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Review: Emotional Terrorism, Drayton Arms Theatre

By [Olivia Lunn](https://www.ayoungertheatre.com/author/olivia-lunn/) (<https://www.ayoungertheatre.com/author/olivia-lunn/>), on December 8, 2017 in [Theatre](https://www.ayoungertheatre.com/category/theatre/) (<https://www.ayoungertheatre.com/category/theatre/>).



After its performance at the Hollywood Fringe Festival and the Edinburgh Fringe Festival, Writer, Director and Performer Ellyn Daniels stages *Emotional Terrorism* in the Drayton Arms Theatre with what felt like pure, raw truth. After some initial artistic direction from Desmond Devenish, Daniels felt her own voice was getting obscured, so decided to become the solo creator. She delves into her past, blending her disturbing psychological self-analysis with a retrospective sense of comedy. The line between actor and character is more than blurred; it is practically absent.

Daniels is swept along on a journey from the instability of a heartless home, to the supposed heights of international fame in Paris, Togo and Japan; she is battered by criticism of her body and her talent. Her abrasive lovers and callous mother only serve to magnify this confused sense of self, fraught with eating disorders and suicidal thoughts. One supposed nugget of advice comes from her first boyfriend, who burdens her with herpes and is double her age: “bulimics are weak, anorexics are the strong ones”.

Traditionally, a play adopts the form of an illusionary reality, but this play shatters the illusions she once held about herself and her

worldview. A newly empowered and positively disillusioned Daniels courageously invites the audience into her past. She self-consciously presents her adolescent illusions about the world, ripe with impressionability. I cringed at parts, especially when she humorously captures the naïve youth romanticising poverty: seventeen-year-old Daniels gazes upon the vibrancy and vivacity of a slightly impoverished corner of Africa, envying their ability to be “alive”.

Despite being the solo performer, the hour-long play did not plateau in energy or content. Daniels seamlessly transitions from herself to her father, from modelling advisor to Romanian boyfriend, aided by her graceful poise as a ballet dancer. Even in its darkest moments, the play is saturated with humour. Her sharp tongue and scathingly witty illustrations left the audience bellowing with laughter- a soothing remedy to the onstage trauma. Comedy is her path from the pit to the tip. She does not hold back in this play. From the opening scene her legs dangle clumsily in the air, adopting an impressively awkward sex position whilst she licks her boyfriend’s anus. She looks on in light-hearted bewilderment, musing, “how did I get here?”

Running in the same self-aware vein as *La La Land*, Daniel’s unapologetic and inspiring piece adds a brushstroke of personality to the widely known and increasingly criticised portrait of the showbiz industry. This play left me wondering how many more plays need to be inadvertently created by the industry before real change is enforced and the masculine power structures are subverted. Her play is fraught with ugly unchangeable realities, like the male gaze, and it teaches us that solace can only be drawn from the inside, not the seeping poison of surrounding voices.

Her voice is the only voice: she reclaims the hurt, anxiety and self-doubt inflicted onto her, both internally and externally, by the voices of her past that she allows to define her. Now she uses her voice as a weapon; as a celebration of her victory; as an internal salvation.

Emotional Terrorism is playing at *The Drayton Arms Theatre*

(http://www.thedraytonarmstheatre.co.uk/menu/discover/listings/eventdetail/5275/14/emot_terrorism) until December 9 2017

Photo: Drayton Arms Theatre

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Olivia is an English Literature undergraduate at UCL, who enjoys soaking up the music, theatre and art offered by the vibrant city of London.

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