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“A Population [and Theater] at Risk”:  
Battered Women in  
Henley’s *Crimes of the Heart*  
and Shepard’s *A Lie of the Mind*

JANET V. HAEDICKE

“The weeping of women who are wives – what is more bitter?”<sup>1</sup>

Oft-castigated for its preponderance of family drama, American theater seems unprotestingly to cede stature to British theater, which has moved from “kitchen-sink” realism to presumably more universal and political plays. Yet the charge of triviality levelled against American “diaper drama”<sup>2</sup> in the theater dissipates in the face of the domestic drama currently being played on the cultural stage: statistics indicate that “An American resident is ‘more likely to be physically assaulted, beaten, and killed in the home at the hands of a loved one than any place else, or by anyone else.’”<sup>3</sup> That many such residents are women led former U.S. Surgeon-General C. Everett Koop in 1989 to decry wife-battering as “an overwhelming moral, economic, and public health burden that our society can no longer bear” and to identify battered women as “a population at risk.”<sup>4</sup> Current Surgeon-General Antonia Novello in 1992 backed a surprising American Medical Association declaration of domestic violence against women as an epidemic requiring intervention by health officials.<sup>5</sup> Should they escape their kitchens for the theater, those four million women assaulted annually would hardly find American family plays trivial or apolitical.

This is not to imply, however, that any such play is by nature politically progressive, even if it directly addresses the issue of family violence. Ironically, Beth Henley’s *Crimes of the Heart*, widely lauded as a breakthrough since its 1981 Pulitzer was the first for a woman in twenty-three years, emerges as ultimately regressive compared to Sam Shepard’s 1985 *A Lie of the Mind*, vehemently attacked by feminist critics as exemplifying the playwright’s macho vision.<sup>6</sup> Prompted by the ever-suspect politics of the Pulitzer, which has since rewarded female escape through suicide and meaning through maternity,<sup>7</sup> this treacherous stance finds theoretical ground in the location of

Henley's play within a modernist, albeit feminist, epistemology and Shepard's within a postmodernist, more politically feminist, one. Further outcry from feminists who attack postmodern theory's decentering of the subject as a negation of agency may be deflected by Wendy Brown's cogent response to the current critical (in every sense of the word) debate.

Brown argues that "postmodernity signifies a pervasive condition"<sup>8</sup> as distinguished from postmodern theory, which signifies, like the current modernist position, a response to that condition. Thus it is epoch, not theory, which poses a threat to formulating an effective alternative politics. The cultural-spatial disorientation of postmodernism has produced an identity politics and a strategic fundamentalism "rooted not [conservatively] in a coherent tradition but [reactionarily] in a fetishized, decontextualized fragment or icon of such a narrative – 'the American flag,' 'the great books,' 'the traditional family.'"<sup>9</sup> Insisting that even an issue from the Left, such as feminism, can become just such "reactionary foundationalism" when it poses as a necessary good, Brown contends that modernist feminism's rejection of postmodern theory as apolitical actually reflects an antipolitical preference for reason over power, truth over politics, security over freedom, discoveries over decisions, and identities over pluralities. It is such reactionary modernism which renders Henley's *Crimes of the Heart* Pulitzerly palatable and, not coincidentally, precludes encouragement of a feminist alternative politics to counter familial and social violence.

Literalizing both the "kitchen-sink" disparagement of domestic drama and the historical relegation of women to the private sphere, *Crimes of the Heart* takes place entirely in the kitchen of the MaGrath family home in Hazlehurst, Mississippi. Moreover, Henley specifies the time as "In the fall; five years after Hurricane Camille,"<sup>10</sup> thereby associating the turbulence in the lives of the MaGrath sisters with the turbulence of a Nature constructed as feminine. Indeed, these women seem to spawn turbulence, since the central crime of the play and the catalyst for their reunion is the youngest sister's shooting of her husband Zackery, the town's most prominent lawyer. The play opens on the oldest sister, Lenny, a stereotypical Southern spinster, pathetically celebrating her thirtieth birthday alone with a candle on a cookie in Old Granddaddy's kitchen, where she now sleeps. Summoned by Lenny, middle sister Meg returns from California, where she has pursued a singing career but achieved only a mental breakdown. Out on bail, the youngest sister, Babe, with "an angelic face" and "pink pocketbook" (18), refuses to offer any explanation for the shooting other than "I just didn't like his stinking looks!" (19).

Babe's lawyer, Barnette, whose fondness for his client stems from her selling him a cake at a bazaar, reveals to Meg medical charts which indicate that Zackery has "brutalized and tormented" (27) Babe over the past four years. Confronted by Meg's demand for a reason for Zackery's abuse (as if any could exist), Babe replies: "I don't know! He started hating me, 'cause

I couldn't laugh at his jokes" (29). Thus wife-battering is the crime behind the crime here, aligning Babe's attempted homicide with that "nearly three-fourths of the violence perpetrated by women [which] is committed in self-defense."<sup>11</sup> So cursory, however, is Henley's treatment of this motive, to which the play never again even alludes, that its significance is occluded. Indeed, most critics seem oblivious to the fact that Babe is a battered woman, concentrating instead on the self-destructive violence of the sisters' behavior; even those who do acknowledge the abuse treat it as a "detail."<sup>12</sup> Henley further undercuts the impact of the issue by Babe's wackiness. Surely it is not only the undeniably sensitive perspective of a Southern female spectator which finds Henley's humor reductionist, a perpetuation of magnolia mush rather than the Southern Gothic comedy ascribed by admirers. Babe's preparing and drinking lemonade after the shooting to the point of pseudo-pregnancy ("my stomach kind of swoll all up" [35]) and then offering a glass to the prostrate, bleeding Zackery renders trivial rather than grotesque the image of family violence. Attempts at feminist recuperation of this scene lead to such stretches as "Lemonade must quench the thirst for masculine validation that neither her father [who abandoned them] nor Zachary [sic] may be depended upon to satisfy."<sup>13</sup> This critical excess, however, is at least partially absolved by the palpability in the play of that thirst in each of the sisters.

Indeed, the immediate motive for Babe's crime proves to be not self-defense but the defense of her fifteen-year-old black lover, whom Zackery struck and shoved off the porch. Initially planning to shoot herself, Babe remembers her mother's hanging herself with her cat: "Then I realized – that's right I realized how I didn't want to kill myself! And she – she probably didn't want to kill herself. She wanted to kill him, and I wanted to kill him, too. I wanted to kill Zackery, not myself. 'Cause I – I wanted to live!" (31–32). Often cited as exemplifying the rise of female assertiveness in the play, the passage reflects only a reactive subjectivity underscored by Babe's two subsequent suicide attempts, which Henley renders farcical by a broken rope and a failed Plath-imitation. Likewise, the female desire here smacks of pathetic need, a sexual stereotyping worsened by its racial and regional echoes:

MEG I'm amazed, Babe. I'm really, completely amazed. I didn't even know you were a liberal.

BABE Well, I'm not! I'm not a liberal! I'm a democratic! I was just lonely! I was so lonely. And he was good. Oh, he was so, so good. I'd never had it that good. We'd always go out into the garage and – (31)

This Southern-apolitical-middle-class-white-lily-awakened-by-double-named-mindless-lower-class-black-stud scenario offends further when Meg sees the pictures taken by Zackery's sister of Babe and Willie Jay in the garage:

"Well, he certainly *has* grown. You were right about that. My, oh, my" (61, emphasis in original). Parodic female assertiveness continues in Babe's admirable but undeniably maternalistic protection of Willie Jay, who is eventually shipped north by Babe's savior Barnette. Even more regressive than Babe's rescue-relationship, founded on pound cake and talk of the "Christmas angel" (36), is Meg's purported regeneration through the realization that "I could want someone" (57) who no longer wants her. Worse still is Lenny's recovery via the telephoned confession of her "shrunken ovary" to her beau from the Lonely Hearts Club of the South, who miraculously wants a non-breeder.

Understandably eliding this overtly schematized self-discovery through male validation, feminist criticism of the play focuses on the rebirth of identity through female and family bonding. Overcome by her real birthday cake, Lenny has a vision of "Just this one moment and we were all laughing," which the play's final image concretizes: "*the lights change and frame [the sisters] in a magical, golden, sparkling glimmer*" (72). Such a vision – Lenny's and Henley's – represents a reaction to rather than an "ultimate rejection of [mediating patriarchal forces]"<sup>14</sup> and thus reflects the reactionary foundationalism of modernist feminism, which posits Truth in individualized subjectivity (consciousness raising) and refuses to deconstruct the subject though insisting on gender as a construct. As Brown insists, "Since women's subordination is partly achieved through the construction and positioning of us as private – sexual, familial, emotional – and is produced and inscribed in the domain of both domestic and psychic interiors, then within modernity, the voicing of women's experience acquires an inherently confessional cast."<sup>15</sup>

Henley inadvertently reproduces this construction and succumbs to Foucault's "internal ruse of confession,"<sup>16</sup> which opposes truth and freedom to silence and power. Clinging to illusory icons of unity in identity and in family, denying the "groundlessness of *discovered* norms or visions,"<sup>17</sup> Henley's women offer, at best, only the power of Nietzsche's "slave morality," a power of reaction and a politics of *ressentiment*. *Crimes of the Heart*, then, dramatizes what Brown terms "feminist hesitations" rather than a feminist politics. So tempting for feminists is this equation of confessional truth with moral good that Joan Cocks also warns against *ressentiment* and resistance politics, which risks becoming a "sanctification of powerlessness, a celebration of weakness, a championing of victim status."<sup>18</sup> The sisters' party seems just this sort of celebration, and Henley's play, just this sort of championing. *Crimes of the Heart* leaves us with saxophone strains in the theater, but, since the music echoes the pathos of Babe's career ambitions on this instrument that she has never played, with no transformative politics to counter violence against women in the family.

Shepard, on the other hand, consistently dramatizes the urgency of a move beyond *ressentiment* in his family plays, which denaturalize rather than

revalidate individualism and the traditional family. Although to posit Shepard as feminist is to risk banishment from the ranks, Shepard's dramaturgy increasingly offers that "Democratic political space" essential for feminism.<sup>19</sup> On Shepard's stage, Oedipal politics is foregrounded in the violence of its faltering rather than, as many feminist critics claim, supported in a covert ratification of violence against women through realistic representation. Even *A Lie of the Mind*, the most overtly violent and ostensibly realistic of the family plays, belies Lynda Hart's accusation of a "pornographic vision,"<sup>20</sup> since that very vision (or male gaze) constitutes the lie of the title. Much as Shepard's postmodern theatricalism disrupts the surface illusion of causal, Newtonian realism, Jake's beating of his wife, Beth, splays open the violent illusion of binary vision, its subject-object poles inevitably gendered and hierarchized. Instead of Henley's reactionary foundationalism in iconizing family, Shepard presents an indictment of family structure as not only the site but also the cause of violence against women.

The stage set, which physically separates Jake from Beth until play's end through the "infinite space"<sup>21</sup> of the "*middle neutral territory*" (21), renders concrete the binary construction of gender, which psychically separates them. Both replay their childhoods at the foundation of subjectivity, the family home. Beth has regressed to a childlike state as a result of brain damage from the battering; Jake, as a result of a mental collapse from the belief that he has killed his wife. On each side of the stage and country is enacted an Oedipal scenario, which mimics the theatricalism inherent in the cultural construction of gender roles.<sup>22</sup> Stripped of his pants, the adult Jake is imprisoned in his short boyhood bed by a mother driven to incestuous attachment by her husband's desertion and subsequent death. The presence of the father weighs heavily, not only as "Some disease he left behind" (91) in his wife, Lorraine, but also in the pressure on Jake, who comments on the box of his father's ashes retrieved from under his bed: "He's kinda' heavy" (39). A military man "always cookin' up some weird code" (36), Jake's father personifies the monolithic masculinity which encodes meanings or inscribes "Truths." As the pantless Jake stares at the Second World War model airplanes dangling from the ceiling and dons his father's bomber jacket, Shepard provides a telescopic image of the originary violence of the Oedipal legacy. Recent research having shifted the psychological determinant in date rape from the rapist's hostility towards the mother to that towards the father, David Lisak maintains that hypermasculinity provoked by paternal distance spawns violence against women.<sup>23</sup> Lisak's warning about this by-product of gender-divided families finds its echo in Shepard's drama. Jake's repeated abuse of Beth ("I saw her face. It was bad this time" [2]) perpetuates, according to his brother, Frankie, a childhood pattern of violence ("Well you kicked the shit out of that [milk] goat you loved so much . . ." [13]). Jake himself implicates his father in the violence of his gaze. When the voyeuristic image of Beth, who is "*simply his*

vision" (41), blacks out as he moves towards it, he blows into the box of ashes.

Whereas Henley confines battering wholly to pre-text, Shepard assaults the spectator with its evidence. Beth first appears in a hospital bed, head bandaged, face bruised. The witnessing of her laborious recovery physically elicits shock and horror, which remain even as her precarious steps and fragmented speech metaphorically evoke the construction of subjectivity: "Who fell me? Iza – Iza name? Iza name to come. Itz – Itz – Inza man. Inza name" (6). Permeating the play is this postmodern insistence on subjects constituted linguistically and thus decentered, which refutes modernist notions of unmediated and centered (or gendered) identity. Moreover, Shepard's alternating narrative and persistent doubling of Beth and Jake<sup>24</sup> do not so much posit Jake as an *equal* victim of machismo as emphasize their mutual construction on the Oedipal stage where gender roles are scripted.<sup>25</sup> Beth's first lucid words, "Am I a mummy now?" (4), suggest a pun encouraged by further conflation of marriage and maternity with lifelessness and weakness. Meg, Beth's submissive mother, confuses her history with that of her own mother until her husband, Baylor, disdainfully clarifies who was actually "locked up"(30).

Beth associates history's erasure of women with psychology's inscription of castration, both signifying female absence to verify male presence. To Frankie, mistaken for a deer and shot in the leg by her father, she suggests the possibility of amputation. Showing an incredulous Frankie the "Knife tracks" of her "*nonexistent scar*," Beth parodies the Freudian biological fiction of a female scar of inferiority and the Lacanian linguistic fiction of female lack:<sup>26</sup>

BETH ... No brain. Cut me out. Cut. Brain. Cut.

FRANKIE No, Beth, look – They didn't – they didn't operate did they? Nobody said anything about that.

BETH They don't say. Secret. Like my old Mom. Old. My Grand Mom. Old.

They cut her. Out. Disappeared. They don't say her name now. She's gone.

Vanish. ... My Father sent her someplace. Had her gone. (73–74)

This theatricalization of the Oedipal myth of female castration exposes feminine absence or weakness as a masculine binary construct, a lie of the mind to sustain subject/object dominance and foster male subjectivity by subjection. Rebelling against her brother Mike's role of male as hunter-protector to female as domestic-dependent, Beth screams: "You make an enemy. In me. In me! An enemy. You. You. You think me. You think you know. You think. You have a big idea" (45).

The "You" accused in the play is the masculinist, militarist cultural complex, which perpetuates paradigmatic binary logic: psychology's phallus

versus lack, language's symbolic versus imaginary, history's fact versus fiction, metaphysics' presence versus absence, all encoded as male versus female. Subjectivity is thus constructed by opposition and exclusion. Here lies the "lie," the source of violence in the world and in the play. Jake's latest beating of Beth erupted ("Why didn't I see it comin'. I been good for so long" [2]) from his own vision of infidelity at a play rehearsal; like Mike, Jake "thinks her": "I knew what she was up to even if she didn't" (11). Jake's violent aversion to acting ("This acting shit is more real than the real world to her" [10]) signals a modernist aversion to shifting subjectivity ("She was unrecognizable" [10]) as a threat to unified identity, which the men guard as dogs guard their territory. Juxtaposed dramatically against the bravado of barking dogs is the vulnerability of silent deer, one of whose hindquarters Mike plops onstage in triumph over his father in their hunting rivalry. At this reminder of Oedipal severing, Beth marvels, "You cut him in half?" (80), echoing verbally Shepard's theatrical undercutting of gender "reality" and dramatic "realism." When Meg uncharacteristically refutes her husband in claiming that hunting is war, not art, she tells him to go ahead and leave, since the women have actually taken care of themselves anyway. Citing her mother's description of males and females as "'Two opposite animals'" (103), Meg exasperates Baylor with her claim that now "Beth's got male in her" (104).

Beth responds to her disorientation, which makes emblematic the cultural/spatial disorientation of a postmodern world, by moving beyond the androgynous reconciliation posited by modernist identity politics to a denaturalization of Oedipal identity. Remaining with "Naked" feet (43) rather than choosing between fuzzy slippers and work boots, Beth mocks the cultural construction of gender as opposition accepted by her foremothers and encoded in clothes. To Frankie's discomfort, she removes her father's plaid shirt, insisting that he "need it" (71) to cover his wound (feminized weakness or castration), and giggles at the burden of fixating gendered identity: "Look how big a man is. So big. He scares himself. His shirt scares him. He puts his scary shirt on so it won't scare himself. He can't see it when it's on him. Now he thinks it's him. . . . Jake was scared of shirts. . . . This is like a custom. . . . For play. Acting" (74-75). The association of tradition, acting, and identity reveals Beth's abdication of foundationalism as she parodies romantic love, though she has claimed to love Jake still. Pushing Frankie down on the sofa and giggling, "You fight but all the time you want . . . me on your face" (76), Beth mimics the progression from romance to rape mentality and the male fantasy of "her mouth says no but her eyes say yes," which disclaims sexual violence.

Rescripting her own marriage, Beth directs Frankie to "Pretend" the Jake role: "But soft. . . . Like a woman-man. . . . Without hate" (76). Over Frankie's protestations that "It's not good for my [penis] leg," Beth proposes *pretending*



their way into "a love we never knew" (77). Attacks on Shepard for validating romantic love's pornographic objectification of women ignore the theatricalism foregrounded in this scene as in the rest of the play, a theatricalism which insists on the theatricalism of post-Heisenberg culture itself. Beth subverts through mimicry the simulacrum of scripted love and its inscription of violence. Her final appearance in bizarre clothing "*straight out of the fifties*" (111) mocks the mentality of those like her father who see such a "roadhouse chippie" (111) as fair prey.<sup>27</sup> Further, this presentation of sexuality as a gendered representation, a "custom" wherein Beth "looks equally like a child playing dress-up and like a hooker,"<sup>28</sup> underscores the horror of Jake's gaze, whereby perception equals Truth and shifts in identity must be brutally quashed.

Beth's fragmented yet oracular speech, like Tilden's in *Buried Child*, suggests agency within mediated subjectivity: "I get the thought. Mixed. It dangles. Sometimes the thought just hangs with no words there. . . . It speaks. Speeches. In me. Comes and goes" (72-73). Shepard's postmodern thematics and theatricalism preclude viewing as reactionary foundationalism Beth's assertions to Frankie that "We'll be in a whole new world" (114) and undermine modernist drama's inscription of the present and the past. Unlike Henley's, the female emergence dramatized here moves beyond the confessional voicing of female experience in the private sphere, hence beyond *ressentiment* and subordination. The revelation by Jake's sister that the son plotted the father's death in Mexico by challenging him to a bar-to-bar "First one to America!" (94) footrace prompts Lorraine's recognition that keeping house was "just a dream of theirs . . . to keep me on the hook" (96). She thus urges her daughter, once banished to reinstate the son in his throne-room, towards freedom from Oedipal rule. Setting afire the icons of the past and family tradition - photos and "*paraphernalia from the men*" (115), Lorraine plans for them to "Do a little jig" and then "Just walk" (120) as the house burns.

In jarring juxtaposition, a still pantless Jake emerges in the center space, "*walking on his knees straight toward the audience with the American flag between his teeth and stretched taut on either side of his head*" (120), these "*reins*" held by a rifle-armed Mike. Thus confronted, the audience stands implicated in the violence inherent in modernist fundamentalism's fetishized iconography. Jake is subjugated by the flag with which his country awarded his dead father's military mindset and in the spirit of which he rendered his wife "red and black and blue" (3).<sup>29</sup> Though Mike attempts vengeance in the name of family, his Oedipal territory, too, is eroding as he inadvertently points the rifle at his father, who has demanded the flag wrapped around it. More concerned with fighting for the blanket that has shrouded Frankie "*like a mummy*" (124)<sup>30</sup> and with sanctifying "the flag of our nation" (123) than with Mike's captive, Baylor solicits Meg's help in folding the flag "letter

perfect" (130). Her presence recognized by neither parent, Beth hears Jake's confession, which echoes her own former disconnected speech: "Everything in me lies. But you. You Stay. You are true" (128-29). Jake has been driven back to Beth by not a vision but a voice, "a voice I knew once but now it's changed. It doesn't know me either. Now. It used to but not now. I've scared it into something else. Another form" (85).

Though Jake's bequeathing of Beth to his protesting brother obviously raises feminist ire, Frankie exists only as a vocalization of Beth, whose voice, as Jake has recognized, now presages transformation. The feminist possibilities capsulized in Beth's speech find interdisciplinary underscoring in Donna Haraway's call for a postmodernist feminist position for scientists: "Feminism loves another science: the sciences and politics of interpretation, translation, stuttering, and the partly understood. Feminism is about the sciences of the multiple subject."<sup>31</sup> Although Nancy Love faults this notion of "situated knowledges" as still too rooted in objectivity and vision, she perceives in Haraway's vocal metaphors a subtextual emphasis on democratic discourse. Love advocates vocal metaphor as signalling an extra-foundationalist "political epistemology [as opposed to the epistemological politics of visual imagery] and, with it, a political transformation. . . . an empowerment/knowledge regime,"<sup>32</sup> which makes democratic discourse possible. Shepard's emphasis on vocal metaphors pushes the play beyond a "championing of victim status" and renders its final vision a created revision rather than the "discovered vision" of Henley's sisters. As Jake exits, shrouded in the patriarchal blanket, and Baylor exits, clinging to its analogue, the flag, Meg refuses to follow her husband, who has rewarded her folding efforts with his first kiss in twenty years. With hand to cheek, Meg describes Lorraine's fire across stage and country: "Looks like a fire in the snow. How could that be?" (131). Only the most myopic perspective is persuaded here of a reawakening of passion in marriage and the reinscription of unity. Nor does Shepard grieve for the failed reconciliation of constructed opposites.<sup>33</sup> As its sheer theatricalism insists, the bucket fire, which burns as the stage lights fade, heralds a Phoenix-rite wherein wives no longer weep in Oedipus's house.

Shepard's postmodernist theater thus ignites a politics beyond Henley's modernist drama, which can kindle only kitchen fires. Rather than recentering the subject in a subjective, moral Truth, which replays the heart's crimes, Shepard decenters the subject in a political, amoral truth, which reveals the mind's lie. No "sanctification of powerlessness" but the voice of power, such truth creates in the cultural theater that discourse in a "democratic political space" which constitutes a feminist politics beyond *ressentiment*. Providing the quintessential forum for vocal metaphors and thus for a political epistemology, theater can become that space where theory scripts praxis. Shepard himself hails "Words as living incantations and not as symbols. Taken in this way, the organization of living, breathing words as they hit the air between

the actor and the audience actually possesses the power to change our chemistry."<sup>34</sup> Hardly giving voice to macho nostalgia, this alleged pornographer confronts the dangers of fixated (gendered) vision and fulfills Haraway's edict that "The interrogation for the limits and violence of vision is part of the politics of learning to revision."<sup>35</sup> Thus does Shepard evoke a transformative politics: "What I'm trying to get at here is that the real quest of a writer is to penetrate into another world. A world behind the form. The contradiction is that as soon as that world opens up, I tend to run the other way. It's scary because I can't answer to it from what I know."<sup>36</sup> And run the masculinist in him and in his audience might, since that "world behind the form," that future beyond the present, must embrace feminism, a feminism which must, in turn, embrace postmodernism. As American family drama moves from Henley's theater of causal identity to Shepard's theater of chaotic multiplicity, it calls for the American family to vacate the site of subjectivity by opposition and subjugation by gender for one of subjectivity in difference and connection in contradiction. Then mainstream theater becomes a voice for the margins in the mainstream, a voice of empowerment for those populations at risk.<sup>37</sup> With such voice, in the words of one battered, "Raggedy Ann Takes a Stand"<sup>38</sup> onstage in the theater of American culture.

## NOTES

- 1 Nancy Hoffman, "A Journey into Knowing: Agnes Smedley's *Daughter of Earth*" in Florence Howe, ed., *Tradition and the Talents of Women* (Urbana, IL, 1991), 174.
- 2 Martin Esslin's use of the term reflects his perception of a "deep anti-intellectual, anti-ideological bias" in American drama. "'Dead! And Never Called Me Mother!': The Missing Dimension in American Drama," *Studies in the Literary Imagination*, 21:2 (Fall 1988), 28. Robert Brustein also faults contemporary American theater as family "guilt-mongering" but objects to the limitations of causal as opposed to metaphorical theater more than to domestic drama itself. "The Crack in the Chimney: Reflections on Contemporary American Playwriting," *Theater*, 9:2 (Spring 1978), 29.
- 3 Sara Munson Deats and Lagretta Tallent Lenker, Introduction, in Deats and Lenker, eds., *The Aching Hearth: Family Violence in Life and Literature* (New York, 1991), 1.
- 4 Cited in *ibid.*, 3.
- 5 Jill Smolowe, "What the Doctor Should Do," *Time*, 29 June 1992, 57.
- 6 Lynda Hart, for example, sees the play as verifying Florence Falk's location of Shepard in the realm of "Male Homo Erectus" (69) and insists that the family plays mitigate male violence by placing it "within the context of romantic ideology." "Sam Shepard's Pornographic Visions," *Studies in the Literary Imagination*, 21:2 (Fall 1988), 73.

- 7 Marsha Norman's *'night, Mother* garnered the prize in 1983; Wendy Wasserstein's *The Heidi Chronicles*, in 1989.
- 8 Wendy Brown, "Feminist Hesitations, Postmodern Exposures," *Differences*, 3:1 (Spring 1991), 64.
- 9 *Ibid.*, 68.
- 10 Beth Henley, *Crimes of the Heart* (New York, Dramatists Play Service, 1982), 4. Subsequent page references to the play are to this edition and will appear in my text.
- 11 Deats and Lenker, 4.
- 12 Karen L. Laughlin, "Criminality, Desire, and Community: A Feminist Approach to Beth Henley's *Crimes of the Heart*," *Women and Performance*, 3:1 (1986), 44.
- 13 Laura Morrow, "Orality and Identity in *'night, Mother* and *Crimes of the Heart*," *Studies in American Drama, 1945-Present*, 3 (1988), 34.
- 14 Laughlin, 48. Morrow reflects critical consensus in claiming that each sister is "reborn as an individual as a consequence of her redefinition of her identity and rediscovery of her ability to love" (38).
- 15 Brown, 73.
- 16 Cited in *ibid.*, 73.
- 17 *Ibid.*, 77, emphasis in original.
- 18 Joan Cocks, "Augustine, Nietzsche, and Contemporary Body Politics," *Differences*, 3:1 (Spring 1991), 145. Unlike Brown, Cocks acknowledges the problematics of Nietzsche for feminists but presents an equally convincing argument for his relevance.
- 19 Brown, 79.
- 20 Hart, 82. Hart agrees with Sue-Ellen Case that Shepard's family plays evince a "heterosexist ideology linked with its stage partner realism" (80). This prevalent position in feminist drama criticism, though based on feminist film criticism, ignores the evolution therein beyond the anti-narrative postulation of an inescapable "male gaze."
- 21 Sam Shepard, *A Lie of the Mind* (New York, New American Library, 1986), set description preceding Act One. Subsequent page references to the play are to this edition and will appear in my text.
- 22 David DeRose finds the play a "surprisingly tame vision of love and subsequent violence American style" devoid of Shepard's trademark theatricality and mythic imagery. "Slouching towards Broadway: Shepard's *A Lie of the Mind*," *Theater*, 17:2 (1986), 69. If, however, the Oedipal complex is recognized as myth and its cultural inscription as theatrical, then Shepard here demystifies this "American style" conjunction of love and violence.
- 23 David Lisak, "Sexual Aggression, Masculinity, and Fathers," *Signs*, 16:2 (Winter 1991), 238-62.
- 24 Rosemarie Bank details the doubling in the play as manifesting a "Self as Other" transformation in the "heterotopic climate of postmodern drama." "Self

- as Other: Sam Shepard's *Fool for Love* and *A Lie of the Mind*" in June Schlueter, ed., *Feminist Rereadings of Modern American Drama* (Rutherford, NJ, 1989), 239.
- 25 Shepard does view his father and himself in his father's wake as victims of machismo. Jonathan Cott, "The Rolling Stone Interview: Sam Shepard," *Rolling Stone*, 18 December 1986, 172.
  - 26 Mary Jacobus rejects Freud's female-as-castrated image ("she develops, like a scar, a sense of inferiority"), dismissing penis envy as a "defensive fiction," "An 'idée fixe' designed to stabilize an original undecidability . . . by projecting the boy's threatened loss or 'cut' onto the girl's scarred psyche." *Reading Women* (New York, 1986), 114.
  - 27 A recent *Time* survey indicates that 53 per cent of American adults over fifty believe that a woman is "partly to blame" for rape if "she dresses provocatively." Nancy Gibbs, "When Is It Rape?" *Time*, 3 June 1991, 51.
  - 28 Sheila Rabillard, "Sam Shepard: Theatrical Power and American Dreams," *Modern Drama*, 30 (1987), 69.
  - 29 This conflation of patriotism, the military, and familial and sexual violence recurs in Shepard's most recent play, *States of Shock*, when the uniformed father beats the war-castrated son, whose identity he denies, as White Man masturbates, both to the rhythm of visual and auditory weapon blasts. The theatricalization of war (so frightening in the Middle East) epitomizes Shepard's view of the violence of fixating gendered identity: "There's some hidden, deeply rooted thing in the Anglo male American that has to do with inferiority, that has to do with not being a man, and always, continually having to act out some idea of manhood that invariably is violent." Michiko Kakutani, "Myths, Dreams, and Realities - Sam Shepard's America," *New York Times*, 29 January 1984, sec. 2, 26, emphasis mine.
  - 30 Males fighting over a blanket mantle/shroud also provides a *leitmotif* in *Buried Child*, revealing Shepard's focus on the mummification of the patriarch.
  - 31 Donna Haraway, "Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective," *Feminist Studies*, 14 (Fall 1988), 589.
  - 32 Nancy S. Love, "Politics and Voice(s): An Empowerment/Knowledge Regime," *Differences*, 3:1 (Spring 1991), 86.
  - 33 Having established oppositions between same-sex characters, Gregory Lanier nonetheless insists on the "balanced opposition" between male and female and sees tragedy in the "futility of ever achieving a single, unified resolution." "Two Opposite Animals: Structural Pairing in Sam Shepard's *A Lie of the Mind*," *Modern Drama*, 34 (1991), 419.
  - 34 Sam Shepard, "Visualization, Language and the Inner Library," *Drama Review*, 21:4 (December 1977), 53.
  - 35 Haraway cited by Love, 93.
  - 36 Shepard, "Visualization," 55.
  - 37 Only burgeoning public awareness can account for the shamefully belated but

auspicious changes in the legal system signalled by a recognition in some states of Battered Women's Syndrome as a legal defense and grounds for clemency.

- 38 Deborah Eve Grayson, "Raggedy Ann Takes a Stand," cited by Nicholas Mazza, "When Victims Become Survivors: Poetry and Battered Women" in *The Aching Hearth*, 40.