—only a stark and lasting difference between men and women.

Entrapment rather than change is also what *The Censor* ends up demonstrating in direct contradiction to its ostensible message of sexual healing. The final image is that of the censor alone in his office, smiling as he watches Miss Fontaine’s controversial movie, a visual reminder of the play’s opening line: “It started with a pornographic film.”⁷⁹ In its penultimate scene, all fragments of the broken conversation between husband and wife are cleverly stitched together into one ongoing exchange, a symbolic restoration of lost wholeness. But just when the censor is on the point of breaking his silence and speaking out (“No, I’ll say something”), the news of Miss Fontaine’s violent death stops him short.⁸⁰ Instead of articulating his feelings, he relieves himself in powerful ejaculations of grief: “He is breaking down, shuddering, making those strange noises that grief causes.”⁸¹ The promise of communication and change remains poignantly unfulfilled because for the censor’s wife the tears express what she already knows—his inability to deal with her love affair: “You don’t have to meet him. I just don’t know what else to do. *Pause.* We’ll work it out. We always do.”⁸²

The penultimate scene also discloses the censor and Miss Fontaine’s all-too-common first names, Frank and Shirley, throwing sudden doubt on the reality of their meetings. After all, “Fontaine” is rather too obviously symbolic of Frank’s longing for a joyful and uncomplicated release. The *pornotopia* she presents, a world in which “the people we dare to call perverts and deviants” will be “recognized for what they truly are: Visionaries!” fulfills too perfectly the censor’s psychological craving for social acceptance of his particular fetishism. And his censorship report, we now realize, reflects all too well the stages of their relationship from courtship, to commitment and trust, to objectification and aggression.⁸³ The news that Miss Fontaine has been battered to death in her hotel room follows the censor’s outburst of anger at her during their final meeting when she retreats into formality. Once a liberating presence, she has become a source of vexation: “You like to think you’re on some higher level but you’re just as fucked as everyone else,” the censor retorts angrily.⁸⁴ Her sexual assurance and lack of sexual weakness makes her ultimately unknowable, perfectly closed to the censor’s prying eyes.

The Censor ends on a characteristic reversal in which distance reasserts itself precisely at the moment it seems to dissolve. And with it also disappears the protagonist’s illusion of having been saved by an obscene and primal image enacted with the express intent of restoring him to wholeness. Like *Masterpieces*, *The*

Censor suggests that images cannot be trusted—not even obscene or pornographic ones that Jean Baudrillard defines as being without depth and without secret, the visual analogue of a tautology.⁸⁵ This throws a different light on David Hare's hypothetical scene with which this discussion started: while the man is falsely professing his faithfulness, the only faithfulness that remained unquestioned was that of the image itself. And, yet, plays such as *The Censor* and *Masterpieces* arise precisely in the gap that looms between image and significance. In the final instance, Miss Fontaine's withdrawal represents what both *Masterpieces* and *The Censor* end up demonstrating: the betrayal of the image, which promises transparency and the liberation of the senses, but always ends up withholding its secret.

Notes

1. Carol J. Clover, Introduction to *Dirty Looks: Women, Pornography, Power*, eds. Pamela Church Gibson and Roma Gibson (London: British Film Institute, 1993) 3.

2. David Hare, "A Lecture Given at King's College, Cambridge, March 5, 1978," *Licking Hitler* (London: Faber, 1978) 59; also quoted in Scott Fraser, *A Politic Theatre: The Drama of David Hare* (Amsterdam and Atlanta, GA: Rodopi, 1996) 24. For another take on this insight, see Luc Gilleman, "Mind the Gap: Perception and Cognition in Harold Pinter's Confrontation Scenes," *The Pinter Review: Nobel Prize/Europe Theatre Prize Volume*, ed. Francis Gillen with Steven Gale (Tampa, FL: U of Tampa P, 2008) 68-92.

3. In 1998, the National Theatre selected *Masterpieces* as a representative play of the 1980s in its NT2000 list of "One Hundred Plays of the Century" <<http://www.nationaltheatre.org.uk/11741/platforms/nt2000-one-hundred-plays-of-the-century.html>>.

4. Elaine Aston, *Feminist Views on the English Stage: Women Playwrights, 1990-2000* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2003) 39.

5. Irving Wardle, review of *Masterpieces*, *The Times* (12 October 1983): 8.

6. She authored scripts for *Grange Hill* and *Eastenders* for the BBC. Peter Anson considers this a cop-out. He is one of the few critics who believes that Daniels, as well as Louise Page, were given too easy a ride compared to Osborne and Pinter. As a result, they never made good on their early promise. Along with Kevin Hood, Page and Daniels "currently earn their living by writing popular serials on radio and television, which is not the outcome that many reviewers predicted for their talents" (Peter Anson, *From Liverpool to Los Angeles: On Writing for Theatre, Film and Television* [London: Faber, 1997] 120).

7. She does not even receive a brief mention in Dominic Dromgoole's *The Full Room: An A-Z of Contemporary Playwriting* (London: Methuen, 2000).

8. For a discussion and survey of in-er-face theatre, see Aleks Sierz's well-maintained and informative website: <<http://www.inerface-theatre.com/main.html>>.

9. Peter Marks, review of *The Censor* by Anthony Neilson, *The New York Times* (29 April 1999).

10. Sarah Daniels, Introduction to *Plays: One* (London: Methuen Drama, 1991): "... I started writing it after talking to a friend of mine who was doing a dissertation on women and male violence. I'd also read Andrea Dworkin's book *Pornography: Men Possessing Women*, and attended a meeting at the University of London where members of 'Women Against Violence Against Women' were speaking" (xi). Many of Dworkin's ideas are presented more consistently in MacKinnon's *Only Words*, not available to Daniels when she was writing *Masterpieces*.

11. Tracy C. Davis, "Extremities and Masterpieces: A Feminist Paradigm of Art and Politics," *Feminist Theatre and Theory*, ed. Helene Keyssar (New York: St. Martin's, 1996) 145.

12. Sarah Daniels, interview in *Rage and Reason: Women Playwrights on Playwriting*, eds. Heidi Stephenson and Natasha Langridge (London: Methuen, 1997): "I did write *Masterpieces* out of a genuine fury and passion" (2).

13. 5.

14. Daniels, Introduction to *Plays: One* xi.
15. Daniels, *Masterpieces, Plays: One* 1.163; this and all subsequent citations for plays are indicated with scene and page number: for instance, 1.163 for scene one, page 163. Three numbers represent act, scene, and page number: for instance, 1.3.36 for act one, scene three, page 36.
16. 1.164.
17. 1.164.
18. 1.176.
19. 8.203.
20. Davis's well-meaning contention only goes to show how unproblematic the identification has become of Brechtian or nonsequential theatre with progressive.
21. Daniels, *Masterpieces* 8.205.
22. 5.191.
23. 9.206.
24. 9.208.
25. In *Pornography: Men Possessing Women* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1981), Andrea Dworkin perceives in pornography all the "strains of male power": "the power of self, physical power over and against others, the power of terror, the power of naming, the power of owning, the power of money, and the power of sex" (24). This "male power" is all encompassing, experienced whenever one senses a loss of utopian wholeness and fulsome humanity, whenever life is brought under control and "objectified" (that is, deprived of inalienable qualities): "The strains of male power are embodied in pornography's form and content, in economic control and distribution of wealth within the industry, in the picture or story as thing, in the photographer or writer as aggressor, in the critic or intellectual who through naming assigns value, in the actual use of models, in the application of the material in what is called real life (which women are commanded to regard as distinct from fantasy)" (25).
26. Catharine A. MacKinnon, *Only Words* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1993) 3.
27. Daniels, *Masterpieces* 16.227.
28. MacKinnon 6.
29. Daniels, *Masterpieces* 8.206.
30. 12.221.
31. 12.222.
32. 8.203.
33. 8.204.
34. 1.173.
35. MacKinnon defines snuff as films "in which actual murder is the ultimate sexual act, the reduction to the thing form of a human being and the silence of women literal and complete" (23). According to Dworkin, snuff reveals the necrophilic impulse that drives male sexuality: "The power of sex, in male terms, is also funereal. Death permeates it. The male erotic trinity—sex, violence, and death—reigns supreme. She will be or is dead. They did or will kill her. Everything that they do to or with her is violence" (30).
36. Daniels, *Masterpieces* 17.229-30; my emphasis.
37. This accords with Dworkin's conception of pornography in terms of power: "The major theme of pornography as a genre is male power, its nature, its magnitude, its use, its meaning" (24).
38. Dworkin 223; This is a major point in Dworkin's work, repeated in various striking passages throughout the book, as in the following one: "Pornography reveals that male pleasure is inextricably tied to victimizing, hurting, exploiting; that sexual fun and sexual passion in the privacy of the male imagination are inseparable from the brutality of male history. The private world of sexual dominance that men demand as their right and their freedom is the mirror image of the public world of sadism and atrocity that men consistently and self-righteously deplore. It is in the male experience of pleasure that one finds the meaning of male history" (69).
39. Daniels, Preface to *Masterpieces, Plays: One*, 159.
40. The movie *Snuff* combines sexually explicit scenes with violence. It is, however, not a hardcore pornographic movie, as for instance Ray Dennis Steckler's *Sexorcist Devil* (1974) that also deals with a satanic cult. It can best be described as a "sexploitation" film or a "gore-and-slasher" movie, not unlike Tobe Hooper's *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* (1974), but of poorer quality. It is very low budget, very badly acted, edited, and dubbed. Compared to more recent "splatter movies," such as James Wan's *Saw* (2004), or "torture porn," such as Eli Roth's *Hostel* (2005), its special effects are particularly unconvincing, especially in the "snuff" scene Rowena describes. Nevertheless, it has recently been

reissued on DVD and is now available from Amazon.com, distributed by Underground under a cleverly designed cover that lists no credits and, thus, upholds the fantasy that the movie is illegal and “real.”

41. When the scandal threatened his profits, the producer organized a press conference in which the actress made an appearance to quell rumors that she had been killed during the film shoot. Many remained unconvinced, preferring the gorier version of the story. For further discussion and analysis, see Avedon Carol, “Snuff: Believing the Worst” in *Bad Girls and Dirty Pictures: The Challenge to Reclaim Feminism*, eds. Alison Assiter and Avedon Carol (London: Pluto, 1993) 126-130; David Kerekes and David Slater, *Killing for Culture: An Illustrated History of Death Film* (San Francisco: Creation Books, 1995) 11-23; and, Sarah Finger, *La Mort en Direct: Les Snuff Movies* (Paris: Cherche-Midi, 2001) 38-43.

42. Anthony Neilson, *The Censor. Plays: I* (London: Methuen, 1998) 3.249.

43. UK also had the most stringent censorship rules for rental videos in Western Europe: movies such as *The Exorcist*, *Tango in Paris*, *A Clockwork Orange*, Sam Peckinpah’s *Straw Dogs*, Quentin Tarantino’s *Reservoir Dogs*, Abel Ferrara’s *Bad Lieutenant*, and most recently *Intimacy* (based on three Hanif Kureishi stories) are either not available in UK rental stores or only in expurgated versions. Most X-rated entertainment, widely available on the continent, such as live sex shows, for instance, is prohibited by law in Britain (see Alan Travis, *Bound and Gagged* [London: Profile Books, 2000] 278).

44. Neilson, *The Censor* 3.250.

45. 9.272-3.

46. MacKinnon, *Only Words*: “Pornography is masturbation material. It is used as sex. It therefore is sex” (17); also, “It is not ideas they are ejaculating over” (17).

47. Ian Hunter, David Saunders, and Dugald Williamson, *On Pornography: Literature, Sexuality and Obscenity Law* (London: Macmillan, 1993) 182-84, qtd. in Many Merck, *In Your Face: 9 Sexual Studies* (New York and London: New York UP, 2000) 121.

48. Neilson, *The Censor* 3.251.

49. 5.256.

50. 5.257.

51. 9.275.

52. 5.261.

53. 2.247.

54. 6.261.

55. 3.250.

56. 9.276.

57. 3.9.

58. 1.8.

59. Sigmund Freud, *Dora: An Analysis of a Case of Hysteria*, ed. Philip Rieff (New York: Macmillan, 1963) 96.

60. Neilson, *The Censor* 12.276-77.

61. Sigmund Freud, *Totem and Taboo: The Basic Writings of Sigmund Freud*, trans. A. A. Brill (New York: Random House, 1938) 826, 827.

62. Howard Brenton, *The Romans in Britain. Plays: Two* (London: Methuen Drama, 1989) 1.3.36.

63. For more information, see Richard Beacham, “Brenton Invades Britain: The Romans in Britain Controversy,” *Theater* 12.2 (1981): 34-37; Mark Lawson, “Passion Play,” *The Guardian* 28 (October 2005) <<http://www.guardian.co.uk/stage/2005/oct/28/theatre>>; David Thomas, David Carlton, and Anne Etienne, *Theatre Censorship: From Walpole to Wilson* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2007) 230-35; and, Philip Roberts, “Howard Brenton’s Romans,” *Critical Quarterly* 23.3 (1981): 5-23.

64. Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia UP, 1982) 1.

65. Daniels, *Masterpieces* 11.212.

66. Linda Williams, *Hardcore: Power, Pleasure, and the “Frenzy of the Visible”* (Berkeley: U of California P, 1999) xvi.

67. Daniels, *Masterpieces* 11.211.

68. 5.190.

69. 13.223.

70. 1.175.

71. 13.223.

72. 223.

73. The Methuen edition of the play, published in association with the Royal Court Theatre,

stipulates the scene requires “the sounds of gulls and waves.” This detail was left out in the collected plays edition to which the page numbers in this article refer.

74. Dworkin 223.

75. Another interesting stage direction suggests the future will not likely bring reprieve. When the “judge” refers to Rowena’s alleged frigidity in the days leading up to the crime, she responds by reading newspaper reports demonstrating legal bias in favor of men who commit crimes against women. A stage direction then stipulates, “[I]n future productions more up-to-date examples can be substituted for these” (16.226).

76. Daniels, *Masterpieces* 9.208.

77. Dworkin 56.

78. Daniels, *Masterpieces* 17.230.

79. Neilson, *The Censor* 1.245.

80. 13.283.

81. 14.284.

82. 13.284-5.

83. 9.271-2.

84. 12.280.

85. Jean Baudrillard, *The Ecstasy of Communication*, trans. Bernard and Caroline Schutze (New York: Semiotext(e) Foreign Agents Series, 1988) 22.

