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SEX AS SPOKEN WORDS IN CONTEMPORARY BRITISH DRAMA

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Abstract: This paper focuses on the descriptive acts of sex and intimacy on the contemporary British stage as written texts and spoken words. The paper will specifically be exploring the use of language in Katherine Chandler's *Lose Yourself* (2019) and Anna Jordan's *Freak* (2014). Both of these play texts use language to describe in varying detail the intimate acts that the characters are recounting, some violent, some messy, some simply underwhelming, but it is solely the description of the acts that the audience are party too. The article refers to extracts from the published texts as well as critic responses of the performances, and apply theories from George Rodosthenous's collection of essays, *Theatre As Voyeurism* (2015), exploring the acceptance of audio and visual voyeurism on stage, and Lisa Fitzpatrick's *Rape on The Contemporary State* (2018) with regard to the issues that arise when performing violent sexual acts on stage. By using these critical texts and relating the author's theories to my chosen performance texts, I argue that by using the description of the sexual acts, rather than overtly performing them, the intimate, aural connection that occurs between the performer and the spectator can be greater than the visual. As society seems to continuously change its mind about what is and is not acceptable to portray on stage, is the aural description of sexual and intimate acts bridging the gap of censorship, putting the ownership on the spectator's imagination, rather than the performers' interpretation?

Key words: intimacy; theatre; performance; visual; Jordan; Chandler.

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1. Introduction

Sex has been commonplace in British theatre for centuries. From Elizabethan theatre, including the brutality in Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus*, to the Restoration's playful and farcical style in *The Country* Wife (Wycherley 1675) and The *Beaux' Stratagem* (Farquhar 1707), from the Victorian era with *Mrs Warren's Profession* (Shaw 1893), to modern British theatre's raw and aptly named In-Yer-Face movement with *Shopping & Fucking* (Ravenhill 1996) and *Blasted* (Kane 1995). Over the centuries, sex and other physical acts of intimacy have featured in, and been the topic of, many pieces of theatre, sometimes directly and unapologetically as with Anthony Neilson's *The Censor* (1997), and sometimes subtly and through subtext as in Noel Coward's *Vortex* (1924). Different periods in British theatre history have brought about different approaches to sex on stage depending on censorship, political movements, or simply the zeitgeist of the time.

Stemming from my previous research exploring contemporary British theatre and theatrical intimacy, I propose that a new movement has occurred from 2013, and may still be occurring, for which sex has become a key theme and topic of work, particularly with female playwrights. However, the way in which writers approach the topic of intimate acts has changed, with depictions of sex becoming less frequent, but the description of the acts now at the forefront. This can be seen in a number of productions which premiered within this time frame, including works such as Louise Orwin's *Oh Yes Oh No* (2017), Abi Zakarian's *Fabric* (2016), Cordelia Lynn's *Lela & Co.* (2015) and Phoebe Waller-Bridge's *Fleabag* (2013). For the purposes of this paper, I am defining sex and intimate acts as any act involving one or more person where there is physical contact with a sexual organ. This includes, but is not limited to: oral sex, manual sexual stimulation through use of a hand (over or under clothing), vaginal penetrative sex, anal penetrative sex, and kissing in a non-platonic or familial setting.

I am examining two examples of British playwriting from the time period. These plays are Anna Jordan's *Freak* (2014) and Katherine Chandler's *Lose Yourself* (2019). These plays have been chosen as they were both written post-2013, and feature a number of similarities, such as the form in which they are written (monologue storytelling) and that they contain both consensual and non-consensual intimacy. Both of these plays use language to describe, in varying detail, the intimate acts that the characters are recounting. These acts of intimacy come in the form of violent attacks, messy encounters, and some simply underwhelming experiences. However, all of the acts featured are presented to their respective audiences solely through verbal description of the acts in the form of monologues. This choice of monologue storytelling could be for a number of reasons, such as financial (if the acts were performed then more actors would be needed), restrictions imposed by the venue (some venues do not allow nudity or certain sexual acts to be performed at their venues) or a directorial choice of telling rather than showing. For clarity, I am defining monologue storytelling as a story being told by a single person, from a single perspective, but that might connect with other stories being told as part of the same

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production and will culminate with at least one shared moment. Other examples of this can be seen in plays such as Patrick Cash's *Chemsex Monologues* (2016a) and *HIV Monologues* (2016b). This is, I believe, the most likely reason not only to allow the actions being described to be left up to the audience's imaginations, but also a way of not making these productions purely about the sexual acts, however highlighting the impact they have on their characters.

Throughout this paper, I refer to extracts from the published texts, critics' responses to the performances, and theories from Lisa Fitzpatrick's *Rape on the Contemporary Stage* (2018) with regard to the issues that arise when performing violent sexual acts on stage. Fitzpatrick argues how sexual acts, particularly violent ones, can become titillating for the audience, thus removing the intention behind the inclusion of these scenes. With regard to *Freak* in particular, this is a particularly key issue considering its choice of writing and descriptive words rather than depiction. I will compare some of Fitzpatrick's theories to George Rodosthenous's ideas around viewing the naked body from his edited collection of essays *Theatre as Voyeurism: The Pleasure of Watching* (2015). Through these essays, Rodosthenous suggests the opposite, that nudity itself is a strong creative choice to be included within a performance. By using critical texts and relating the author's theories to these chosen performance texts, I argue that by using the description of the sexual acts, rather than overtly performing them, the intimate, aural connection that occurs between the performer and the spectator can be greater than the visual, this also being amplified by the venues at which these productions originally premiered.

Before delving into these productions' texts, with regard to the staging of the acts described and considering for a moment why the playwright chose words over actions as a means of telling these stories, I wish to address the concerns raised by Lisa Fitzpatrick in *Rape on the Contemporary Stage* (2018). If performed on stage, it would highlight one of Fitzpatrick's early thoughts on the staging of sexual acts, particularly violent ones such as what happens to Georgie in Anna Jordan's *Freak*. That "[t]he exposure of the (usually female) body to the spectator's gaze can, deliberately or otherwise, titillate" (Fitzpatrick 2018: 5) which, of course, in the case of *Freak*, ultimately undermines the point of the scene. Rodosthenous however believes that the "presence of stage nudity is […] a powerful directorial tool". A tool which could be used to affect the audience, particularly when attempting to "outrage […] unsuspecting and, at times, conservative audiences by converting them to complicit voyeurs" (Rodosthenous 2015: 1). By making the audience party to the actions of the male characters, you may elicit a more visceral response. Additionally, in section 2, I refer to the work and theories of Claire Warden (2023), the first Intimacy Director credited on Broadway, and her theories of female desire and the societal bias that people may unconsciously have, particularly the idea that women who have desires (which we see on stage), must only be conforming to patriarchal, heteronormative desires which men tell them they should have (Ramos and Warden 2023: 83-89).

Fitzpatrick also highlights that plays such as *Freak,* which take a female-centred narrative, use methods of storytelling such as monologues to avoid the

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"pitfalls of staging rape – such as eroticizing the violence or exposing the female body to the scopophilic gaze of the spectators" (Fitzpatrick 2018: 75). By using the monologue form, any risk of eroticising the violent acts is minimalised. This is something which should, of course, be taken into account when working with such material. Although Rodosthenous suggests that audiences viewing the action as opposed to simply hearing it described would be provoked beyond mere passivity, it must also be acknowledged that audiences may respond differently, finding the performance either desirable or undesirable, when viewing such actions.

In the following section, I begin with the first of two chosen texts, that of Anna Jordan's *Freak*. *Freak* comprises two seemingly unrelated monologues which interweave through the performance until a connection between the two characters is revealed in the final speeches.

2. Freak

Anna Jordan's *Freak* was first produced by Theatre503 and Polly Ingham Productions at The Assembly Rooms for the Edinburgh Fringe Festival in August 2014 and starred Lia Burge, as the confident and sexually experimental stripper, Georgie, and April Hughes as the young and sexually naïve schoolgirl, Leah, with Jordan herself directing. Both characters talk of their desires, with Georgie's dream of being "raised up on the Fourth Plinth at Trafalgar Square" with gaffer tape over her breasts and crotch, "dancing, winding and writhing" as the people below watch her, including businessmen, tourists and even "fucking pigeons" (Jordan 2014: 3). The language used by Georgie when describing her dream is detailed and graphic. Georgie is a character who knows what she wants when it comes to her desires and isn't afraid of expressing this. In the opening section of the performance, she says:

> …everyone is hard for me. I mean every man in Trafalgar fucking Square. Fuck it – cocks *all over the city* are filling with blood for me. Denim straining, nylon stretching, buttons popping, zips busting. Stag parties roar and leer at me. Grab their crotches, spit beer at me. All over the city, grooms-to-be are changing their minds because of me. (Jordan 2014: 3)

Georgie's language, through all of her speeches, is frank and to the point, it highlights the confidence in her character. She does not simply say that she enjoys sex or that she wishes men fancied her, she goes into great detail on the acts she fantasises about, and later the sexual acts in which she participates. Georgie is not someone who shies away from her own honesty and feelings, certainly not with her audience.

Whereas Leah's thoughts of sex are based largely on what she has heard from her friends and what she has seen online, they are seemingly more innocent and far less ambitious in comparison to Georgie's. She has fears about her boyfriend, Luke, feeling any sign of pubic hair, due to the fact that, in the pornography she

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has seen, the women are all fully shaved. She uses Veet hair removal products everyday even though:

> It gets a bit sore, and it's costing me a fortune but sometimes at break I meet Luke at the back of the DT block and he puts his hand up my skirt and I think 'What about the hair? What if he touches the hair? (Jordan 2014: 6)

This anxiety and insecurity that Leah feels about her own body, whether the look or the feel, adds to the negativity of her sexual experiences, foreshadowing her own disappointment to come later in the play. It would appear that no matter what Leah's sexual experiences are with Luke, they are all tinged with a lack of the excitement or release that Georgie experiences.

Leah's thoughts on sex are commonplace for most teenagers, driven by peer pressure and the unrealistic standards created by society, particularly those of women. She is not confident with most of the sexual acts she engages in with her boyfriend but is certain it is what she should do because it appears to be what is expected of her by her boyfriend and her girlfriends. Further on in the performance she states:

> …Luke comes over here. To *my* bedroom. And every week it's something new. At first he would kiss me hard and lay on top of me so all the air went out of me, and that was the first time I felt something happening, a burning in my stomach and a sort of lightness in my legs and fluttering in my chest. And I guess that's what being *turned on* feels like. It feels like something you need to fix. And it feels like anything could happen.
>
> The next week I felt his dick hard against my leg and I laughed. He didn't like it. But I couldn't believe it felt like that; it just seemed like such a…cliché. But then I felt myself getting wet between my legs and that felt very grown up. (Jordan 2014: 7)

Leah's experience and expectations appear to come from what she hears from her friends. She compares her friend's conquests to her own, creating expectations of what her encounters with her boyfriend will be. The language used for Leah is in stark contrast to that of Georgie's, as well as the character's thought process. Whereas Georgie is thinking about all the men who are hard for her, Leah is more concerned about the fluttering in her chest, which she cannot even identify, she merely suspects it is the feeling of being turned on.

Jordan's characters' discussions of sex offer honest and genuine thoughts on the anxiety and desire which surround sex that many women, and men, feel at different points in their lives. Her use of language to tell these stories, although still in the realms of titillating and, at times, a touch graphic, is there to serve a purpose. Catherine Love, a theatrical reviewer at WhatsOnStage.com, described these monologues as offering "startling frankness", stating:

> it insistently pushes what women can publicly say about sex and sexuality, but so often those statements conform more than they think they do to

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> existing patriarchal structures. Women are allowed to talk about fucking, as long as they continue to replicate male desires. (Love 2014).

This is potentially the case for the character of Georgie, as she dreams of having sex with multiple men at once and, unfortunately for her, this dream becomes a reality. However, what is it in the dream that she is actually searching for? Is it the admiration of many men, or that she desires to adopt the male role within a relationship? Within the dream itself she is atop a phallic column; she is the one who is erect in front of everyone. This symbolism within the dream would suggest that not only does she want to be desired, and to be the focus of everyone's desire, but that she also wants to be the one who is in control and having the more traditionally masculine role. According to Intimacy Director Claire Warden, desire itself "is typically thought of as a male thing […] the bias in our brain is that desire is masculine" (Ramos and Warden 2023: 83). Thus, the fact that Georgie even has these dreams makes her "masculine".

The scene simply entitled '*The Event*' consists of the two women describing the key sexual events that are the main focus of this play. Leah describes her first time with Luke, doing everything she thinks she should do: for example, giving him oral sex for the first time, at which point she vividly describes that:

> he grabs the back of my head and I gag. I think he likes that […] I think he's going to tell me he loves me. But he tells me that I'm beautiful. Which is pretty much the same thing, right?" (Jordan 2014: 17-18)

It is clear from this description that her boyfriend's behaviour is replicating that of a teenage boy who has observed other sexual acts through the medium of pornography. When it comes to the sex itself, Leah says:

> He looks like a different person. Concentrating very hard. He seems to be in a place that I can't join him. And for a moment I panic. I think that maybe I could just slide out from under him and tiptoe downstairs and watch telly while he thrusts away. (Jordan 2014: 19)

The sex culminates as Luke "cums like a lot lot lot lot lot lot lot lot lot lot lot quicker" than Leah expected as finally "he gives a little shudder and makes a little noise [which] might have actually been the word 'No'" (Jordan 2014: 20-21). The event had been built up in Leah's mind, as a beautiful experience that brings a couple together and demonstrates their love for one another, however for Leah it is nothing but anti-climactic, for which she doesn't even feel present. This, of course, also reflects Georgie's feelings of absence from her own "event" which precedes Leah's. Jordan's choice of repetition of the word "lot" not only serves as a way for Leah to highlight her surprise in the briefness of their entanglement but is also a quality observed in the vernacular of young people and children, to exaggerate and repeat, further highlighting Leah's naiveite surrounding the situation.

Georgie's "event" in contrast becomes far more graphic and pushes Love's thoughts on the female fantasies conforming to the male fantasy and brings this theme to the forefront. Her speech, beginning with "I've done something bad

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[…] Bad bad. Very bad" (Jordan 2014: 14) echoes the repetition used by Leah in her speech as she recounts the night she met a group of men, a "stag do", at her workplace. Drawn in by their (in her eyes) worshipping of her, she goes home with the group. "They pass me around like a doll, like a trophy. I'm the best thing since sliced bread", succumbing again to the male fantasy of being an object, a doll or trophy, an inanimate thing without feeling. As her fantasy comes to fruition, the night becomes a sex fuelled orgy where Georgie is "going to show them just how [she] adores them" (Jordan 2014: 16).

> His cock is in my mouth, and the others get theirs out, wank themselves, surround me. It's a textbook porno and I'm the star. I stare up at them with these big baby-doll eyes, 'Oh *my*, you're so *big*, you're not going to hurt me are you?' […] *I* am responsible for *all* this pleasure. (Jordan 2014: 18)

Finally, Georgie's dream has come true, she is the focal point, she is the one everyone is "hard" for and she proudly takes responsibility for this. The fantasy soon changes from being Georgie's to that of the men's. During what she describes as a "spit-roast" with two of the men, with one of the men "just fucking [going] for it":

> The others follow his lead: Someone holds my nose. There are hands around my throat. Spit and fingers in my arsehole. […] They're saying 'Her' and 'She'. Like I'm not there. […] 'Turn her over. Move her here.' […] 'Fucking whore' […] They're all at it now. Cocks in every hole. This is what I wanted. But I thought I would be *involved*. Now my thoughts, my words, my will; none of them matter. (Jordan 2014: 18)

This scene goes on with Georgie eventually "leaving her body" and feeling as if she is just watching herself being treated like "just meat and holes". "Mouth, pussy, arse. Mouth, pussy, arse" (Jordan 2014: 18). The repetition this time no longer demonstrating innocence as it did with Leah, but the monotonous movements, like a machine, ever repeating, never relenting.

These encounters described through *Freak* do, as Love highlights, demonstrate how women's fantasies conform to that of the patriarchy, but that diminishes the idea that in some cases, women's fantasies may be similar to that of men. It may be less common for women's desires to be spoken of in such frank and graphic language, but this does not mean that it is not the case. Ramos and Warden suggest that there is a lot of shame put on women by society for their desires:

> We're always fighting the patriarchal virgin/whore dichotomy that we're pushed into, and what is assumed in a patriarchal society to be "sexy". We have such limited depictions of desire from women because desire is a very powerful feeling. In patriarchy there is a deep fear of any strong feeling from a woman. (Ramos and Warden 2023: 84)

As such then, does the issue of the text describing the acts, rather than depicting them, further prove Warden's point that we do not see the acts because

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they represent female desire? Or, as Fitzpatrick suggests, is it a way to protect the characters from becoming merely objects once more, in their own stories? The issue, in the case of both situations described in the play, is that the men are not treating the women as people, but rather that the women themselves simply become objects making both women feel as if they are no longer present. Georgie experiences an out-of-body moment during her ordeal, whereas Leah feels as if she can simply slip out from under her boyfriend without him even noticing.

In the following section, in contrast to *Freak*, *Lose Yourself* consists of three interlocking monologues, this time with two male perspectives and a single female. These monologues tell the story of the relationship of these three characters which culminates in one night shared by all three.

3. Lose Yourself

Katherine Chandler's *Lose Yourself* was first performed at the Sherman Theatre, Wales, in May 2019. It was directed by Patricia Logue and features Aaron Anthony as Nate, a flashy footballer coming to the end of his career, Gabrielle Creevy as Yaz, a young girl desperate to get out of "shit jobs in shit towns" (Chandler 2019: 16) and Tim Preston as Josh, Nate's young protégé struggling with his dwindling prospects following a sports injury.

There are both similarities and striking differences between the use of language in *Freak* and *Lose Yourself*. Similar to *Freak,* the initial sexual encounters described are fully consensual, though we do question how much is truthful and how much is the character boasting to themselves. This is a play in which all three characters describe their unique take on the same event, demonstrating just how unreliable and untrustworthy personal viewpoints may be. It also highlights how subjective perspectives can blur one's perception of events. Nate's description of his encounter with Yaz, for instance, is not an encounter that she retells herself, though if she did, the question of whether she would describe it in the same way would be an interesting one. For example:

> I lead the One Stop chick to the VIP bathroom.
> Shake up the champagne.
> The fizz explodes spraying us both. She giggles.
> Nose wrinkles.
> I like her.
> She grabs the bottle. Sucks on the end of it.
> I like her even more.
> Gulps down the fizzing liquid. Licks the bottle end.
> Lets it spill down her moth, her chin, her neck.
> My turn
> I lick the spill that's running down her neck,
> Between her tits (Chandler 2019: 40)

Here Nate recounts how he "[slips his] fingers into her pants" before "[his] tongue, still fizzing [from the champagne], gets to work on making her come She does Cause she does" (Chandler 2019: 40-41). Nate's monologue echoes the

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confidence of Georgie from *Freak*, but this time with a cockiness which is more expected from a male character. The use of the interwoven monologues through *Lose Yourself* helps to blur the lines between the characters, whilst bringing into focus what each of them wants and how each of their desires become singularly focused.

The second encounter is described by Yaz as she sits in the VIP area of the club with Nate, and briefly thinks of Nate's wife after seeing his wedding ring:

> For a second I consider whether I care about her
> As his fingers reach the top of my thighs
> I realise that I don't
> All's fair
> At that moment, I realise that all I care about is me
> What I want
> All I care about is him
> Not about him
> About fucking him
> THE Nate West fucking me
> That's what I want
> Right now (Chandler 2019: 49)

Yaz's monologues are less direct in her use of language than those of Nate. One reason is that she delivers the build-up, rather than the main intercourse itself. Her speeches show her thought process, her thoughts change focus from the wife, to Nate, to what she thinks she wants, to what she actually wants. She recounts asking him questions leading up to sex, "How hard are you? Hard. How hard? Really fucking hard. I want you to fuck me. Now" (Chandler 2019: 49). She goes into greater detail surrounding what she wants, rather than the actuality of the events. When it comes to the act itself, it is Nate who recounts:

> We don't make it to the bed.
> The first time.
> We only just make it to the room.
> We don't close the door.
> No clothes removed
> No time
> I take her against the wall.
> It's quick.
> She wanted it quick.
> Fast.
> Faster.
> A guy walks past the door
> He's in uniform.
> Works at the hotel.
> A porter or something.
> I let him watch for a bit before
> I kick the door shut with my foot.
> Harder
> Faster
>
> Fuck me

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Fuck
Fuck me
She comes. (Chandler 2019: 49-50)

This again demonstrates Nate's own aims and pleasures, allowing a porter to watch as if showing off to the audience (perhaps an acknowledgment of the footballer/performer in him), before highlighting to the audience that she achieves orgasm, which is another boast. His speeches are an attempt to impress, highlighting that their passion was such that they could not even contain themselves enough to make it to the bed. This was not the only time they had sex; it was just the first time that night.

The final encounter in the play is told in part by Nate's teammate, Josh. He walks in on Yaz and Nate having sex and watches. Up until this point in the play, Josh has looked up to Nate, worshipped him, in fact, and wanted to be like him. The opportunity to become a part of one of Nate's sexual conquests gives Josh the feeling of achieving an equal social status as Nate. At this point, Josh's perspective becomes key to the narrative. We do not focus on Yaz or Nate's thoughts, only Josh's. Nate "nods" Josh over and removes his penis from Yaz, inviting Josh to take over:

In that moment
In that one moment
I follow my cock
Pushing hard against my jeans
Planning its escape
I take Nate up on his offer
Take over where he left off
[…]
He's in front of her
He's in her mouth
She stops and looks back at me
Eyes wide open
Still I fuck her.
She moves her head back. (Chandler 2019: 53)

Once the intercourse has finished, Yaz says she is thirsty and walks off into the bathroom. It is only when it is Yaz's turn to speak again that the audience have confirmed what they fear to be the case:

The floor is cold
I like it cold
I don't know how long I sit there but I do know, I don't want to go
back into the room.
So I stay on the cold floor.
I check the door.
It's locked.
I locked it.
[…]
I'm naked.
I look down at myself and see that I'm naked.

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> My skin is mottled.
> Cold
> I pull at it.
> My skin.
> Is it my skin?
> Is that my face?
> I'm not sure it's me. (Chandler 2019: 55–56)

With further similarity between the two texts, Yaz, similarly to both Georgie and Leah, separates herself from the "event" that has just occurred, although after the event, Yaz physically leaves the space. The audience now have a choice of which story they believe, which narrative they interpret as the truth, leaving the story ambiguous. However, the words spoken by Yaz make it clear this outcome was never the plan and never what she wanted.

One way in which *Lose Yourself* differs from *Freak* is that *Lose Yourself* offers the perspective of all characters involved in the events, thus highlighting how memories of events may differ. *Freak*'s focus, however, is purely on the female perspective of the interactions. It explores two separate narratives with some similarities between the two, whereas *Lose Yourself* features interlocking monologues offering both consensual and non-consensual perspectives on the same sexual event. In both accounts, however, it leads to further unwanted experiences, even if the characters had originally been willing participants in those encounters. Due to the female focus within *Freak*, when we reach the final scene (the only scene within the play where the two characters interact with one another), there is a sense of closure as the two characters share a feminist connection. However, for Yaz in *Lose Yourself*, there is no one within the play for her to speak to, leaving her alone after the assault in the hotel room.

4. Conclusion

As stated in the introduction, sex is discussed far more in recent years by female voices. However, another key change in the discussion around sex in modern plays is tone. Fitzpatrick states that "rape and sexual violence are commonly represented in women's dramatic writing, a fact that suggests that the experience of sexual violence, or the theatre of it, is a common life-experience for women across cultural and social groups" (Fitzpatrick 2018: 75). The use of monologue as a form of storytelling also adds another element, that of the personal and confessional. It allows the audience to become invested in the characters, to understand, to believe and to feel connected with them. Another female focussed play which is both thematically and stylistically similar, written post-2013, featuring sexual acts, both consensual and violent in nature, is *Fabric*, by Abi Zakarian. Zakarian, unlike Jordan and Chandler however, has chosen to include a highly unusual and descriptive stage direction at the start of the play:

> The rape scene and any other parts of the play related to it must always be portrayed sensitively and with absolutely no recourse to sensationalism,

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> overt brutality or anything that could be contrasted as placing emphasis on the visual or physical rather than the words. (Zakarian 2016)

Both *Freak* and *Lose Yourself* could also benefit from the use of stage direction such as this to, as Fitzpatrick puts it, "return some of the power and agency to the female characters" (Fitzpatrick 2018: 28) as well as the writers. By ensuring that the visual is not used at all when referring to the intimate acts, the audience can understand how these female characters in particular are responding to their own thoughts, actions and experiences. Within both of these plays, as well as in many of those mentioned in the introduction, the acts of sex and intimacy that occur do vary greatly between the consensual, the violently consensual, sexual harassment and rape, though I would argue that this is not the focus of the plays. These are not performances about sexual harassment, sexual assault or even sex, but are plays about the female experience at the hands of men, power dynamics, male desire, subjugation and control.

As a playwright and theatre maker myself, I have recently produced two plays using this same monologue style, however, in my own work, I also directly address and interact with the audience. In 2021, I produced *Three Way*, consisting of three interlocking monologues exploring male sexuality through the experience of three unrelated characters. In two of these monologues, the characters described their own sexual encounters in varying detail but in an honest, conversational way. These monologues were not intended to be sensational, but honest. The characters boast of their exploits, embrace their flaws and express their desires, though also acknowledging these characteristics are not necessarily morally acceptable. As a production, *Three Way* was praised for its style, not only in the writing but for the conversational and casual nature in which the monologues were performed. My second production, *I Heart Michael Ball*, although not sexual, still delves into the dark subject matter of obsession, grief, kidnap and murder. This monologue was once again praised for its conversational approach, allowing the audience to connect wholly with the character and making it an even more immersive experience than we could have hoped for. It also alludes to a celebrity being violently beaten to death off stage but this, in the most part, is done out of the audience's view, once again leaving it to their imaginations.

I wish to end with a quotation from Stephen Bottom's *Authorizing the Audience*. Bottoms is referring in his article to the work of theatre maker Tim Crouch, however I feel, particularly as Crouch himself also writes in the monologue form quite regularly, that this quote is appropriate for both the plays discussed in this paper: "Spectators take the information they are given, partial and contradictory as it is, and fill out the perceptual and emotional landscape through an investment that, because personal, makes the material all the more intensely felt" (Bottoms 2009: 66).

If either *Freak* or *Lose Yourself* depicted, rather than simply described, these acts, if they featured characters that would fill out the scenes and, flesh out the idea of the strip club, the school room, the night club or hotel, then the stories being told would be far less personal. It would create worlds which audiences

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may not connect with, being too developed as their own worlds. It is due to this monologue form that the stories being told resonate and connect with their respective audiences.

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