

**Review: The Question of The Canon, Modern British Women Playwrights by Elaine Aston and Janelle Reinelt**

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**Abstract:**

In our reference mentioned above, “Canon” refers to literary arts historically set by men and power elites to ensure the repetition and perpetuation of works that reinforce a given culture's dominant ideology. These arts are “indispensable” works that must highlight, in particular, the works of modern British women playwrights. In this part, the authors choose three women playwrights, Caryl Churchill, Pam Gems, and Sarah Daniels, to explain the canonical notion.

**Keywords:** review, Modern British, ideology, women playwrights

**Introduction:**

The authors have mentioned that they are not ‘canonical’ for purely capricious reasons. Their work does share several attributes that account for why they are widely viewed as canonical writers.

Gems and Churchill contradict this assumption since both developed their careers as writing mothers, and many other women have managed to juggle these roles.

They may be considered canonical because of solid production and publication records and because their work now spans at least two generations, if not three.

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**Pam Gems: body politics and biography**

She has a prolific output—Gems is the author of some twenty plays and has adapted many European classics by many writers. This contrasts with her experience of the post-Liberation, post-Pill, and now so-called 'post-feminist' years, in which women have gained certain economic and sexual freedoms. Gems works with this

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dual vision: she brings her 'before' and 'after' experiences to bear on the complications of more excellent choices and opportunities for women.

### **Dusa, Fish, Stas and Vi**

Gems dramatizes a community of four very different young women who find common ground in their struggle to survive in a 'man-made' world. Fish loses the man she loves to another woman and realizes she has lost her chance to have his child; she breaks down and commits suicide. Dusa survives a failed marriage and a battle to get back her abducted children; Stas works as a hostess to fund her training as a marine biologist; and Vi, whose protest against the feminine body is registered in her refusal to eat.

Each of the three women represents a complex corporeal site of 'damaged' resistance; the bodies of the divorced mother, the prostitute, and the person with anorexia are all bodies violated by an artificial world.

However, fish, the political activist, does not survive because she fails to connect the politics of her middle-class feminism to the 'body politics' of her personal life.

### **Queen Christina**

The brief story is about how the woman plays the role of a man by disguising her sex and her royal identity because of the death of the baby, the successor of the king, at the time of birth. Then, how would she reveal her identity at the end?

The story refers to the dominance of the manhood society and the political situation in the life of the people.

### **Piaf**

Gems stage the gap between the star image of the French cabaret singer as 'the little sparrow' and the hardship of her working-class life, originating in destitution and prostitution.

Piaf is regarded as a woman who makes trouble' because she refuses to modify her behavior to an acceptable feminine 'norm.' Although she benefits from the material comfort of a singing career, brin rejects middle-class femininity's values, behaviors, and niceties. The play is pointing to the 'gap' between image and reality.

### **Camille**

The drama is inspired by the real-life courtesan Marie Duplessis, written by Alexander Dumas. The stages of the doomed love affair between the consumptive courtesan, Marguerite Gautier, and her bourgeois lover, Armand Duval. Marguerite needs her aristocratic lovers to pay for her material comfort, whereas Duval has neither the money to support her nor a father who will tolerate the liaison. The narrative ends with the death of Marguerite. Gems attempts several theatrical techniques to counter the sentimentalization of the tragic-romance narrative.

### **The Blue Angel and Marlene**

The Blue Angel details the story of a schoolmaster who cannot resist his passion for nightclub singer "Lola," thus bringing about his social disgrace and

downfall. So, the relationship between Lola and The play reflects a person who is a bruised but proud victim of a predatory society.

### **Stanley**

Gems set *Loving Women* in a contemporary scene to explore the issue of political projects and personal lives. Stanley Gems returns to a triangular relationship within the biographical framework of Stanley Spencer and his two wives, Hilda Carline and Patricia Preece.

The story focuses on the relationships with his two wives. His growing sexual obsession with Patricia gradually displaces Stanley's deep love and affection for his first wife, Hilda. He divorces Hilda to marry Patricia, but this second marriage is never consummated. Patricia desires Stanley for his money and artistic connections; her body she keeps for her lesbian lover, Dorothy Hepworth. Much of Act II is taken up with the attempted reconciliation between Stanley and Hilda and traces Hilda's decline in health, her mastectomy, and her death.

### **Caryl Churchill and the politics of style**

Caryl Churchill is arguably the most successful and best-known socialist feminist playwright to have emerged from second-wave feminism. Churchill has stimulated and provoked some of the most important feminist thinking about the theatre since coming to critical attention in the mid-1970s. It has been part of the feminist movement to ask for equality, freedom to meet sexual desires, and breaking down male dominance.

Churchill placed her characters as social subjects at the intersection of economic, religious, and political forces that disciplined their sexuality and prescribed gender.

Her best plays are *A Mouthful of Birds*, *A Number*, *Cloud Nine*, *Ding Dong*, *The Wicked*, *Far Away*, *Light Shining in Buckinghamshire*, *Love And Information*, *Mad Forest*, *Serious Money*, *The Skriker*, *Top Girls*, and *Vinegar Tom*.

### **Violence, abuse, and gender relations in the plays of Sarah Daniels**

Representations of the abuse of and violence against women are central to the plays of Sarah Daniels. The notion of any form of 'extremism' on the part of women, 'extremism' here, means simply a critique of women's domination by men. It is to her credit that this has not deterred her from addressing what remain abidingly serious issues: the oppression of women and their exploitation by men.

The chapter will focus on four issues: (1) that of the oppressed housewife, a key figure in Daniels's work; (2) female bonding as a means of countering female oppression; (3) the representation of violence against women; (4) the problem of the endings of Daniels's plays.

Women doing it for themselves and each other: cross-generational relations  
The 'happier' endings for the housewives discussed above are predicated upon four stages of development in the female characters: (1) women's recognition of their oppression; (2) women's articulation of that recognition to other women; (3) women's decision to fight this oppression; (4) female bonding in the face of adversity.

Violence against women can take many forms, as sexual abuse and harassment have created the idea of a 'split personality' for women. Moreover, women are the victims and are punished for it; men are the perpetrators and get away with it.

**Conclusion:**

Endings and the problem of realism Like Dworkin's, Daniels's plays thus argue that crimes against women do not count in this culture. None of Daniels's plays ends with the indictment of the male perpetrators of the crimes in any direct way. Instead, and as a consequence, the plays focus on what happens to the female characters. I want to relate these endings to the fact that Daniels's plays, though they contain several stylistic devices that undercut this effect, are, foremost, realistic. Daniels Plays are; 1, Ripen Our Darkness, The Devil's Gateway, Masterpiece, Neaptide, and Byrthrite. 2, Gut Girls, Beside Herself, Head-rot Holiday, Madness of Esme and Shaz.

**Reference:**

Aston E. & Reinelt J. (2000). *The Cambridge Companion to Modern British Women Playwrights: The question of the canon*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.