A MAN’S WORLD:
EXPLORING GENDER CONFINEMENT AND RESTRICTIVE
SEXUAL ROLES IN FRANCA RAME AND DARIO FO’S

A WOMAN ALONE

____________________________________
A Thesis
Presented to
The Honors Tutorial College
Ohio University

____________________________________
In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for Graduation
from the Honors Tutorial College
with the degree of
Bachelor of Fine Arts in Theatre

____________________________________
by
Sophie A. Mitchem
April 2016
This thesis has been approved by

The Honors Tutorial College and the Division of Theater

_________________________________
Dr. William Condee
Honors Tutorial College, DOS
Thesis Advisor
Theater

_________________________________
Dr. Carey Snyder
Professor, English
Thesis Advisor

_________________________________
Jeremy Webster
Dean, Honors Tutorial College
Table of Contents

Introduction 4

*Figlia d'arte: Franca Rame Biography* 9

*The Woman Question: An Analysis of A Woman Alone* 17

*When Worlds Collide: Theatrical Context* 27

*I’m Maria: Production Reflection* 41

Conclusion 54

Works Cited 57

Appendix 59
Introduction

Over and over again, stories in women's magazines insist that women can know fulfillment only at the moment of giving birth to a child...In the feminine mystique, there is no other way for a woman to dream of creation or of the future. There is no other way she can even dream about herself, except as her children's mother, her husband’s wife.

—Betty Friedan

The restrictive gender and sexual roles that Betty Friedan describes in her feminist classic, The Feminine Mystique (1963), are still prevalent for women in today's society. While women no longer face the same pressure to be housewives, they still must deal with confining gender expectations as well as being limited in their expressions of sexuality. The media frequently misrepresents female sexuality and handles women's issues only superficially. By portraying female characters in popular television shows as constrained by gender norms or shamed for their sexuality, the media potentially influences audience views on women. Simplistic depictions of female characters on television shows that reach millions of viewers are harmful to the society's perception of women. For example, the character of Christina Yang in Grey's Anatomy is frequently made out to be less of a woman, and referred to as a “robot” or “monster” because she places her career as a surgeon ahead of wanting a child. In addition, her husband moves out of their home after she has an abortion. This expectation of gender conformity can also be seen in Law & Order: Special Victims Unit in the character of Detective Olivia Benson. While succeeding in her career, she is seen struggling to find love and maintain romantic relationships. Both characters do transgress traditional gender roles; these television
shows, however, reflect society’s condemnation of women who are not “female enough” without the desire for a husband or child.

Uninhibited expression of women’s sexuality is also often depicted as inappropriate, with “slut shaming” — the act of degrading a woman for being sexually active, having multiple sexual partners, or masturbating — still rampant in the media. Popular television shows such as Gossip Girl consistently slut-shame the lead female characters. Another common trope in television shows is sexualizing violence against women, which can be seen gratuitously in Game of Thrones. More complex and nuanced depictions of female sexuality can be seen, however, in certain shows like How to Get Away With Murder and The 100, both of which depict their diverse casts of women exploring sexuality outside the heteronormative expectations. Despite this range of representation, female sexuality is still largely one-sided and presents depictions that do not accord with how many women express their sexuality. For example, as recently as 2014, Leah Simon wrote in the Washington Square News,

Historically, society has attached chastity, virginity and preservation to the female identity... Culturally, the [attitude toward] female bodily exploration is more dismissive than accepting. Without a safe space to learn and discuss their sexual urges, many girls feel a hybrid of shame and confusion regarding their sexual selves... [G]irls are educated on their sexuality through media representation and through the dismissive tone that is perpetuated toward female sensuality on a cultural level.
Not only do women struggle to learn about their sexuality in schools and societal groups, but they also are unable to look to the media for accurate representation.\footnote{This sexual difference between men and women can be demonstrated even further, in my interpretation, when looking at masturbation rates. According to the National Survey of Sexual Health and Behavior, 18.8\% of men, aged eighteen to twenty-four, masturbate more than four times per week compared to the 3.1\% of women in that same category. These rates exemplify that female masturbation is not discussed or portrayed as commonly as male masturbation.} This unfortunately skewed media representation can be tied back to the fact that the majority of movies are written, produced and directed by men.

It is because of the lack of sexual education for women and the confining gender roles women face that I chose to explore this topic in my thesis. Before starting university, I was not educated in sexual health at all. My high school taught abstinence and the most exposure I got to sexual education was through the sex jokes told on the television show, *Friends*. I also attended a high school where engagements by graduation were common and going to university to receive your “MRS” degree was encouraged. Throughout my four years at Ohio University, I began to explore feminist studies and realized I was not the only woman who had faced constraining gender expectations and sexual shame. Paired with my studio work and tutorials, these women’s studies classes revolutionized the way I thought about what it means to be a woman. Through this exploration, I developed my thesis topic: the
effect of gender confinement and restrictive sexual roles for women in a one-woman show, *A Woman Alone* by Franca Rame and Dario Fo (1977).

*A Woman Alone* focuses on Maria, a housewife and mother who is confined to her home by her husband after he discovers her extra-marital affair with a younger boy. Throughout the fifty-minute play, Maria contends with the needs of multiple men, including her injured brother-in-law, whom she cares for; her baby, who cries throughout the latter half of the play; the young boy, with whom she had a sexual relationship; a peeping tom; an unknown man on the phone who expects pornographic conversations; and her husband who continues to check in on her throughout the day. While dealing with these men, Maria finds solace and friendship in an unseen neighboring woman to whom she speaks for the duration of the play. These expectations placed on Maria lead her to consider suicide until the neighboring woman convinces her otherwise. The final moments of the play show Maria violently reacting towards the men: the last image is Maria awaiting her husband’s arrival home with a gun in hand.

This thesis consists of a scholarly analysis of the play and its literary, biographical, and historical contexts; a performance of *A Woman Alone* on February 4, 5 and 6, 2016; and a reflection on the production. The written thesis consists of four chapters, the first of which is an introduction to the playwrights, especially Rame, and the position of women within Italian culture in the 1970s. The second chapter analyzes *A Woman Alone* through the lens of Betty Friedan’s *The Feminine Mystique* to contextualize the play. The third chapter uses the prominent feminist
dramas *Hedda Gabler*, by Henrik Ibsen, and *Machinal*, by Sophie Treadwell, to further illuminate Fo and Rame’s work and contextualize the women’s liberation movement. The final chapter is the reflection on the process of producing and performing in *A Woman Alone*, directed by Professor David Haugen. The appendix includes the production’s program note, photographs from the production and other notable pictures, as well as the translation of *A Woman Alone* that I used. Through this thesis, I demonstrate the damage done to women because of societal standards and taboos against female sexuality, which in turn necessitate the production of plays such as *A Woman Alone* that criticize those standards and work to eliminate such taboos.
Chapter One: Figlia d’arte

The only way for a woman, as for a man, to find herself, to know herself as a person, is by creative work of her own.

—Betty Friedan

This chapter examines the life and work of Franca Rame and Dario Fo, with specific attention paid to Rame, as well as the Italian culture during which A Woman Alone was written. While their work started with specific focus on the working class movement in Italy, this chapter will focus on the playwrights’ subset of feminist pieces. These monologues were strongly influenced by Rame’s background and her own work in the women’s liberation movement in Italy. These monologues also respond to the Catholic Church’s influence on Italian society and the pressures placed specifically on Italian wives and mothers.

Franca Rame (1928-2013) was an internationally renowned Italian playwright, actress and political activist. Considered a “figlia d’arte” (daughter of art), she began acting at age eight despite being self-described as “deadly shy.” Rame came from a family who had been long active in theater, with a company that specialized in translating the classics, such as Shakespeare, into more accessible language, and performing them in lower-class areas of Italy. It was in Italy’s commercial theaters, however, that directors noticed Rame’s beauty rather than her talent and experience. This resulted in her often being cast in roles without lines (Anderlini, “Franca Rame” 34). Because of the superficiality of theater critics and audiences, Rame said, “the way I looked was enough for [acting troupes]: I was tall, with a bosom and blond hair, a ‘good looker,’ as they say, and they used me for that” (qtd. in Anderlini, “When Is A Woman’s Work Her Own?”).
Viewed similarly to Marilyn Monroe in the United States, Rame was Italy’s theatrical blonde bombshell.

In 1954, Rame married Dario Fo (born in 1926 and still living), a Nobel Prize winning Italian playwright. In the 1950s and 1960s, the roles Rame played were “essentially decorative” (Farrell 195), with the exception of those that Fo wrote for her. Her sex-symbol status resulted in her playing the stereotypical “dumb blonde” in several plays, typecasting that she resented and which led to her not being invested in the craft of acting for such parts. By the 1970s, however, Rame had shed her sexualized image, in favor of her activism in the women’s liberation movement.

Rame voiced disdain for the profession of acting, even being quoted in interviews as saying, “If my father’s job had been shoe-making, I would have set out to make shoes” (Anderlini, “Franca Rame” 34). Her political activism was her main focus; indeed, growing up, she originally wanted to be a union organizer. During the 1960s, she was specifically active in Soccorso Rosso (Red Aid), an organization that defended political prisoners’ rights. This desire to work in a political environment ultimately translated to the work she and Fo produced beginning in the 1950s. As she said, however, “Why did I continue even after I realized (acting) didn’t interest me? Because through my work I can advance the causes that I believe in” (qtd. in Jenkins 79).

Both Rame and Fo were left-wing political activists who fought for the working class and were crucial in the proletarian uprising in Italy. Up until the late 1960s, the couple was mostly known for producing political satires that focused on the class divide. Fo wrote the plays while Rame edited and performed in the productions, which included
both the one-person shows and those with larger casts. Because of Rame’s long background in theater, she helped Fo make his writing more relatable for audiences. Fo specifically relied on Rame for help with the specificity of his phrases and to ensure his wording was representative of how all classes of people spoke. Fo also relied on Rame for her improvisational skills in performance, as she was able to personalize the text to each individual audience (Jenkins 82).

After Rame left her family’s theater company and met Fo in 1951, the two began their careers as what they called “buffoni della borghesia” (clowns of the bourgeoisie). The couple ended up leaving the commercial theaters in 1968 to use their political satires in service of the working class and they initially partnered with the Italian Communist Party (PCI) to form the Associazione Nuova Scene (New Scene Association). After disputes, however, Fo and Rame formed the Collettivo Teatrale La Comune (City Theatre Collective) in 1970, which they hoped would produce a form of revolutionary left-wing theater as an alternative to the mainstream bourgeois theater (“Dario Fo—Biographical”). This switch to more revolutionary theater led Fo and Rame to increasingly target the Italian government and the Catholic Church in their satires during the late 1960s. Because of their ridicule of these institutions, both the Italian government and Catholic Church hated the couple and Rame claimed they were “practically blacklisted” by the government (qtd. in Anderlini, “When Is A Woman’s Work Her Own?”). For example, Mistero buffo (Comical Mystery; 1969) controversially depicts the character of Pope Boniface VIII, who served as Pope from 1294 to 1303, as a corrupt, vicious church leader. The comedy Morte Accidentale di un Anarchico (Accidental Death of an Anarchist; 1970), one of Fo’s most
controversial and widely produced plays, suggests that the police coerced the alleged terrorist Pino Pinelli into committing suicide. Other notable plays that they wrote focusing on the working class movement include: *Gli arcangeli non giocano al flipper* (*Archangels Don’t Play Pinball*; 1959), *Tutti uniti! Tutti insieme! Ma scusa, quello non è il padrone?* (*United We Stand! All Together Now! Oops, Isn’t That the Boss?*; 1971), *Non Si Paga! Non Si Paga!* (*We Won’t Pay! We Won’t Pay!*; 1975) and *Il Fanfani rapito* (*Fanfani Kidnapped*; 1975).

The height of the government’s anger toward the couple was demonstrated in 1975 when Rame was kidnapped and raped by a group of male neo-fascists, most likely members of the Italian Social Movement, who were reportedly commissioned by high-ranking officials in the Italian federal police. According to Franca Rame’s obituary written by Margalit Fox, Rame was brutally beaten, raped, burnt with cigarettes, slashed with razors and left in a park. After the incident, Rame revealed only that the men had beaten her and she could not even tell Fo that she was raped. As revealed in her interview with Serena Anderlini, for the next three years, Rame could not walk alone. This traumatic event led to Rame writing *The Rape*, the only play for which she is credited with sole authorship. After the initial writing of the piece, Rame was unable to perform it. When the Parliament began passing laws against sex crimes, however, she realized she had to tell her story. Rame said, “I can’t tell you the difficulties I had. I tried three times and couldn’t speak…I began to act—I must say, with a great effort. It was my story that I had lived through. But I overcame it” (qtd. in Anderlini, “When Is A Woman’s Work Her Own?”).
After Rame’s assault and the realization that the “woman question is too important nowadays” (Farrell 197), Fo and Rame began to find ways to contribute to the conversation of women’s liberation while still maintaining their satirical style. Specifically, Rame became concerned about women’s secondary position in society because she realized that people identified her as Dario Fo’s wife rather than an artist in her own right. While Rame said that Fo understood women well, she believed being identified as only his wife exemplified the lack of respect for women: “I felt like I was being treated as in that famous line that goes, ‘Did you see those two people?’ ‘No, I saw a man and his wife’” (qtd. in Anderlini, “When Is A Woman’s Work Her Own?”). In response to this disrespect, Rame began to perform the feminist monologues of Tutta casa, letto e chiesa (It’s All About Bed, Home and Church; 1977). While Fo was the primary author of these works, Rame contributed ideas, edited the pieces and restaged the productions with her own insights (Anderlini, “Franca Rame”).

These performances occurred when second-wave feminism reached its peak in Italy. The feminist group Rivolta Femminile (Women’s Revolt) was formed in Rome and Milan in 1970, and a law for divorce was introduced that same year. Following this progress, in 1975, adultery was removed as a crime and men and women were recognized as equals in marriage by the law (Ginsborg 369-370). However, the Italian feminist movement faced much opposition, perhaps unsurprisingly given that Italy is ranked amongst the countries in the European Union with the lowest gender equality, according to the European Gender Equality Index (5). As Celeste Montoya-Kirk writes,
Women’s rights policies in Italy, particularly addressing reproductive rights and gender violence, have often conflicted with deeply entrenched societal norms based on religion and on perceptions of women’s maternal role…Motherhood and maternity are discussed as embodying woman’s highest capacity and her natural destiny. (5)

With a culture entrenched in “the traditional family and heavily influenced by the Catholic Church,” feminist leaders have struggled to combat the societal norms that women should be seen as homemakers rather than individuals (Montoya-Kirk 2). This theme is frequently explored in Rame and Fo’s feminist plays. Specifically in A Woman Alone, The Woman (Maria) is shown performing domestic duties while delivering a monologue about her identity being devalued and the expectation that she please the men in her life (Rame, Fo n.p.). Because of cultural expectations of women as housewives, Italy has one of the lowest employment rates for women in the EU, and females who do work blue-collar jobs make one-third in salary less than men (Italy, Policy on Gender Equality 5).

While the inequality among the sexes is recognized in Italy, the country lacks the necessary infrastructure to enact change according to the Policy on Gender Equality in Italy. For example, despite abortion being legalized in 1978, most gynecologists refuse to perform the procedure because of their conflicting religious views. In addition, the crime of rape is seen as “an assault upon family honor, rather than an assault upon the individual woman” (Montoya-Kirk 5). This cultural norm particularly can be seen in A Woman Alone when Maria repeatedly receives inappropriate phone calls. Maria says she cannot tell her husband because, “…he’d say it was all my own fault. He’d say I must be getting some
kind of kick out of talking to a pervert or there wouldn’t be any kicks in it for the pervert” (12).

Women entered the Italian national government in 1946, however, and gave visibility to the issues Italian women faced. Significant changes included a law guaranteeing paid maternity leave in 1950 and a law closing state-run brothels in 1958. This momentum continued throughout the 1970s, when second-wave feminism became prominent in Italy. Despite some improvements, laws against gender violence and for reproductive rights have been the most difficult to pass through legislature, and even in the 1970s, these policies did not shift.

Rame became more active in the women’s liberation movement during the 1970s and many of the feminist monologues written by her and Fo focused on these particular issues. She was still hesitant, however, to be an integral part of the movement because she believed it was anti-male in tone. Rame remarked, “Yes I am a feminist, if it has a political edge, not when it involves a sterile struggle against men. Yes, if it means walking hand in hand. Women need to be helped to liberate themselves” (qtd. in Farrell 209). Rame believed that most other feminist plays portrayed women as weeping victims, which she actively avoided in her writing. For example, in A Woman Alone, at the end of the play the protagonist takes a rifle to await her husband’s arrival home after shooting the peeping tom in her window and shoving her groping brother-in-law out the door. Rather than a damsel in distress, the play depicts a dynamic female character belittling a domineering man. According to Rame, feminism is “a movement brought about by women who hope to gain some independence from this blessed male. Independence
means independence in society, in the workplace, and in culture. Independence, freedom, dignity. In male society” (qtd. in Anderlini, “When Is A Woman’s Work Her Own?”).
Chapter Two: The Woman Question

I never knew a woman, when I was growing up, who used her mind, played her own part in the world, and also loved, and had children.
—Betty Friedan

In this chapter, I analyze the feminist themes of A Woman Alone through the lens of Betty Friedan’s The Feminine Mystique (1963). This chapter also examines how Rame and Fo’s political statement about women’s rights is achieved through absurd humor and satire. Friedan was a leading feminist activist during the women’s rights movement in the United States during the 1950s and 1960s. She first questioned why suburban housewives were dissatisfied in a time when they were thought to have it all. The Feminine Mystique is integral to second-wave feminism. Gail Collins writes in the new preface to the book,

The Feminine Mystique is a very specific cry of rage about the way intelligent, well-educated women were kept out of the mainstream of American professional life and regarded as a little more than a set of reproductive organs in heels. (xiii)

Friedan’s argument is that the “feminine mystique” is what has convinced women that their life should be committed to the fulfillment of femininity, which, according to patriarchal standards, consists of motherhood and sexual submissiveness. Friedan writes,

As she made the beds, shopped for groceries, matched slipcover material, ate peanut butter sandwiches with her children, chauffeured Cub Scouts and Brownies, lay beside her husband at night—she was afraid to ask even of herself the silent question—‘is this all?’ (1)
The Feminine Mystique is integral to my analysis of A Woman Alone because it examines the plight of the isolated housewife and the notion that women should desire to please men. While the play is set in Italy, the issues Maria faces in A Woman Alone were also seen in America and other parts of Europe. Friedan’s book articulates one of the central themes of the play: What does it mean when a woman’s identity is not built upon her desires, but rather the needs of men?

In A Woman Alone, Maria has been kept in solitary confinement since her husband discovered that she had an affair with a young boy. Throughout the play, she contends with the desires of the men in her life. Whether it is her child crying, her husband yelling at her over the phone, her injured brother-in-law honking a horn, a peeping tom staring at her through a window, or her young lover trying to win her back, Maria has no opportunity to focus on herself. She is defined by her roles as mother, wife and caretaker and is forced to perform these duties daily with limited communication with the outside world.

A Woman Alone exemplifies one of the main points of Betty Friedan’s The Feminine Mystique. Friedan writes, in the epigraph I used for this chapter, “I never knew a woman, when I was growing up, who used her mind, played her own part in the world, and also loved, and had children” (74). Friedan is describing the notion that middle-class women did not have an identity outside of the household and, if they did, they were unable to perform their duties as a wife and/or mother. Women were unable to “have it all,” as the common saying suggests. Instead, women had to choose whether they were career-minded or maternally minded. Regardless of which choice a woman made, a
woman was isolated, from not just society, but from other women as well. Because of the expectations to fulfill their role as women, many did not find fulfilling outlets outside of their daily routines.

This lack of fulfillment can be seen directly in *A Woman Alone*, when Maria tells her neighbor, “The thing was when my little girl got old enough for school I said to my husband, ‘I’m tired of being just a housewife. I want to do something intellectual for a change. I could learn a language for instance’” (16). Like the housewives Friedan describes, Maria expresses boredom and a lack of identity other than that of being a wife and mother. It is this inherent desire for knowledge and to explore a life outside of the home that makes Maria such a representative character of the second wave feminist movement. As Friedan writes, “It is my thesis that…our culture does not permit women to accept or gratify their basic need to grow and fulfill their potentialities as human beings, a need which is not solely defined by their sexual role” (77). Women are not given equal opportunities to discover their likes and dislikes or how they may excel. For Maria, she only knows how to perform her domestic duties and how to please the men that surround her. Her discontent is expressed when she says, “What do you mean we haven’t got a maid? We’ve got a maid all right! Me! Maid, nurse, babysitter, cook, charlady, washerwoman and screwing machine!” (20). Not only is she exploited for her domestic duties, but she is also devalued because of those chores. Her husband does not even have the decency to acknowledge the work that she puts in to run a household.

Rame and Fo also use the tradition of the theatre of the absurd to exaggerate the stereotype of a 1970s housewife. According to Martin Esslin, the theatre of the absurd
“strives to express its sense of the senselessness of the human condition and the inadequacy of the rational approach by the open abandonment of rational devices and discursive thought” (24). As seen when the play begins, Maria enters dressed in a see-through negligee and stilettos, which complies with the norms of a “sexy” housewife. Because Rame originated this role in 1977, by placing Maria in this clothing, Rame is also commenting on her past identification as a sex object and is subverting audience expectations of watching what they might assume to be a play about a ditzy wife. Instead, the absurdity of Maria’s wardrobe allows for the satire of the piece to shine through by establishing the idea of exaggeration at the start of the play. While the exaggeration makes Maria seem comical, she actually is used as a vessel to discuss feminist issues such as sexual objectification, sexual shame, the demands of being a wife and mother, and domestic abuse.

The unfulfilling, confining role of the housewife is continually expressed through exaggerated humor that conveys satire. Maria says,

I love it at home. I’ve got everything. My husband gives me everything I need. Like…like I’ve got…(Looks round)…I’ve got a refrigerator! What? Well yes I know everybody has refrigerators but mine (Impressive) makes round ice cubes. (Serious again) And I’ve got a washing machine with twenty-four different programs. (10)

Using the absurdity of that specific passage, Fo and Rame highlight the stereotype of a vacuous housewife who is pleased with anything her husband provides for her. This passage also uses the humor to show how confining the housewife role is as Maria is so
isolated from society that she believes a fridge that makes ice cubes is revolutionary. As Friedan writes, “Love and children and home are good, but they are not the whole world, even if most of the words now written for women pretend they are. Why should women accept this picture of a half-life, instead of share in the whole of human destiny” (64-65). Friedan expresses that women are not given the opportunities to grow as people like men are. The middle-class women Friedan describes were unable to get an education, or able to get one but not able to do anything with it. Women did not have the same job prospects as their male counterparts, which forced women to be financially reliant upon a spouse. Similarly, Maria’s life is confined to her housewife duties because she does not have the option of leaving her home. She must do what her husband tells her to do because she has nothing without his financial support. After he discovers her affair with the young boy, Maria says,

And my husband forgave me. He was incredibly kind and incredibly generous and incredibly understanding and then he locked me up. What?
Yes I know it’s against the law to lock your wife up but what can I do?...I couldn’t do that because then the whole story would get into the papers.
And then one, my husband would divorce me, two he’d take my kids away and three he’d leave me his brother in exchange! (19)

Even though her husband is abusive, Maria recognizes that as isolating as her current life is, her other options are just as dire. It should also be noted that divorce in Italy was not legalized until 1970 and, without a previous legal separation, divorce was rarely granted.
As mentioned in the previous chapter, Rame felt that weak female characters made people view women as victims. Therefore, absurd humor is used to avoid portraying Maria as a victim, despite her being confined by men throughout the piece. Instead of showing Maria weeping over her tragic life, Rame and Fo use broad comedy to make the same points and keep the piece entertaining. For example, Maria says,

Oh my God I’ve ironed my breast! It’s all his fault…It’s all I need isn’t it…a peeping tom. A poor woman can’t even dress in casual clothes to do the ironing in her own home. Because of him I should do the housework in my overcoat. *(shouting at peeping tom)* Right? With a balaclava and ski boots eh? *(then tragically to woman opposite)* And I don’t even know how to ski. *(12-13)*

Rather than Maria crying over this violation, she jokes about the situation, which also helps highlight that being spied on must be a daily occurrence for her.

Maria is sexually objectified and yet, at the same time, she is shamed for it. For example, the peeping tom watches Maria as she does her housework. She refuses to call the police because, “I can just imagine their questions. *(Official voice)* What was I wearing on the day in question. To what degree might I have been described to be…unclothed. Is it not a fact that I was being deliberately provocative” *(13)*. It is again an example of how Maria is expected to be sexy, hence her clothing choices, and yet she is also shamed for that specific reason.

These statements ring true even in today’s rape culture, in which sexual harassment and assaults are normalized because of society’s tendency to blame the victim.
Rame and Fo specifically drew upon the societal norms of Italian culture. The 1936 Italian law that defined rape, according to Celestine Bohlen, “as an offense against public morality, rather than an act of violence against individuals” was not amended until 1996. This amendment came after Prime Minister Lamberto Dini urged Parliament to change the law following the summer of 1995’s slew of sexual crimes in Italy (Bohlen).

These norms of female sexuality are continued in the play as Maria discusses her sexual relationship with her husband:

He ‘protects’ me by locking me up like a battery hen and then he beats me up and then…he wants to make love! Couldn’t care less if I don’t feel like it. Always ready, that’s me. Instant. Like Nescafe. Washed, brushed, deodorized, shaved legs and armpits…all smooth and warm and eager. And silent. All I’m supposed to do is just breathe. Oh and give a few little squeals and sighs every now and then so he’ll think everything’s fine…With my husband I have never had a…had a…oh the word! What a word, what an awful word! I can’t bear to say it even. Orgasm. (14)

This section of the play exemplifies how Maria’s relationship with her husband perpetuates standards of female beauty and perfection as well as how he objectifies her. The idea that women should be at the ready to have sex whenever any male wants it equates them to a toy or play-thing that can be picked up and put down dependent on the man’s interest. In addition, according to Maria, it is a wife’s duty to make sure the man is always interested, even if there is no pleasure involved in the act for her.
The idea that Maria has never experienced sexual pleasure with her husband is an example of how society rarely educates women and men on female sexuality. Throughout the play, when speaking of her sexual relationship with her husband, Maria expresses a level of naiveté as to what sexual pleasure for a woman actually is. This naiveté highlights the idea that, though female sexuality is not often discussed in mainstream society, women are nonetheless expected to have a certain level of sexual prowess. Friedan writes, “For the woman who lives according to the feminine mystique, there is no road to achievement, or status, or identity, except the sexual one: the achievement of sexual conquest, status as a desirable sex object, identity as a sexually successful wife and mother” (316). Friedan touches on the notion that a woman’s worth is dependent on how sexually desirable she is. However, it comes at a price when women are ignorant of their own sexuality. As seen in *A Woman Alone*, Maria says,

> And I couldn’t talk to anybody about it, you see, I couldn’t. Not in those days. But I started reading women’s magazines and one day I found out something extraordinary! Listen to this. We women have got things called Erogenous Zones! Yes. Now what these are are places on us that are very sensitive sexually and they…what? Oh. You already knew about them.

(15)

Again, Rame and Fo use humor to express Maria’s naiveté and isolation from other women, which contributes to her lack of sexual education. This section also reinforces the earlier stated idea that Maria’s husband does not place an emphasis on sexually pleasing his wife, who he sees more as a play-thing than an equal partner.
Despite the lack of sexual pleasure in her marriage, Maria finds pleasure in her relationship with the young boy that was her English tutor. She repeatedly highlights the differences between sex with her husband and sex with the boy, for instance, saying, “So that’s how I discovered that love…real love…isn’t that old business with me underneath and my husband on top bam bam bam…the combine reaper! (Languorous) Love is sweet…so sweet” (18). This experience with the boy represents Maria’s sexual awakening and one of the only moments of the play when she is treated as a human being rather than an object for men. Maria relates that after being rejected several times, the boy threatened to kill himself until she made love to him. Even her moments of pleasure had to come out of moments of manipulation and coercion.

Throughout the play, Maria is manipulated by the needy men in her life who only seem to take from her. She says, “They’re all the same. Love…ha! [The boy] is just like all the others. Only after one thing” (25). By the end of the play, she becomes aware of how the men see her, despite her ignorance at the beginning. These men expect her to be sexually desirable but still pure, a doting mother but still invested in her appearance, a loving wife but silent in the bedroom. What the men ask of her invalidates the very notion that she is merely a human being, incapable of being everything for them at once. As Friedan writes, “Women are human beings, not stuffed dolls, not animals” (65). At the end of the play, the audience sees Maria coming to this realization and finally taking a stand against these men who have been harassing her. In the end, she shoves her groping brother-in-law out the front door, slams the door on the young boy’s hand, shoots the peeping tom, and, as the play ends, waits with a rifle for her husband to come home. The
violence enacted against her throughout the play is then turned on the men who
manipulated and abused her. *A Woman Alone* becomes a depiction of a woman whose
needs are devalued but who, upon realizing this, becomes the dominating force over the
men who degraded her.
Chapter Three: When Worlds Collide

The mistake, says the mystique, the root of women’s troubles in the past is that women envied men, women tried to be like men, instead of accepting their own nature, which can find fulfillment only in sexual passivity, male domination, and nurturing maternal love.

—Betty Friedan

The female protagonists of A Woman Alone, Hedda Gabler and Machinal all have a common predicament: they are women trying to survive in a man’s world. Hedda Gabler, by Henrik Ibsen (1890), and Machinal, by Sophie Treadwell (1928), can illuminate and further contextualize A Woman Alone. Hedda Gabler was written before women even had the right to vote in the United States (1920), Norway (1913) and England (1918), whereas Machinal was written eight years after the ratification of the 19th Amendment, and A Woman Alone during the second-wave feminist movement, respectively. Despite being written decades apart (and in different countries), the women face eerily similar problems, which highlight why A Woman Alone, and other feminist dramas, still need to be produced today. In this chapter, I discuss four central themes that are represented in each play: confinement, boredom, sexual displeasure and awakenings.

Hedda Gabler focuses on Hedda Tesman, who is newly married to George Tesman, a man she finds to be beneath her, because of the societal pressures forced upon women. Hedda yearns for freedom and power, which ultimately leads to her demise when she commits suicide at the end of the play. She makes this decision after being faced with what she felt were suffocating pressures—not only to dote upon her husband and have a child, but also to enter into a sexual relationship with another man. As Toril Moi writes,
Hedda’s yearning for beauty and freedom is...a response to a sense of being made unfree in a highly gendered, sexualized, embodied way. In fact, Ibsen’s genius made him realize that a female protagonist could embody the problem of freedom and meaning in modernity in a more profoundly dramatic way than a male protagonist. (438-439)

Hedda became a symbol of the suffrage movement because of her rebellion against standard gender norms and her ultimate demise because of the pressure. An anonymous woman at the London premiere of Hedda Gabler in 1891 declared that “Hedda is all of us.” Susan Torrey Barstow, commenting on this statement, writes, “...[S]he both recognized and called into being a group of bourgeois women no longer content with conventionally feminine roles...[and] created an embattled sense of unity among these spectators and fostered the transformation of a female audience into a collective” (405-406).

Similarly to Hedda, the Young Woman in Machinal succumbs to a marriage with a man she finds repulsive because of societal expectations and a desire for financial stability. As the play progresses, we see the Young Woman’s confinement within these gender roles take their toll on her, leading to a climax involving violence, similar to A Woman Alone and Hedda Gabler, in which the Young Woman murders her husband. Machinal has become a prominent feminist drama because of the play’s representation of the patriarchal machine, which is even expressed in the fragmented style of the writing and the highly stylized way it is produced. As Katherine Weiss observes,
Through lighting and sound effects, [Treadwell] creates a claustrophobic world, criticizing the mechanical age responsible for the invention of electrotherapy and the electric chair. The machines in the play, often only heard, […] signify the daily drudgery of work and married life to which the young woman must submit… (4)

The script and production design all add to the overall effect of the Young Woman being restricted by the patriarchal machine.

All three female protagonists contend with the pressures of society and their loveless marriages, which culminate in an act of violence at the end of each play. Not only do they face similar obstacles, but the women are also alike in their lack of conformity to gender expectations. Maria, Hedda, and the Young Woman all reject the standards of femininity. Maria, in A Woman Alone, for example, is too curious for her world. She questions her role and identity and her seemingly manic behavior is her form of rebellion. This rebellion is exemplified in her threats with a gun and her tendency to disclose private details of her and her husband’s disturbing sex life. This same rebellion can be found in Hedda and the Young Woman. Hedda is known for her affinity to her father’s pistols and her pride in being a general’s daughter. She does not succumb to the ideas of “feminine behavior,” such as sweetness or subservience; instead she is frank and sardonic. The Young Woman also finds strength in being outspoken, specifically when describing her husband, sex with him or the idea of motherhood. In their own right, these three women represent a revolution against the standards that were imposed on them in their respective time periods.
Maria is faced with both literal and figurative confinement during *A Woman Alone*, which is shown within the opening moments of the play. She says, 

> Sorry. When I’m on my own I always have the radio on. If it isn’t turned up full blast I get this feeling I might hang myself…Oh yes I like Church music too even though it’s really hopeless to dance to. Any kind of music really, as long as it’s loud. It keeps me company, you see. (9-10)

Maria’s literal confinement has led to her being excluded from society for months and, unsurprisingly, this physical confinement led to her identity being figuratively confined to that of a housewife and mother. Without purpose outside of her domestic chores, Maria becomes suicidal and apathetic.

While not literally confined like Maria, both Hedda and *Machinal’s Young Woman* deal with their own forms of restriction within their identities. Hedda is restricted not just by her marriage to George Tesman but also by Judge Brack, who manipulates Hedda throughout the play. Hedda asks, “Do you think it quite incomprehensible that a young girl—when it can be done without any one knowing—should be glad to have a peep, now and then, into a world which she is forbidden to know anything about?” (142). This statement is clearly indicative of the restrictions placed upon Hedda because she is a woman and her options, outside of marriage, are limited. The Young Woman, similarly, is confined by her mother’s pressure to marry and, later, by her husband’s desires. Her marriage may allow her to escape the pressures of her mother, but she is still subordinate to her husband in every other sense. As Anthony Martinelli writes, “She lived a perpetually stifled, restricted, confined and tortured life…That is the life that any woman,
every woman, is expected to live.” While referring to the Young Woman, this quote is applicable to all three protagonists. The confinement imposed on these women, whether literal or figurative, strips each of them of their identities outside of being a doting wife, mother or sex object. They are no longer their own person; rather, they are subject to the restrictions and expectations placed upon them.

These constraints also result in boredom for all three women. At the beginning of *A Woman Alone*, the stage directions read, “Bored and expressionless, she irons in rhythm to the music, executing sketchy dance steps…Suddenly her face lights up with surprise and pleasure” (9). Maria’s isolation from society leads to the monotonous task of completing housework and tending to her baby and brother-in-law. Even her dancing is done robotically and without enjoyment. This boredom is also apparent in the Young Woman’s life at the beginning of *Machinal*. The patriarchal machine confines the Young Woman to a life of monotony. She says, “[M]arried—all girls—most girls—married—babies—a baby—curls—little curls all over its head—George H. Jones—straight—thin—bald—don’t touch me—please—no—can’t—must—somebody—something—no rest—must rest—no rest—must rest” (11). This claustrophobia is prevalent for the Young Woman throughout *Machinal* and leads to her apathy toward every aspect of life. Similarly, Hedda is already disillusioned by her marriage, which was built upon convenience, and she shoots guns as an escape from the monotony that married life brings, often shooting her pistols at any man who gets near her. This escapism can be seen in an exchange between Hedda and Tesman:
HEDDA: Well, I shall have one thing at least to kill time with in the meanwhile.

TESMAN: [Beaming] Oh thank heaven for that! What is it, Hedda. Eh?

HEDDA: [Looks at him with covert scorn.] My pistols, George.

TESMAN: Your pistols!

HEDDA: [With cold eyes.] General Gabler’s pistols. (23)

Like Maria and the Young Woman, Hedda does not find enjoyment in mundane, everyday tasks that were expected of wives and mothers. Her boredom leads her to find an outlet for her apathy, which results in target practice. Despite this, however, Hedda still lacks her own purpose. As Barstow writes, “In a matter of hours, the outraged Hedda destroys Thea and Løvborg’s trust in one another; dares Løvborg to return to the pleasures of wine, women, and debauchery, burns the manuscript; and engineers Løvborg’s suicide. But even these actions do nothing to alleviate Hedda’s misery and boredom” (396). While Hedda controls someone else’s destiny, she is still left unfulfilled because she has no control over her own.

The boredom these women contend with can also be traced back to each of their loveless marriages. All three protagonists marry men because of societal expectation, not because it is their desire to do so. Maria, specifically, was unaware of what married life would mean. She says, “On my wedding day I was so excited! In church I was singing to myself (Sings) ‘Love is coming. Love is coming.’ (Flat) But my husband arrived instead” (15). This statement shows that Maria’s expectations of love and marriage were dashed upon her wedding. For her, marriage was an inevitable part of life, which is a sentiment
that is shared with Hedda and the Young Woman. Hedda longed for adventure and power; however, she knew she could not remain single forever. When speaking of why she married, she says, “I had positively danced myself tired, my dear Judge. My day was done—“ (97). There was no romance in her relationship with George Tesman. Their marriage was one of convenience because Hedda believed she had reached the age when it was inappropriate to be single. Similarly, the Young Woman married her husband because of related reasons. In a scene between the Young Woman and her mother, they say,

MOTHER: Why can’t you [marry him]?

YOUNG WOMAN: I don’t love him.

MOTHER: Love! –what does that amount to! Will it clothe you? Will it feed you? Will it pay the bills?

YOUNG WOMAN: No! But it’s real just the same!

MOTHER: Real!

YOUNG WOMAN: If it isn’t—what can you count on in life? (31)

This exchange highlights the need for the Young Woman, and the other female protagonists, to succumb to societal pressures and marry because her life without a man is one without options or security. As Martinelli writes, regarding the aforementioned exchange,

With this statement, [the Young Woman’s] mother reveals the conundrum presented before [the Young Woman] in the first episodes: her only escape from the hell that is her stifling job, is to step directly into the claustrophobia of a loveless, passionless marriage. Although Helen may
change roles, she does not escape the patriarchal machine. She would still be controlled by the male-dominated society.

In each play, the marriages are portrayed as ones of convenience that fulfill the expected gender norms, all of which emphasize that these women are confined in a man’s world.

As a result of their loveless marriages, the protagonists also face unfulfilling sex lives. As discussed in the second chapter, Maria never experienced sexual pleasure with her husband; specifically, she had never had an orgasm. Despite this dissatisfaction, Maria must still be sexually available for her husband, regardless of her own desire. Sex is not treated as an act of love or even enjoyment for any of the three women. For the Young Woman, this is epitomized in Episode Three, “Honeymoon.” The Young Woman and her Husband are about to consummate their marriage. Throughout the scene, however, it becomes apparent that her Husband must coerce the Young Woman into sleeping with him. The final moment of the scene is the Young Woman crying and shouting out, “Ma! Ma! I want my mother” (49). This moment, while disturbing, is a necessary evil to demonstrate the power dynamics between a husband and wife, which is prevalent in all three plays. As Martinelli writes,

This forced coitus is terrifying on two despicable levels. First of all, if the progression is traced, [the Young Woman] ends up sleeping with [her husband] not out of love or for pleasure, but simply because it means her continued financial stability. Essentially, her sexual intercourse with [him] is a drawn-out form of prostitution. As if this were not enough, the forcible
pressures of the patriarchal machine that propel a wife forward into her role as sexual partner clearly result in a form of rape. This statement gets to the core of the sexual expectations placed upon women and the callousness that their male counterparts show toward them when it comes to these matters. The men have been taught that these power dynamics are part of fundamental male-female relationships and do not hesitate to use coercion as a tactic in sexual encounters. Hedda is also unfulfilled by her husband sexually. Moi writes, “The play hints at her complete non-enjoyment of sex. To her, sex with Tesman is not only a violation, but revolting, tedious, and demeaning” (447). Similarly to the other women, Hedda’s sexuality is not explored or expressed because it is only tied to discomfort and disgust. For these women, their sexuality becomes something to be ashamed of. They have been convinced that sex is not for the woman’s pleasure, but only for the man’s. While not from her husband, Hedda also faces sexual manipulation from another man, Judge Brack. What begins as a relationship between two equals takes a turn toward the end of the play when Brack blackmails Hedda with sex in order to shift the power dynamics in his favor. This sexual aggression is similar to the expectations both Maria and the Young Woman’s husbands have for their wives. Moi writes,

Sexual menace pervades this scene. With each line he speaks, Brack’s demand for a sexual response from Hedda becomes increasingly explicit, as evidenced in his use of an increasingly intimate mode of address…in a deliberate denial of her marriage, he first addresses her
as ‘Hedda Gabler,’ then moves to plain ‘Hedda,’ and finally to the even more intimate ‘my dearest Hedda.’ (444)

Brack does not expect Hedda to refuse him and, therefore takes liberties to cross the boundaries of not just her marriage, but also her body. While Brack may be a devious character, he is also representative of each male character’s inherent belief that his desires are for a woman to satisfy, without any care for her pleasure.

After dealing with confinement, boredom, and sexual abuse, each woman has an awakening in her own way. For Maria, it is her sexual awakening after her affair with a younger boy. Regarding her first experience of sexual pleasure, she says, “So I got undressed and made love. Oh Signora, it was so beautiful, so delicate” (18). Maria discovers that sex can also be pleasurable for women. Like Maria, *Machinal’s Young Woman* discovers her sexuality after an encounter with a man at a speakeasy. She sleeps with the man and says, “I never knew anything like this way! I never knew that I could feel like this! So—so purified!” (96). The distinct contrast between these protagonists’ sexual relationships with their husbands and those of their lovers demonstrates their self-empowerment.

Hedda, while not in a sexually explicit affair, does have her own awakening through her relationship with Eilert Løvborg. Prior to the beginning of the play, Hedda and Løvborg were engaged in a relationship, but it was never physically consummated. Hedda broke off their relationship when she became aware that she needed to marry. Moi writes, “In the past, Hedda’s passion remained passionate and spontaneous response, which she couldn’t give. In that moment, Hedda’s silence with Løvborg was bodily: what
she withheld was not words but her sexual response” (446). While Hedda was unable to physically awaken her sexuality, she did so in another way with Løvborg. Hedda’s awakening was one that allowed her to have power over another human’s destiny, which Hedda yearned for throughout the play because of her lack of control over own life. After stealing Løvborg’s manuscript, Hedda has changed the power dynamic. Moi also writes, “Hedda’s excited ‘yes!’ indicates, perhaps, the moment in which she realizes that, for once, she is in a position of power, the moment in which she becomes the director of Løvborg’s…tragedy” (441). Hedda finds her power and control, which is the outcome both Maria and the Young Woman get after having a pleasurable sexual encounter. All three women gain a new awareness of their sense of self and experience moments of freedom because of their initial awakenings.

This glimpse of freedom leads each woman to commit an act of violence at the end of each play. Maria’s constant oppression by men is heightened once she realizes that the young boy, who awakened her freedom, was no better than the other men who continued to abuse her. She says, “Now. Who wants what? He wants a sexy peep. He wants hot water. He wants his cereal. And he wants a grope. Does that take care of all the men around here? Oh yes…and he wants a pornographic chat” (15). Maria is constantly expected to fulfill these men’s desires and, because of this pressure, she almost commits suicide. Maria decides against this, however, and the final image of the play presents her awaiting her husband’s arrival with a rifle in hand after shooting the peeping tom in the face. This violent outburst is a direct result of her confinement and oppression.
For the Young Woman in *Machinal*, her violent outburst occurs after her lover ends their affair and she is unable to tell her husband that she wants out of their stifling marriage. Martinelli writes, “With his departure, [the Young Woman] sees that she has once again submitted to the powers of the patriarchal machine. Where she thought she had found release, she had simply committed another submissive act: becoming [his] lover.” Realizing her glimpse of freedom was fleeting, the Young Woman reacts violently by killing her husband in his sleep. When asked in the courtroom why she killed him, the Young Woman responds by saying, “To be free” (143). The Young Woman cannot think of another way to escape her confinement and the result is her violent reaction. Martinelli writes, “With [his] death, the ties that bind her to the patriarchal machine would be undone, leaving her free for the first time in her life. She would still have financial stability, but she would no longer be bound to the roles she forcibly accepted to originally secure her financial footing.” Like Maria, the Young Woman did not find that society offered her a way out of this oppression. She instead chose to take drastic measures because the consequences would still be preferable to the life she was forced to live.

Hedda also finds freedom in an act of violence; however, it is against herself rather than the men. After being blackmailed by Judge Brack to be his sex slave and terrified that she is pregnant, Hedda commits suicide in the final moments of the play. In response to Judge Brack’s blackmail, Hedda says, “I am in your power none the less. Subject to your will and your demands. A slave, a slave then! No, I cannot endure the thought of that! Never!” (267). For Hedda, these options are just another prison for her on top of her already confining marriage—suicide is the key to her freedom. Hedda is unable to fully
express her yearning for a different life, but she cannot continue to live in the world that oppresses her. Barstow writes, “Yet for all her discontent, Hedda remains captivated by the image of conventional womanliness…As her suicide attests, Hedda is unable to imagine herself outside these conventions” (397). Hedda does not see a world in which she can be a pistol-wielding, unmarried, fulfilled woman without creating a scandal because her character goes against the idea of what it means to be a woman. The only way for Hedda to escape these conventions, in her mind, is to commit suicide.

Maria, Hedda and the Young Woman were all conceived at different times, in different countries, yet their lives and problems are parallel. Their search for freedom is a theme that continues to be relevant today. Hedda and the Young Woman helped create the dialogue necessary for women’s liberation to progress. Because of these female protagonists, and many others whom have not been touched upon, Maria’s story becomes even more necessary to tell. Despite the vast changes that happened between the 1890s and the 1970s, the problems facing women remained persistent and continue to resonate with female audiences today. Upon seeing the premiere of *Hedda Gabler*, female audiences were able to identify with Hedda’s plight. Barstow writes, “Her sense of identification with Hedda is itself transformative: she notices and implicitly acknowledges her own unhappiness, perhaps for the first time” (394). Hedda’s confining life resonated with the confinement women faced daily and, in itself, helped awaken the female audiences of the time to their own discontent. As Martinelli writes regarding *Machinal*,

*Machinal* demands to expose [that] this is the life that every woman, any woman is expected to live. Thus, if any woman could be driven to
the point of murder to challenge the patriarchal machine and free herself from its oppressive, male-dominated structure, then every ordinary man, any man, should fear, if not expect, a similar response.

*Hedda Gabler*, *Machinal* and *A Woman Alone* all aim to demonstrate to audiences the necessity to challenge gender roles and the inequalities women face. If unable to escape oppression, dire consequences could be involved for all parties, as seen in the endings of each of these three plays. Maria is not merely a fluke of a character; she is another female protagonist whose story must be told in order to understand the plight still facing women today. *A Woman Alone* may be lesser known than the two feminist touchstones I have selected, however, it is of equal importance that it is read and produced.
Chapter Four: I’m Maria

The new mystique makes the housewife-mothers, who never had a chance to be anything else, the model for all women; it presupposes that history has reached a final and glorious end in the here and now, as far as women are concerned. Beneath the sophisticated trappings, it simply makes certain concrete, finite, domestic aspects of feminine existence—as it was lived by women whose lives were confined by necessity, to cooking, cleaning, washing, bearing children—into a religion, a pattern by which all women must now live or deny their femininity.

—Betty Friedan

“You need to find the joy in your acting.”

My acting professors at Ohio University have given me this advice since my first year in the studio. I’m too technical, too intellectual, too concerned with getting it right. Every actor has certain hurdles they need to overcome and this has been mine. Throughout the production of A Woman Alone, I believe I came closer to overcoming my particular hurdle.

When selecting a play for my thesis, I knew that I wanted it to be stimulated not only academically but also creatively. As an actor, I wanted to be challenged and pushed outside of my usual comfort zone. Specifically, I knew a one-woman show would present the opportunity for me to apply all aspects of my training. Upon discovering A Woman Alone, I also became aware that I would be challenged by the bold choices the character and text called for, the stamina it would take to perform the show, the necessity of finding humor in deeply tragic and uncomfortable topics and the challenge of performing a text originally written for another actor and in another language.
The Beginning

When deciding what topic I wanted to cover for my thesis, I knew I wanted to explore some area of female sexuality and gender confinement. After taking multiple Women’s, Gender and Sexuality Studies courses, I was inspired to combine these feminist themes with my education in theater. Knowing that whichever topic I chose to explore I wanted to apply in a one-woman show, I began reading vast numbers of plays trying to narrow down what exactly about female sexuality and gender confinement I was hoping to explore. Dr. William Condee and Dr. Daniel Dennis both suggested I look at the work of Franca Rame and Dario Fo. The feminist monologues I stumbled upon gave me a wide array of choices and, ultimately, Maria’s struggle with her sexual awakening and shame stood out among the rest.

I knew from the start who I wanted to direct my thesis production—David Haugen. He was my professor and mentor for three years, and I reveled in the idea of working one-on-one with him on a script of this caliber. I was incredibly fortunate that he agreed to direct the production, and I instantly relaxed upon knowing I would be in more than capable hands. Through all the stress and anxiety caused by this show, Professor Haugen kept me focused, calm and confident in my abilities.

The concept of the show came from many production meetings and discussions with Professor Haugen about where we wanted the setting of the play to be. We immediately knew we wanted to Americanize the play, avoiding the necessity of an Italian dialect, and we also wanted to modernize it. While discussing options of setting the play in the South or New England or Appalachia, we stumbled upon the Real Housewives of
Orange County. What started as a joke developed into the concept of setting the play in present-day Orange County, California. We chose this setting because of the exorbitant wealth in the area as well as the large population of married housewives, many of who are perceived to be uneducated. Despite the exaggerated circumstances of the Real Housewives of Orange County, the setting of Orange County suited the world of A Woman Alone quite well. The Real Housewives demonstrated much of what was present in the text. For example, the women often dealt with spousal abuse and affairs, which resulted in many of them wanting to avoid divorce because of the damage to their reputation a scandal could cause. Maria also avoids divorce, despite her husband’s abuse and his affair with a fifteen-year-old girl, because she does not want her community to think poorly of their family.

Once the setting was established, designers brought their concepts to the production. The scenic designer, Justen Locke, started with the idea of an abstract or off-balance set to mirror what was occurring in Maria’s broken mind. He also sent us multiple images of colors and furniture to help establish Maria’s social class standing as well as how bare or full we wanted the set to appear. His initial design involved walls that would create a prison-bar effect and a space that narrowed as it moved towards the bright red front door.
Locke’s choices helped highlight the confinement Maria faced, both figuratively and literally. The distorted set also mirrored the ambiguity in the play between what is real and what is not. The lighting designer, David Vazquez, worked with Locke and Professor Haugen to select lighting choices that displayed the claustrophobia Maria felt. Finally, the most prominent design piece in the script is the sound cues. Franny Gallagher, the sound designer, wanted to utilize the opening of each door as a comedic moment. The songs she chose, therefore, were either silly or unexpected, or both. Because the music is what kept Maria from committing suicide, using music that was popular and catchy helped balance the tragic elements with the comedy that is so prevalent in the text. This reasoning resulted in music choices such as “Whip It” by Devo and “Mamma Mia” by ABBA, which added to the campiness of the script. The other sound cues, like the baby crying and telephone ringing, were tested during technical rehearsals for specific noise levels and
how much they should be overlaid so as to create chaos, specifically toward the end of the production. In the final moments, each man in the play continually summons Maria, creating a sense of havoc onstage. The sound cues were essential to demonstrate the overwhelming pressure Maria felt and the reasoning behind her attempted suicide.

Finally came the issue of the gun. The figurative weight the gun carried is not as apparent when just reading the script. When we made the decision to leave the gun on stage for almost the entire production, the violence in the show became much more prominent. Professor Haugen was very clear about using an AR-15 rifle in the show for its social relevance since it is the gun used in so many shooting massacres today. He also wanted to add to the humor of a woman like Maria not only owning such a gun, but also knowing how to use it. By having the gun onstage for the whole production, there was always the threat of “what if she uses it?” The end of the show, in my opinion, became that much more powerful by having her realize the weapon she’s been toting around all play could be her key to escape.

**The Swing**

If someone were to have recorded every rehearsal of *A Woman Alone*, they would have heard one sentence uttered repeatedly—“Get on the swing!” To most actors, including myself prior to this process, that sentence would hold no meaning. Professor Haugen introduced the concept of the swing to me during our very first rehearsal. We spent the subsequent week focusing on applying the technique to the text. To start, I was told to visualize myself on a swing and then I was to physicalize that motion. The goal
was to find the turning point (or the point when the swing is in mid-air before either falling backwards or forwards) in the text and moments happening onstage. The swing was dependent on my breathing rhythm. For example, when I would take a breath in, that would be my impulse to say my next line (or the turning point on the swing). Following the intake of breath, I would speak as much text as I was able to get out, until I got the next impulse to breathe in. When physicalized, this technique would look, to many, like a very strange exercise routine but it was the core of my performance.

After physicalizing the swing, we then worked on finding it by simply moving the energy or changing the direction of the energy without large movements or me sprinting around the room. By moving the energy, I mean changing the rhythm of how I was speaking. Changing the direction of the energy also allowed for me to have more range with my voice. I was, therefore, finding more comedic moments in my ability to start off a portion of text in a higher pitch and then end the same portion in a lower register. The hardest part of staying on the swing came when we took the movement away and I had to remain on the swing while ironing, sewing and responding to sound cues. I began to get frustrated with myself and anxious about what the show would be if I couldn’t get on the swing. Instead of using the swing to help with the demanding activities, I started intellectualizing the process rather than committing to the exercise, which led to a stagnant performance. Each time we rehearsed the show in full, I doubted whether I could remain on the swing. I, therefore, doubted whether I was capable of handling A Woman Alone or if I was in over my head. Professor Haugen continued to tell me to trust the swing, however, and to let go of the idea of getting it “right.”
Finding freedom in my performance was much harder than I imagined and there continued to be moments where I would spend more time worrying about whether or not I was on the swing than just trusting myself. After several rehearsals, I was able to remain on the swing for much of the first half of the play. The second half, however, was an entirely different beast. The pace of the play picked up, the sound cues became incessant and even keeping track of where I was in the plot seemed near impossible. I wanted Professor Haugen to give me a quick fix, the magic cure to make the second half come together like the first. Instead, all I heard from him was, “Trust the swing.”

I struggled with keeping the play light and funny the closer we got toward the end of the rehearsal process. I continued to forget whom I was speaking to on the phone, or who was knocking at the door, or which door I was even supposed to be going through. I shed tears and suffered several sleepless nights as opening night drew near and I still could not stay on the cursed swing. During one particular rehearsal, exhausted and irritable, I just threw myself into the run through without caring whether I was doing a good job or not. Ironically, that was the breakthrough rehearsal. Discovering that my focus should lie more on enjoying myself and the absurd play rather than getting it right, allowed me to utilize the swing to its fullest.

The swing became the lifeline I held on to during every rehearsal and each production. The swing allowed me to find the freedom and joy in the text and also created spontaneity onstage. Each time I performed the show, it was different. Because of the swing, nothing was pre-planned and I took the ride from moment to moment, allowing for the humor in the script to come through.
The Character

I took many character inspirations to discover who I thought Maria would be. She was naïve, but not unaware; uneducated, but not stupid; melodramatic, but not obnoxious. I grew to become very attached to her and endeavored to portray her as a full, complex woman with hopes and flaws. I did not want her to be a caricature but I also understood the necessity for boldness in order to fill the absurd humor. Through the rehearsal process, I discovered her mannerisms, the way she spoke, her sense of humor and child-like way of telling stories.

The process started with Professor Haugen showing me clips from the movie Born Yesterday (1950) starring Judy Holliday. From this film, I noticed the way Holliday utilized her voice for comedic effect. For example, she had different ways of speaking depending on what she was trying to achieve (i.e. the way she called for her husband, the way she spoke when flirting, etc.). Professor Haugen continued to encourage me throughout rehearsals to play with my voice and we landed on a higher pitch than my natural voice for Maria. I also discovered specific ways for answering the phone, depending on whom I believed to be calling. Giving myself the liberty to play with my voice began the first step to determining whom Maria was and her relationship to those she interacts with during the play.

After Born Yesterday, I also looked at character inspiration from Legally Blonde (2001) and Clueless (1995). Because of Elle Woods (Legally Blonde) and Cher Horowitz (Clueless), I became more invested in the naïveté and melodramatic qualities that Maria also possessed. These qualities led to the freedom for bolder choices, and I began to
become less self-conscious as rehearsals progressed. Professor Haugen and I discovered the way Maria carried herself, specifically how she walked, sat and acted out the stories she told. I began to feel liberated in trying new things in rehearsals rather than waiting for Professor Haugen to tell me it was a good choice. The way Maria held herself made it easier to keep the lightness and buoyancy of the text.

What also became integral to the character development of Maria was the decision of what we wanted to be real onstage opposed to what was happening in Maria’s mind. Professor Haugen and I decided that we wanted to use opportunities to display both Maria’s lucidity and her imagination, therefore, allowing the audience to decide what was really occurring. Instead of making none of the off-stage action tangible or vice versa, we felt as though leaving it up to the audience would create a richer performance. For me, as the character, however, I decided to believe that everything onstage is real—even the dummy as the brother-in-law. This play lives in the world of the absurd and the surreal, but the issues that Maria deals with are very harrowing and, unfortunately, very real. Neither Professor Haugen nor I wanted to undermine the severity of domestic violence and sexual assaults, and we felt as though treating Maria as though she were untrustworthy as a narrator would have done just that. We did, however, want to be truthful to the satirical nature of the piece. Our conclusion was to make the neighboring woman a real person who Maria could reveal herself to and find solace in, which could bring Maria’s childish nature to the surface, allowing for some absurdity. We also treated the young boy as a real person and had an actor, Sam Fisher, do the hand gestures and muffled voices called for in the script from behind the front door. This choice made the
show even more absurd and the moments with the boy’s gestures and voices ended up being one of the funniest parts of the show. Maria’s view of reality was somewhat skewed, but it was also one that needed to be grounded in the reality of a woman who needed to escape.

**What I Learned**

Reading a script and performing a script offer very different insights into the text. This production of *A Woman Alone* was no different. Taking on the role of Maria illuminated the play in ways I couldn’t imagine. I recognized even more the necessity for the absurd humor in the piece as well as the discomfort that the tone of the play causes audiences.

Keeping the show light and funny was key to each performance. Rame and Fo’s political satire easily turned tragic when taken too seriously. I discovered that the humor was the vessel that Maria channeled her pain through. If she let her discussions of domestic abuse or rape get too heavy, she would realize just how traumatic her experiences with men have been. During the play, through the relationship with the neighboring woman, Maria discovers that she doesn’t deserve this treatment. To ensure I didn’t give away the ending of the play at the start, I used the bold humor and satire of the piece to help with Maria’s naïveté. As an actor, I really struggled at first with keeping my personal emotions out of Maria’s feelings. Since Maria could not express her discontent, I had to use the humor to bond with the neighboring woman and to create this image that Maria had a perfect home life. Each time a new piece of information about her home life
came out, I made the decision to treat it as though Maria was confessing a dark secret to her neighbor but she had to keep it funny so her neighbor wouldn’t think less of her.

What also became apparent to me during performances was the tension in the audience. Responses varied each night, however, there were common moments of discomfort. This discomfort made it clear to me that this play resonates today, despite being written thirty years ago. I knew that this play touched upon many issues women face today but, until the performances, I was not aware of how relevant and timely it would actually be. In particular, each night during the part of the play when Maria discusses being beaten by her husband, one line struck a chord with each audience. When I said, “The way he punches me, you’d think he was beating up another man. Well, come to think of it, that is one way I get equal rights” (6). The silence in the theater was almost palpable, and many audience members commented to me after the production about how difficult that part was to watch because of the stigma that still surrounds issues of domestic abuse. Audience reactions made it clear to me that this show can easily be modernized and does not merely live during the era of second-wave feminism, in which it was written. It is difficult to be in front of an audience of people for fifty-six minutes performing a show that is tragic but meant to be hysterically funny. This production made me realize, however, that it was a story that needs to be told.

What Could Have Been Better

As an actor (and a perfectionist), I can’t help feeling that so much of this show could have been perfected. Before the laundry list of issues I could have fixed, however, I
do want to state that I am quite proud of how I handled the production and myself. This process was the most challenging experience I have ever faced as an actor and it was, simultaneously, the most enjoyable and rewarding. How lucky I am to have chosen such a rich, complex show as my thesis and to have had the support of the Division of Theater and the Honors Tutorial College to execute it.

If I had a time machine, I would go back and allocate at least two more weeks of rehearsal time for this production. While performing it as early in the semester as I did allotted more time for my writing, the pressure the four-week rehearsal process placed upon me was exhausting. I have never slept less in my life. To feel more secure and comfortable onstage, I wish I could have had extra time in the space and at least two more dress rehearsals. There were so many props and sound cues and transitions that to have more time to get it in my body would have eased opening night nerves.

I should have started a workout regimen. This show was not just mentally and emotionally exhausting, but it physically tore my body apart. The stamina it took to make it through four-hour rehearsals and to perform the show with full energy was like nothing I have ever experienced. I wish I had started working out to improve my stamina and my core strength, which would have made the daunting task of running in heels while constantly speaking not feel as though I had just run a marathon.

I feel as though the production would have been better had I been several years older with more experience at hand, but that is just an idle wish at this point. Specifically, however, I think I could have spent more time on the different character voices (for the maid and the interrogator). I could have made the character voices clearer to the audience.
so as to understand why I was making these choices and making it easier to understand what I was saying. I also think I could have thought more about the aura of an Orange County housewife and let that stereotype influence me more. For example, I wish I could have experimented with possibly making Maria stuck-up or patronizing. While I am happy with the character choices I made, I do think I missed an opportunity to incorporate more of the upper-class ideology into Maria. Following that thought, I wish I had let myself go even more at times during the show because I know my self-consciousness did occasionally get the better of me. Maria is a character who has no boundaries, which I could have pushed even further.

Overall, I am very proud of the work that I did for this production. I set out to explore gender confinement and how female sexuality is performed onstage. Through this performance, I discovered even more about the constraints placed upon women. Maria became a part of me and, because of the rich script I was working with, I was able to explore multiple facets of my own sexuality. I could not have asked for more out of my senior thesis production.
Conclusion

But what happens when women try to live according to an image that makes them deny their minds? What happens when women grow up in an image that makes them deny the reality of the changing world?
—Betty Friedan

In The Feminine Mystique, Betty Friedan summarizes the core questions I have asked myself throughout my research process for this thesis. Society is intent on placing narrow gender expectations on women, and the effect these norms have on women goes largely unnoticed. While the pressure of being a glorified housewife is not as prominent today, society still imposes expectations on women and their expression of their femininity. In my view, rather than seeing women as individual people, despite their gender, society sees them as mothers, wives, and sexual beings. Society still even considers the discussion of women’s rights as up for political debate, rather than being guaranteed. The restrictions placed on a woman because of her gender and expression of her sexuality limit women to viewing themselves as individuals. Rather, they are told to conform to the box labeled “female” that society has set for them.

Throughout this thesis, I demonstrated the representation of gender confinement and sexual restrictions in women’s drama. Starting with the background on the co-author and actress Franca Rame, I highlighted the Italian culture that influenced A Woman Alone, while also discussing the broad feminist themes the play discusses. I expanded on those themes and examined them using The Feminine Mystique, a core text during the second-wave feminist movement. This
examination led me to discover how patriarchal society demands these gender restrictions, while simultaneously devaluing these roles.

In order to contextualize the importance of feminist dramas throughout the women’s liberation movement, the plays *Hedda Gabler* and *Machinal* became essential to my research. I was able to draw parallels among these three plays that were written during different time periods and in different areas of the world. This demonstrates the prevalence of women’s issues in European and American drama in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and how these issues were transhistorical.

As an actor and a woman, I am deeply concerned with the portrayal of women in drama. Far too often I have read scripts that objectify a woman or, on the other end of the spectrum, repress her sexual desires while simultaneously placing rigid gender expectations on her. When researching Rame, I realized that my frustrations with theater’s portrayals of women were also hers. Despite the gap of nearly four decades, these problems are still rampant in the theater industry. As Holly Harper writes,

> [T]he balance between men and women actors never changes, but the opportunities for men somehow far outnumber those for women. As a result of this imbalance, women have become disposable in the modern theatre. In an industry run by men, women struggle to find work. This is not true only for actors, but for technicians, writers, composers, directors, and producers...Theatre is a boys’ club.
Even when women are represented well, the examination of the female characters still emphasizes “female issues”—such as motherhood, being a wife, balancing a career—rather than depicting these women as simply human beings, confronting a wide range of human issues. While we live in a society where there is a greater balance between men and women when it comes to child rearing, parenting is rarely depicted as a men’s issue. Instead, the media delegates these topics as “female.”

This thesis has, I hope, explored how A Woman Alone and other women-centered plays shed new light on how gender confinement and restrictive sexual roles affect women and the importance of complex representations of females. I learned that the more society continues to place women in a box, the more society leads females to believe their worth is dependent on how well they play the role a patriarchal society has determined for them. Today, women are consistently told to be sexy yet nurturing, smart yet not the brightest, devoted yet independent, feminine yet strong. Maria was also told to be sexy, nurturing, and naïve and, as such, lost her sense of self, similarly to how many women continue to feel today. Exploring Maria’s plight and Franca Rame’s struggles as a woman led me to understand the limitations I face. This research process has encouraged me to find strength in my own voice and the knowledge that our identity should not be built upon our gender and our relationship to men. These restrictions strip us of how we deserve to be viewed: as human.
Works Cited


Appendix

Poster 60

Program Note 61

Production Stills 62

Dario Fo and Franca Rame Images 67

A Woman Alone Script 71
A WOMAN ALONE

Written by
Dario Fo and Franca Rame

An HTC Thesis Project By
Sophie Mitchem

Directed By
David Haugen

February 4th + 5th | 8pm
February 6th | 5pm + 8pm

Hahne Theater
Kantner Hall

Free Admission
A Woman Alone  
By Franca Rame and Dario Fo  
Directed by David Haugen  

Cast  
The Woman    Sophie Mitchem  
Alan/Creditor/Boy    Sam Fisher  

Production Team  
Stage Manager    Devon Swanson  
Lighting Designer    David Vazquez  
Scenic Designer    Justen Locke  
Props Master    Justen Locke  
Sound Designer    Franny Gallagher  
Technical Director    Cubbie McCrory  

Special thanks to Dr. William Condee, Dr. Carey Snyder, Annie Harris, Kate Burton, Jose Nunez, Lorraine Wochna, Adrian Shelton, Brian Evans, Rahul Mukherjee, the Division of Theater faculty, and the Honors Tutorial College.  

In the Honors Tutorial College, we spend our senior year working on a thesis project of our devising. For my thesis, I knew I wanted to incorporate my Women’s, Gender and Sexuality studies specialization with my theater background. I also wanted to choose a play to produce that would push me out of my comfort zone as an actor. The result is this production. Dr. Dan Dennis and Dr. William Condee recommended the playwrights, Franca Rame and Dario Fo, to me and I cannot thank them enough for the suggestion. For the past nine months, I have immersed myself in Betty Friedan’s The Feminine Mystique, Italian gender equality laws, and the fascinating life of Franca Rame—all in hopes to further my understanding of how female sexuality is performed and the effect of societal pressures on women.  

I would like to personally thank my thesis advisors, Dr. Condee and Dr. Snyder, for their help and editing prowess throughout the process of writing my scholarly thesis as well as the Honors Tutorial College for their unwavering support during these four years. I would also like to thank David Haugen for agreeing to direct this production and for being patient and encouraging throughout not just this process but throughout all my time in studio. Finally, I want to thank my second family—my friends (those at OU and elsewhere) for their compassion and for dealing with my high maintenance tendencies.  

Most importantly, thank you to my parents, brother, future sister-in-law and Aunt Kalie for being my constants. Without all of you, I wouldn’t be me.  

Cheers to four incredible years at Ohio University. I’ll love you long time, Athens.  
Enjoy the show!  
Sophie Mitchem
Production Stills*

*All production stills were photographed by Zach Weeks

Maria using the gun on the peeping tom

Maria recounting her feelings of shame about the young boy
Maria recounting her affair with the young boy

The chaos becomes too much for Maria
Maria discussing her sexual relationship with her husband
Maria describing her first sexual experience with the young boy
Maria thinking of a way to get rid of the young boy (the arm in the door)
Dario Fo and Franca Rame Images


Rame and Fo on Italian television in 2003 (Alessandra Tarantino/Associated Press)
Poster for international performance of *It’s All About Bed, Home, and Church* (Jenkins)
Rame performing *It’s All About Bed, Home, and Church* (Jenkins)
Rame performing *A Woman Alone* (Anderlini, “Franca Rame”)
A Woman Alone

Music up on a woman downstage
close, ironing. She's in her early
twenty, dressed in a more or less see-
through negligee and high heeled
shoes. A portable radio is playing
music very loud. There are five
doors leading off. She plays
throughout as if facing a window
which is only a few feet away from
the window of the flat opposite.
Quiet and expressionless, she irons in
rhythm to the music, executing
chaotic dance steps. At one point she
reaches for her arms and, with the iron in
one hand, moves her arms to the
music. Suddenly her face lights up
with surprise and pleasure. She comes
further downstage.

Hey! Hey Signora, good morning!
Louder] I said good morning.
How long have you been living
here there? [Shouts] I said how
long ago did you move in? I
thought that apartment was still
empty. I'm so glad somebody's
moved in. What? [Even louder] I
said I'm glad! I'm glad! What's the
matter, can't you hear me? What?
She runs over to the radio and
turns it off and goes back to
window.

Sorry. When I'm on my own I always
have the radio on. If it isn't turned
up full blast I get this feeling I
might hang myself. I've got the
stereo on in the living room.
Listen.

Goes to living room door and
opens it. Blast of classical music.
The music cuts off as she shuts the
door.

Did you hear it? And the cassette
player's going in the kitchen.

Goes to kitchen door, opens it,
blast of jazz, closes it.

See? Whatever room I go into, I've
got company. What? [Shocked] Oh
not the bedroom, of course no! My
goodness no. I've got the television
in on there.

Goes to bedroom door. Opens it.
Blast of plain chant.

[Shouts] Oh yes I always keep it
pretty loud. That's a high mass! In
Polish (Music cuts off as she shuts
the door) Polish ... what a daft
A WOMAN ALONE

language, eh? You can't understand a word of it. Just right for a pope!

*She goes back to her ironing.*

Oh yes I like Church music too even though it's really hopeless to dance to. Any kind of music really, as long as it's loud. It keeps me company, you see. How do you keep yourself company, Signora? Ahhh ... a child! Aren't you lucky!

*Pause. Looks at the small jacket she's been pressing.*

How silly I am. I've got a child myself. Two! A big one and a little one.

*Brings the jacket further downstage, sits and brushes it.*

No no, they don't keep me company, oh no. The big one's started school and she's got her own friends. The little boy's at home the whole time but he's no company either. He's too young. He's a baby ... even though he snores like an old man. Sleep? Sleeps all the time! *(Sighs)* If only he'd grow up. *(Then hastily bright)* But I'm not complaining. I love it at home. I've got everything. My husband gives me everything I need. Like ... like I've got *(Looks round)* ... I've got a refrigerator! What? Well yes I know everybody has refrigerators but mine *(Impressive)* makes round ice cubes. *(Serious again)* And I've got a washing machine with twenty four different programs. There's one that's for such delicate things I could wash paper in it ... I could! Trouble is I never have any paper to wash. And a dryer too. You would not believe how dry this dryer dries. Amazing. Sometimes have to get all the clothes wet again ... they're too dry to iron.

*Reminded, she goes back to the iron. Lays a shirt out on the board.*

Oh and a cleaning lady. Oh yes ... I used to have a cleaning lady working for me. But she left. Then another one came. But she left too. They all leave. They just can't stand it in my house. No no, not because of me. My brother in law He touches them all. If they get anywhere near him ... grab! You know. Right there. He's not well, you see. Poor boy. What? Perverted? Oh I don't know about that. All I know is that he wanted to do things and they wouldn't let him. Quite right too, really. Well imagine it. There you are busy doing the housework and all of a sudden this hand comes up at you from underneath. Grab! And what a hand he's got ... you should see it. Just as well he's only got the one.

*Brings the shirt downstage and sits again as she sews on a button.*

No no, an accident. A car crash. Terrible. He was all smashed up and him only thirty. They put him in a plaster cast from head to foot. Only a little hole here for breathing and eating. He can't really talk through it ... *(Mumbles)* just.
mumbles like this. Oh and his eyes aren’t covered. They were okay. Lovely big eyes he’s got ... always staring at you. And they left out this hand of his too because it was just about the only part of him that wasn’t broken. Well ... (Embarrassed) there is another part of his that wasn’t smashed either. What? Well it’s ... I don’t know how to say it, Signora. We’ve known each other such a short time, I wouldn’t like you to get a bad impression. Let’s say he’s quite ... sound (Then doing an exaggerated pelvic thrust) there! (Rueful) And how sound! Too sound. He never stops wanting to ... well you know. Hmmm? Oh yes yes he does think about other things. He reads a lot, you know. To educate himself. Reads all the time. (Pause) Pornography. His room is full of filthy magazines ... those ones with naked women in ... certain positions? Uncomfortable! I bet some of them need a plaster cast like my brother in law after all that. Disgusting ... all those parts of anatomy blown up in full colour. Do you know it can take me fully fifteen minutes to figure out what part I’m looking at?

Folds up shirt and goes back to the ironing.

Once all the cleaning ladies left I have to look after my brother in law myself. I do it for my husband’s sake. (Indignant) What, me? What an idea! Certainly not. With me he’s different. He respects me. He’s very polite ... he always asks my permission before he grabs.

Telephone rings

Oh that’s my husband. He always rings me up about now. Excuse me a minute. (Picks up phone. Sweetly) Hello. (Pause) What? (Pause) Fuck off you bastard! (Slams down the phone. To woman opposite) I do beg your pardon. I never swear but when you must you must, mustn’t you. What? No that wasn’t my husband ... I don’t know who it was. He’s a heavy breather that talks. A real pig! He rings me up two or three ... or four thousand times a day and says filthy things to me. Some of the words he uses aren’t even in the dictionary. I know ... I looked. Yes of course that kind of person is sick, I know! Listen I’ve already got one sick man here. I can’t take care of all the dirty old men in Italy!

Telephone rings

There he goes again. I’ll show him! (Picks up phone. Hard and fast) Listen, pig, this telephone is being tapped by the police so you’d better just ... oh. (Then with enthusiastic affection) Hello! (Covers phone. To woman opposite) It’s my husband! (Back to phone) No of course not, Aldo dear, I didn’t mean you. I thought you were somebody else. Who? Oh. A ... a man who keeps on telephoning and ... uh ... asking
A WOMAN ALONE

for you! He sounds furious and his language is terrible! What? Well he says ... uh ... he says you owe him a lot of money! Yes! So I thought I'd frighten him by mentioning the police you see. No, he's never said what his name was. Why? Is there somebody you ... What?

(Outraged) What are you talking about? I'm at home! Aldo I swear I'm at home. What number did you dial just now eh? Right! And who answered it? So where else can I be? Have I been out? You are asking me if I've been ... you'll drive me round the bend! How could I get out? (To woman opposite) Oh Signora, my husband is so ... (Back to phone) What? No there isn't anybody here. Just me, all alone. (Exasperated) Well when I talk to myself I call myself Signora, all right? Yes your brother's fine. He's in his room looking at his blue movies. Yes the baby's fine too. Yes he woke up and got fed. Yes he did peepee ... yes your brother did too. Don't worry! Who's getting mad? I just said not to worry. Everybody in the house has peed! Goodbye. No, I'm feeling happy, Aldo. I've been here ironing and just laughing and singing away. I'm very happy, Aldo! (Shouts) I'm happy!

Hangs up and gives inarticulate bellow of rage at phone. Then comes back down to the window.

You see? I had to lie to him. If I told him the truth about the talking heavy breather on the phone he'd say it was all my own fault. He'd say I must be getting some kind of kick out of talking to a pervert or there wouldn't be any kicks in it for the pervert. He'd probably have the phone cut off. He already keeps me locked in the house. Yes, it's true, he really does. Every morning when he goes out he locks me in. The what? Oh he does all the shopping.

She starts ironing again.

How do you mean if there was an emergency? Oh no ... nothing could ever happen in my house. We're such a quiet family. Anyway he always phones me during the day and I ...(Breaks off. Her tone suddenly icy) Excuse me.

Her gaze has gone higher and now she shouts

I can see you, you creep, I can see you! Don't try and hide. Your binoculars are shining in the sun!

She covers one of her breasts with a tiny handkerchief she's ironing and puts the iron over the other breast. Screams.

Oh my God I've ironed my breast!

Puts iron down and attempts to cover both breasts with the handkerchief

It's all his fault. No you can't see him, his window's on the floor above you. It's all I need isn't it? a peeping tom. A poor woman can't even dress in casual clothes to do the ironing in her own home.
Because of him I should do the housework in my overcoat.

(*Shouting at peeping tom*) Right?
With a balaclava and ski boots eh?
(*Then tragically to woman opposite*) And I don’t even know how to ski. I’d probably end up in a plaster cast like my brother in law. What? No I’m not calling the police thanks very much. I can just imagine them and their questions.

(*Official voice*) What was I wearing on the day in question. To what degree might I have been described to be … unclothed. Is it not a fact that I was being deliberately provocative. (*Own voice*) Oh yes. What do you want to bet I’d be the one that was charged. With indecent behaviour in domestic premises which were exposed to the view of an innocent member of the public! I don’t need the police. Not while I’ve got this. (*Goes to the back wall and gets a rifle*) I’ll take care of him myself. Maybe this will be my lucky day.

...Crouched over she comes stealthily back to the window. Stands up, points rifle and shouts

I’ll kill you!

*Disappointed, she lowers the gun.*

Escaped again. Just one peep at this and that’s him gone every time.

(*Shouts*) Coward! Creep! Dirty snooper! (*Pretends to shoot*) Bang! Bang!

Puts the gun down, looks at woman opposite and laughs

I suppose it is quite funny, really. Bet you think I’m a nutcase. (*Starts ironing again*) Well, better a bit bonkers than the way I was before. Every few months I’d get so desperate I’d start swallowing pills. Sleeping pills, aspirins, tranquillisers, antihistamine … everything—I could lay my hands on. Even the kids’ castor oil. Anything to kill me … anything just to die. (*Importantly*) Once I slashed my wrists. Yes. Three months ago. See? I’ve still got the scars. (*Pause*) Oh no, Signora, please don’t ask me to tell you the story about that. No I’m sorry, it’s just too intimate and private. It wouldn’t be right. After all, we hardly know each other. (*Pause*) Shall I tell you? (*Very brief pause*) Yes I will. I don’t know … I’ve got a real feeling of (*Searching for the word*) empathy for your building since you moved in. I will tell you. It might do me good … get it out of my system. Oh it’s such a sad story, Signora! It was all because of this boy. (*Tenderly*) Fifteen years younger than me and he looked even younger than that. So sweet, so sensitive, so delicate and shy. Even to imagine making love with this boy would have been a terrible thing. Oh terrible. Like … like incest. Yes, incest! (*Brief pause*) I did it. (*Surprised*) Did what? The incest. I made love with this boy and the most awful thing was I wasn’t even ashamed. I was happy! I sang all day long. But at night I’d cry in bed. (*Dramatic*
14 A WOMAN ALONE

relish) "You’re depraved!"

Sound of honking from offstage

Oh excuse me a moment. That's my brother in law sounding his horn for me. Be right back.

Goes to another door and sticks her head round it.

What is it dear? No not now. No, I'm talking to a friend.

Shuts door. Telephone rings. She answers it.

Hello? What is it, Aldo? What? If he comes ... if who comes? The man about the money? (Baffled) On the telephone? What man? Oh! Oh that man on the telephone! Oh yes. Well what if he does? I'm locked in aren't I. I can't very well invite him in through the keyhole. Oh I see ... pretend I'm not at home. Yes. Yes. Yes. (Nodding) Turn off the radio, turn off the T.V. Right. Absolutely. Everything off. Yes sir! (Warm) Listen I'll do even more for you. (Malevolent) I'll go into the bathroom, dive into the toilet and pull the chain!

(Pause) What? Oh terrific, you're mad now are you? Well why don't you just go to hell!

Hangs up, turns to woman opposite. Forced laugh.

He says when he gets home he'll smash my face in. Who, my husband? (Incredulous) Hit me?
(Brief pause) All the time.
Sometimes the way he punches me you'd think he was beating up another man! (Pause) Well come to think of it that's one way I do get equal rights.

She goes back to her ironing

But he says he only does it because he loves me so much. (Fond) He says I'm still just a baby and he has to protect me. (Another brief pause)
From everybody but himself! He 'protects' me by locking me up like a battery hen and then he beats me up and then ... he wants to make love! Couldn't care less if I don't feel like it. Always ready, that's me. Instant. Like Nescafe. Washed, brushed, deodorised, shaved legs and armpits ... all smooth and warm and eager. And silent. All I'm supposed to do is just breathe.

Oh and give a few little squeals and sighs every now and then so he'll think everything's fine. Well let me tell you everything is far from fine between my husband and me. I don't enjoy it. No, I don't feel anything. With my husband I have never had a ... had a ... oh that word! What a word, what an awful word! I can't bear to say it even. Orgasm. (Pause) Orgasm. It sounds like some kind of hideous creature. Like a cross between an orang outang and a cataclysm. I just see it in the headlines. (With flourish) "Fully Grown' Orgasm Escapes from American Circus!" Or "Nun at Zoo Attacked by Crazed Orgasm!" And whenever they talk about 'reaching orgasm' all I can see is somebody running like mad to catch a bus!
Looks at woman opposite and
laughs
Good. I'm glad you think it's funny
too. Orgasm! It's like a bogeyman
to frighten the children. Why
didn't they use a nice sensible word
like ... like chair for instance? You
could say (Does some heavy
panting, then in an exhausted
voice) "I reached a chair." Then at
least you could rest! (Pause) Where
was I? All this talking about
orgams has made me lose the
thread. Oh yes ... my husband. It's
true. I don't feel a thing with him.
Nothing, no matter how hard I try.
Look. I'll show you how I make
love with my husband. Like this!
She stands bolt upright, legs apart,
arms curved stiffly out in front as
though embracing someone, eyes
closed. Then opens eyes briefly to
look at woman opposite.

Only I'm flat on my back, of course.

Resumes pose, closes eyes again,
remains still for a moment then
opens eyes

And when he's finished I say "At
ease!" (Takes up soldier's at ease
stance) No, not out loud ... he'd
hit me. To myself. Then I relax
and go to sleep. (Shrugs) Nothing.
Every time nothing. Maybe it's
because I only ever had one other
sexual experience before my
husband. No, nothing that time
either. He was hopeless! He was
twelve ... I was ten. The only thing
I felt was a terrible pain ... here.
(Points to her navel) Well we didn't
know anything about it all, you
see, except that babies come out of
your stomach so we thought that
must be the place for love. (Points
to navel again) So there he was
with his thing ... pushing and
pushing. My belly button was all
red for days! My mother thought
I'd got the measles. But when I
grew up and got engaged my
girlfriends explained it all to me.
(Rapturous) On my wedding day I
was so excited! In church I was
singing to myself (Sings) "Love is
coming. Love is coming." (Flat)
But my husband arrived instead.
On the wedding night I thought
"That's it? Is that all?" Oh I was
so disappointed the first time.
(Brief pause) And the hundredth.
And I couldn't talk to anybody
about it, you see, I couldn't. Not
in those days. But I started reading
women's magazines and one day I
found out something extraordinary!
Listen to this.

Looks carefully round and then
comes down to the window.
Conspiratorial

We women have got things called
Erogenous Zones! (Nods wisely)
Yes. Now what these are are places
on us that are very sensitive
sexually and they ... what? Oh.
(Disappointed) You already knew
about them. You know a lot don't
you. (Sighs) Right. (Then hopeful)
Bet you don't know how many
erogenous zones we've got.
(Pleased) No? Well in this
magazine there was a drawing of a
naked lady all divided up into sections. You know ... like those posters in the butcher's shop of a cow? And all the erogenous zones were painted these incredible colours. For instance, the rump was painted shocking pink. *(Does a bump and grind and laughs)* Then this part here *(Putting her hands on her back just below her neck)* ... butchers call it chuck. It was purple. And the fillet ... *(Briefly diverted)* What about the price of fillet nowadays eh? Terrible. Well anyway, it was orange. And then the sirloin? *(Pause. Sighs pleasurably)* Ah, the sirloin!

*She clasps her hands, closes her eyes, rotates her hips and sings her love is coming tune. Stops. Opens her eyes.*

But with my husband? No sirloin, no chuck, no fillet ... no brisket! No nothing. "Well," I thought to myself, "Better just get used to it. That's the way it is for us women." And then I met the boy!

*Comes down to the window and sits*

The thing was when my little girl got old enough for school I said to my husband "I'm tired of being just a housewife. I want to do something intellectual for a change. I could learn a language, for instance. Maybe English ... because if we ever go to England they talk it like mad over there. All of them ... all the time!" "Why not?" he says, "Good idea." And he brings me home this boy. *(Pause)* Twenty years old. A drop-out from university. Spoke wonderful English. Well we started our lessons and in no time at all I realised this boy was madly in love with me. Every time I looked at him he'd blush and if I happened to touch his hand he'd start trembling all over and stuttering out the English so you couldn't understand a word. Oh it was all so sensitive and spiritual! Absolutely new to me, Signora. There'd never been anything like that in my life before. All I knew about was my brother in law grabbing me, the heavy breather talking horrible filthy at me and my husband *(Pause, looking for word)* functioning with me! So I said to myself "Are you sliding towards sin?" And I gave up English. He took it terribly badly, the boy. Every morning when I went out to shop, there he'd be. Down there in the doorway waiting for me. I didn't want people talking, naturally, so I'd say *(out of the corner of her mouth like a gangster)* "Scram. Get lost. I'm old enough to be your mother. Get a girl your own age, kid. *(Suddenly shouts)* Go away!" Poor thing, he'd get such a shock when I did that. But I can't help ... when I get excited or upset I just do sort of shout. Then one day when I went out in the morning as usual he wasn't there. Oh I was so disappointed. "Never mind," I thought. "It's all for the best. He finally given up." And then I saw The walls of the houses in the
street were covered in letters about a foot high in red paint. I LOVE YOU MARIA. That’s me, I’m Maria. I LOVE YOU MARIA! In English so nobody could understand it! I ran straight back up the stairs and slammed the door. I turned up the radio as loud as it would go. “No no no,” I said to myself. “I’ve got to forget him.”

So I started to drink. To help me forget. Fernet Branca. Yuk ... so bitter! But I forced it down like medicine. (Poignant) All alone in here with the bitter Fernet, my bitter regrets, the radio blaring away, the telephone ringing and my brother in law honking.

_Honking from offstage_

There he goes again! (Goes to door and puts head in) What is it?

(Loud honking) No, be quiet! I told you I don’t have time ... I’m talking to a friend of mine.

(Furious honking. She shouts over it) Don’t be so rude!

_She slams the door. The honking continues behind it_

Listen to him swearing at me with that horn. (Shouts) One of these days I’ll throw him down the stairs, him and his wheelchair! (Hysterical honking. She shouts louder) All four floors! (The honking subsides) I should think so too. Now where was I? Oh yes, I was drunk on the Fernet Branca. Well not really drunk, just a bit sloshed. The doorbell rang. It was the boy’s mother! I didn’t know where to put myself. Then she said, “Signora, forgive me but my son is dying of love for you. He can’t eat, can’t sleep, can’t drink ... save his life! At least come and see him.”

(Pause. Then dramatic) What could I do? I’m a mother myself. (Pause) I went. Like a mother. I came into his room and there he was in bed ... so thin, so white! He burst into tears. I burst into tears. His mother burst into tears. Then she went out.

(Pause. Closes her eyes) He hugs me and I hug him. He kisses me, I kiss him. And then. (Opens her eyes, shouts) “Stop!” He got another one of those shocks.

“Listen,” I said, “I like you too. I’m not ashamed to say it. As a matter of fact (Getting louder and louder until she’s bellowing) I love you I love you I love you I LOVE YOU. (To woman opposite) The Fernet Branca. (Then confidential) Do you know they told me afterwards that everybody in that building rushed to their windows.

“Who’s in love?” “Somebody in love on the first floor?” “No, nobody here. It must be on the fourth. Who’s in love on the fourth?” Wasn’t I silly! Lucky nobody there knew me. (Bellowing again) “I love you but I can’t make love with you. I’ve got two children, one husband and a brother in law!” Well he jumped out of bed. (Pause) Naked. (Claps hands over her eyes but peeks) Oh how naked he was! He grabbed a knife that happened to be there at the time and he held it against his
throat. He said "If you won't make love to me, I'll kill myself!"
*(Turns palms up in helpless gesture)*
I'm not a murderess! *(Then tenderly)* So I got undressed and
made love. Oh Signora, it was so beautiful, so delicate ... oh those
kisses, those caresses ... God bless that knife!

*Now as she talks she puts away ironing and ironing board*

So that's how I discovered that love ... real love ... isn't that old
business with me underneath and my husband on top bam bam bam
... the combine reaper!
*(Langourous)* Love is sweet ... so sweet. *(Sighs)* I went back the next
day. And the day after that and the day after that and all the days
after the days after. What do you mean Signora? He was ill! I was
simply stunned by the whole thing ... amazed. What? to get all the
way to my age and find out the movies were true after all?
*(Blissful)* I was going around in a
total daze. *(Pause. Then irritable)*
So my husband decided I must be drinking. And what does he do?
Locks up the Fernet Branca.
Brilliant, eh? But then, he started to
get really suspicious and he had me
followed. One day I was in the
boy's room standing there naked
and he was standing there naked
and we were just saying "Hello
how are you?" "Fine and you?"
And suddenly the door bursts open
and in comes my husband. Fully
dressed. I couldn't think what to
say so I said *(Polite and friendly)*
"Fancy meeting you here." Well I
was a bit rattled. I mean ...

imagine! You standing there nude
with a nude stranger and your
husband in an overcoat. He started
yelling that he was going to
strangle the boy and yelling that he
was going to strangle me. But my
husband's only got two hands. So
he grabbed both of us around the
necks and squeezed our heads
together. But even though I tried as
hard as I could I couldn't die. I
pushed my neck right up against
the boy's. I closed my mouth tight
so I wouldn't be able to breathe.
*(Presses her lips together tightly to
demonstrate)* Suddenly my nose
started breathing off its own bat.
I've got an independent nose! Then,
right in the middle of it all, in
rushes the boy's mother and his
sister and his granny and his aunt
... and me standing there starkers
with my independent nose! I ran
into the bathroom, locked the
door, grabbed a razor blade and
without a second thought I started
cutting every vein I've got. I kept
looking for more of them. Here's
one ... zap! And another ... zap!
One more ... one more ... zap zap
zap! Who would have thought we
had so many veins! I was even
cutting them lengthwise so I'd die
quicker. But my husband had this
thing about how he wanted to kill
me personally so he broke down
the bathroom door. When he saw
me covered in blood ... mine's very
bright red ... I looked like
Dracula’s Christmas dinner... then he got frightened. So he decided he’d save my life instead of killing me and he wrapped me up in a nice blanket ... well he didn’t want to get the car messy ... and he took me to the hospital. They sewed me up with little cross stitches all over. I looked like one of those old fashioned samplers. On legs. And my husband forgave me. He was incredibly kind and incredibly generous and incredibly understanding and then he locked me up. What? Yes I know it’s against the law to lock your wife up but what can I do? The police? You’ve got a real bee in your bonnet about calling the police don’t you. Got a relative in the force? Anyway I couldn’t do that because then the whole story would get into the papers. And then (Counting on fingers) one, my husband would divorce me, two he’d take my kids away and three he’d leave me his brother in exchange! No no, there’s nothing I can do. I just have to ... oh excuse me.

The telephone is ringing again. She answers it crossly.

Hello. (Astonished) Oh! (Great tenderness) Darling why are you phoning me? (Shouts to woman opposite) It’s the boy! (Resumes intimate tone) You know you mustn’t call me, love, you know that. How can I? How can I possibly come and meet you when I’m locked in? Oh it’s all so ...

(Shouts) What? You can’t! Are you crazy? Now listen to me ... don’t you dare do such a ... hello? Hello! He’s hung up!

Rushes down to the window.

He’s gone mad, Signora! He says he’s coming round here to pick the lock with a bent nail. Well of course I know it won’t work but what about the neighbours? How am I going to look if somebody goes past in the hall and sees him scratching away at my keyhole with a bent nail?

Knocking at the front door

Oh my God it’s him! He’s here already! (Rushes to door. Shouts) Go away! My husband will be here any minute. Go away! What? Who is that? Money? What money? Oh!

(To woman opposite) Would you believe it! It’s the man my husband phoned me about. The creditor! Oh what a mess! (Through door) There’s nobody at home, no one’s here. Well yes I’m here but I’m only the maid. What? Yes I did say my husband was coming. Uh ... he’s the cook. No the family isn’t here. They’ve all gone! Where? Uh ... on a cruise. In the car. Listen my orders are don’t open the door and don’t speak to anybody and don’t turn on the radio and don’t watch T.V. And anyway even if I did want to open the door I couldn’t because I haven’t got the key. (To woman opposite anxiously) Oh Lord, now what have I said! (Through door) What? Well yes they do lock me in, yes. Uh ... because ... because my mistress
A WOMAN ALONE

thinks I steal from them. No no don’t worry about that! I’m not starving to death ... they leave me emergency rations. The police? Why do you want to call the police? (To herself) He must be related to the lady opposite.

(Through door) Hey listen, come back! Come back! (Pause) Gone.

She comes downstage to the window

He said he was going to get the police. I bet he was only bluffing. Trying to scare me. How does he think I’m going to know what my husband’s been up to? He never tells me anything.

Knocking at the front door

Oh here we go again. Who’s it going to be this time? The creditor? The police? That crazy boy? Well I’m not going to answer it. I’m not going to open the door for any of them!

The knocking gets more insistent

Maybe it really is the police.

A man’s voice shouts ‘Maria! Maria!’

My husband! That’s my husband’s voice. (Goes to door) Aldo, why are you knocking? I know the bell’s broken again but you’ve got your key so open the door. What? You’ve lost your keys? (Dramatic) Oh my God what’ll happen to me now? I will starve to death ... buried alive in here with only the baby and your brother in-law’s hand. What a terrible terrible death! (Then furious) Anyway you’d better look out! Your friend was here just now. That one you owe the money to ... that’s right. He’s gone to call the police. No no no I didn’t say a word to him not a single word ... I’m not an idiot. He only talked to the maid. What do you mean we haven’t got a maid? We’ve got a maid all right! Me! Maid, nurse, babysitter, cook, charlady, washerwoman and screwing machine! No I am not hysterical and I’m not crazy either. (Hysterically) I’ll be glad when the police do come. That’ll put an end to the whole thing. Yes do ... do go away! Go! Go! Go away and stay away you ... you ... you ... (Makes frustrated muttering and growling sounds searching for the right epithet) ... you astigmatic! (Then stamps her foot) Oh!

She comes back downstage, depressed.

Honestly, all the swear words I know and when I really need a good one that’s all I can come out with. Astigmatic! And he’s got perfect vision. Oh I feel such a fool.

(Shrugs) Well anyway, I said what I thought for once. (Baby cries offstage) The baby! (Very alarmed) Signora, listen ... the baby’s crying! What? (Heading for bedroom) You bet I’m scared. He’s never cried since he was born!

Opens bedroom door and goes in.

Sound of baby crying and high mass on T.V. She turns off T.V. sound of a honk or two
(Shouts) You! What are you doing in my room? Oh how could you? Coming in and waking my baby just to get me in here. Stop! Stop that! Leave me alone! (To baby) Don’t cry, precious. (Shouts again) I said leave me alone, you!

The telephone rings. She dashes out, her negligee torn

That slob! Look what he’s done to my new negligee! (To phone) All right I’m coming I’m coming. (Over her shoulder back toward bedroom) Just you wait till your brother comes home! (to herself) If he comes home.

Picks up phone

Hello. Oh no! (Fury) Listen if you don’t stop ringing me up I swear to God I’ll put a bomb in the telephone. I’ll blow your gums off! Oh—you filthy disgusting horrible pig aren’t you ashamed of yourself? I’m a mother! How would you feel if somebody said all those terrible things to your lovely white haired old mother knitting in front of the fire. (Pause) Ha! That stopped him. Found the right word at last. The magic word that beats in the heart of every decent Italian man ... Mama! (Operatic) Mama! (Pause) What? (Puts down the phone) He’s an orphan. (Then to woman opposite indignantly) And what about my brother in law? Look what he’s done to my ... oh. (Breaks off) Signora! Hey Signora! (Dejected) She’s gone. (Her gaze goes up and she sees the peeping tom) But look who’s back.

The baby cries offstage. As she goes up to the bedroom door she picks up the rifle.

Don’t cry. Mama’s going to show you how to kill a peeping tom.

Knocking at the door

(To peeping tom) Don’t go ... I’ll be right back. (Goes to door) Who’s there? Oh my God, for pity’s sake go away. I’m expecting my husband. And the police. And some crazy creditor. Go away! Don’t touch that lock with your nail do you hear me? Oh well it doesn’t matter you’ll never get it open with ... (Shouts) you’ve opened it! (As the door starts to open she quickly puts the chain across) You can’t get in. I’ve put the chain up. Oh help!

She turns and looks gladly over to the window

Oh Signora ... you’ve come back! Listen this crazy boy’s got the door open with that nail. I’ve got the chain up but what do you think I should— (Breaks off as boy’s hand appears through the crack of the door, outraged) Leave my house this minute with that hand!

The hand beckons insistently

Now what? You want to shake hands? Listen I keep telling you my husband’s coming! Oh you’re so stubborn. Here. You can hold my hand but only for a minute. I have to ... (Breaks off) ouch! What are you doing?
Keep still, it won’t hurt you. It’s the kind you use for babies. Oh darling ... what an awful cut I gave you. Now you must go away, you must. Oh all right, one little kiss. *(Kisses his hand)* On your mouth? Certainly not. You’re not getting anything on your mouth. And no, I am not taking this chain off. Oh, help help!

*He has pulled her so hard toward him that her face is mashed up against the crack in the door.*

Stop! My head won’t go through there! I’ve got ears remember! Wait wait wait ... oh I never knew anybody so stubborn ... wait! I’ll try and get my head through sideways.

*She manages to get her head part way through the crack*

Oh my God I’m stuck! My head’s stuck in the door! Don’t pull ... push! *(Then muffled)* Not with your mouth, fool, with your hand! Ouch! Ouch! Ouch!

*Her head comes back through the door with the last ‘ouch’. She holds her face in her hands*

My poor face ... it’s all scratched. *(As she moves away from the door the boy beats frantically on the door with his outside hand)* Will you please stop! This is no time for your drum practice. Just go! Go away! *(The arm in the crack of the door waves wildly about)* What? You’re stuck now? I don’t believe this! *(To woman opposite)* Signora,
guess what! His arm’s stuck in the door. It’s a disaster.

(Melodramatic) He’ll grow old with his arm stuck in my house. My husband will kill me! What am I going to do? What? Soapy water? Oh yes, yes of course ... like for rings.

Goes toward kitchen. Looks up and once more sees peeping tom

He’s still up there. (Shouts) Go away!

(To woman opposite) Hot soapy water do you think? Yes hot’ll work better. (Then furious to peeping tom) Lesbian! (Then to herself) Calm down. Just calm down. Now. (Deep breath) Who wants what? (Then rapidly pointing first at peeping tom) He wants a sexy peep. (Then at boy’s arm) He wants hot water. (Then at the baby who cries offstage) He wants his cereal. (Then toward brother in law offstage who honks) And he wants a grope. Does that take care of all the men around here? (Telephone rings) Oh yes ... and he wants a pornographic chat. (Picks up phone. Speaks with great sweetness) Hello you depraved, disgusting, degenerate pig ... whoops. (Then with nervous cheer) Hello dear. What? (Pause) Who is that? Oh sorry, I thought it was my husband ... no I mean I didn’t think it was my husband ... what I mean is ...

(Deep breath. Then courteously efficient) I’m afraid my husband’s not at home just at the moment. May I take a message? Oh yes. Yes I see. Mmmm hmmm. (Then laughs heartily) Terrific!

Congratulations and let’s hope it’s a boy but you’ve got the wrong number. What? Yes a man does live here as a matter of fact. My husband. But my husband only gets me pregnant. You’re what? You’re positive? Your daughter? No he did not happen to mention it to me. My God he’s the depraved, disgusting degenerate ... (Breaks off) How old is your daughter anyway? Sixteen. Oh ... right. Not quite sixteen. Great. Marvellous. Look, maybe instead of letting your not quite sixteen year old daughter run around getting pregnant by other peoples’ husbands you should try locking her up! I’m over sixteen myself and my husband locks me up so why don’t you think about ... what?

How dare you! (Bangs down the phone. To woman opposite) He called me a whore! His daughter gets pregnant by my husband and he calls me a whore!

The boy bangs loudly on the door from the outside again

Leave me alone, I’ve got family problems. My husband’s pregnant.

Goes into kitchen. Baby cries. Brother in law honks. She comes out of the kitchen with a basin of water in one hand and a bowl of cereal in the other.

All right I’m coming I’m coming!

Ooooh ... ouch! This cereal’s hot.

(Goes into bedroom) Hello sweetheart, here’s Mama with your
A WOMAN ALONE

nice cereal. Stop! Stop that! take that hand off me this minute! Look out, you'll spill the cereal. Look out! (A scream) Oh my God!

She rushes on with the basin of water which she puts down. Then to woman opposite.

I've spilled hot cereal right on his eyes! No not the baby, my brother in law. What shall I do? Nivea cream? Oh yes, good idea. Oh sure I've got lots of it. (Getting the cream) I told you my husband gives me everything I need.

The boy bangs on the door again.

Leave me alone, I said. I'm busy. I've been burning my brother in law.

She goes into the bedroom and comes out again wheeling her brother in law, a dummy covered in plaster of paris except for one large hand and sitting in a wheelchair with an auto horn attached to one arm of it. She puts ointment on the dummy's eyes.

Well I'm sorry it hurts but it was your own fault really. I told you it was going to spill but you just went on and ... stop that! Unhand me!

She has manipulated the dummy's arm so that it clutches her

Let me go this minute ... let me go! (Reaches for the basin of water) I'm warning you! (Holds basin threateningly over the dummy's head) There's boiling water in this basin! (The hand lets her go) So!

Finally got the message, eh? Good.

Runs over to the boy with the basin.

Quick put your arm in here. No of course it's not boiling. I just said that to frighten my brother in law.

The boy puts his arm in, screams' and pulls it out of the water and, out of the crack in the door. She, looks at the basin, surprised

Oh. So it was boiling. Never mind you got your arm out. Well I'm sorry it hurts but it'll only be a little scald. Put some of this on. Here. (Hands Nivea cream through the door) And then go away. Please. I mean it. (Then shouts) What are you doing?

She is being pulled up against the door by the boy

Let me go! Stop! Have you gone mad? What are you doing? Let me go. If anybody sees us we'll all three get sent to prison. You, me and the door! Let go ... you haven't got any respect for me at all. I'm going to make you very sorry for this. I'll punish you. Oh you don't believe me? Well get this!

She pulls the boy towards her with all her strength and slams the door on him. There is a yell of pain and his footsteps running away. She stands still for a moment, then takes the chain off the door and opens it wide. Looks out. Closes door sadly and comes back to the window.
They’re all the same. Love … ha!
He’s just like all the others. Only after one thing. (Despair) I can’t bear it! I just can’t bear it! (Baby cries again offstage) My baby … he’s the only one I really love. I’ll go to my baby.

As she starts for the bedroom the phone rings

Shut up! Just shut up!

Brother in law honks

And you shut up too! Shut up! Shut up!

The crying, the honking and the phone ringing all get louder and louder. She covers her ears and screams

Stop! Stop! Stop! I’ve had enough!

And she runs and gets the rifle and points it at her throat.

I’ve had enough!

Total silence. She stands still, her eyes closed. Then she opens her eyes and turns to look at the woman opposite

Dazed) What? (Lowers the gun) Yes … yes. (Holding back tears) Oh my God, my God what was I thinking of! (Puts gun down) Thank heaven you came to live opposite. (More cheerful as she listens) Yes? Yes? Oh yes what marvellous advice! I’ll do it. I’ll do it right now.

Brother in law honks and she goes over to him, smiling

I’m coming honey. (Strokes him suggestively) I’m right here. Ready and willing! Tell you what … let’s go for a walk to the park and have some fun just the two of us, eh? (Pushing wheelchair to door) To the bushes!

She opens the door and gives the wheelchair a hard shove. We hear it bumping down the stairs and the horn honking as it goes

One! Two! Three! Oh … watch out! Watch out for the picture window on the mezzanine floor!

There is a terrific crash of glass. Then silence. To woman opposite.

Well … that’s one down.

The baby cries offstage and she starts to go to him again. Then stops and looks up at peeping tom. Waves and blows him kisses. Moves voluptuously toward the window, smiling and wiggling her hips. Then grabs the rifle fast and shoots.

(Shouts) That’s one in the eye for you, Peeper!

Baby cries again and once more she goes toward the bedroom. The phone rings. Furious, she picks it up and speaks in a terrible voice.

Hello!

Pause. Then very sweetly.

Oh Aldo, hello. Yes everything’s just fine. Yes yes I’m quite calm. No there’s nobody here, Aldo, nothing but peace and quiet. Come on up. I’m expecting you.
26  A WOMAN ALONE

_Hangs up. Then to woman opposite._

Don't worry, Signora, I am calm.
Absolutely calm.

_With the rifle pointing at the front door. Very carefully she takes aim._

I'm just waiting here very very calmly.

_She gets the rifle and takes up a position leaning against the table_