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*Haunting the Stage: The Performance of Trauma by Contemporary Female Playwrights***.**

Eva Gil Cuder

Supervisor: Dr. Carolina Sánchez-Palencia Carazo

University of Seville

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Haunting the Stage: The Performance of Trauma by Contemporary Female Playwrights.

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La Directora de Tesis   La Doctoranda

Carolina Sánchez-Palencia Carazo   Eva Gil Cuder

A mis padres,

con inefable gratitud.

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The world of pilgrims- of identity-builders- must be orderly, determined, predictable, insured; but above all, it must be a kind of world in which footprints are engraved for good, so that the trace and the record of past travels are kept and preserved. A world in which travelling may be indeed a pilgrimage. A world hospitable to the pilgrims. And so the modern men and women lived in a time-space with structure; a solid, tough, durable time-space…

The world is not hospitable to the pilgrims any more. The pilgrims lost their battle by winning it. They strove to make the world solid by making it pliable, so that identity could be built at *will*, but built systematically, floor by floor and brick by brick. They proceeded by turning the space in which identity was to be built in a desert. They found out that the desert, though comfortingly featureless for those who seek to make their mark, does not hold features well. The easier it is to emboss a footprint, the easier it is to efface it. A gust of wind will do. And deserts are windy places.

It soon transpired that the real problem is not how to build identity, but how to preserve it; whatever you may build in the sand, is unlikely to be a castle. In a desert-like world it takes no great effort to blaze a trail- the difficulty is how to recognize it as a trail after a while. How to distinguish a forward march from going in circles, from eternal return? It turns virtually impossible to patch the trodden stretches of sand into an itinerary- let alone into a plan for a life-long journey. (Zygmunt Bauman 1996:8)

De darse una imagen, forma, o expresión capaz de contener lo que identificamos como el 'sujeto contemporáneo' (ya que encontrar dicha imagen es, después de todo, la tarea estética de cualquier obra de arte), la interpretación que Zygmunt Bauman ofrece acerca de la subjectividad en la actualidad, tomando una forma inestable e inconsistente, edificada sobre arenas movedizas, parece cobrar sentido en una contemporaneidad caracterizada por su precariedad. De manera opuesta a la construcción sólida y ladrillo a ladrillo de una serie de valores estables sobre los que basar nuestra existencia, los tiempos que corren, argumenta Bauman, se caracterizan por la vulnerabilidad del sujeto contemporáneo, que ya no viene a estar definido por la constancia de una vida certera o de camino fijo que marca dicho peregrinaje, sino más bien por la inestabilidad y la inconsistencia de un camino oscuro y pantanoso, donde las huellas por uno mismo trazadas, o las señales que nos indican en qué dirección debemos ir, se tornan opacas e ilegibles.

Para mi proyecto de tesis doctoral me propuse abordar en profundidad la reiterada aparición en el mundo de las artes escénicas de una imagen que, de una forma similar a aquella propuesta por Bauman en la anterior cita, parece delinear la naturaleza intangible, opaca y elusiva que representa al ser contemporáneo en su precariedad ontológica. La figura del espectro, lo inmaterial y lo etéreo parece haberse erigido de forma persistente, tal y como pretendo demonstrar con este exhaustivo trabajo de investigación, como forma de representación escénica de la subjetividad contemporánea, en tanto que dicha naturaleza fantasmal apela igualmente a lo intangible y precario, como al carácter persecutorio y casi obsesivo que define la determinación humana por clasificar, simbolizar, contener o significar todo aquello que nos rodea.

De esta forma, de igual manera que aquellas huellas o marcas inestables y de fácil erosión con las que Bauman simboliza la subjetividad líquida del ser

contemporáneo, la naturaleza etérea e incorpórea del espectro, igualmente maleable e inestable, parece seguir persiguiendo e invadiendo representaciones recientes de la subjectividad postmoderna, en su estatus como eco o recordatorio de un pasado incontenible. Y sin embargo, al mismo tiempo, dicha imagen espectral parece ser incapaz de proporcionar una definición sólida de aquel pasado fugaz, y de proporcionar consuelo a dicha existencia actual, post-traumática y, de esta forma, fragmentada.

A lo largo del trabajo que ocupa estas páginas, a través del cual solicito la mención internacional al doctorado, me dispongo a explorar y clasificar una serie de obras representativas dentro de dicha estética del espectro como figura capaz de articular la esencia del sujeto contemporáneo dentro del mundo de las artes escénicas. Dicha herramienta estética en evocación de lo fantasmal se ha manifestado de manera persistente, según he podido comprobar a lo largo de mi estudio, y según pretendo demostrar con el trabajo que aquí presento, en obras recientes dentro del mundo de la representación teatral.

La representación del sujeto y su relación con la realidad simbólica en la que se desenvuelve ha ido cobrando forma a través de una serie de eventos sociales y culturales que han cambiado irremediablemente el curso de la representación artística actual. Tal y como ya han formulado una serie de autores reconocidos a nivel internacional (Dominick LaCapra, Cathy Caruth, Roger Luckhurst, Shoshana Felmann y Ann E. Kaplan, entre otros) y cuyas contribuciones serán contempladas a lo largo de esta tesis, los tiempos que corren han sido formalmente identificados como una "cultura del trauma" ("trauma culture" R. Luckhurst 2003:2), que viene a estar definida por la infructuosa búsqueda de algún método racional, ordenado (o, haciendo eco de la metáfora líquida propuesta por Bauman, algún método sólido) capaz de contener e inscribir nuestro pasado, de forma que esto permitiese la construcción de un futuro

estable y certero. Este intento de representar (o, dicho de otra forma, contener) la esencia del ser contemporáneo fracasa estrepitosamente como consecuencia de la futilidad que caracteriza la contemporaneidad líquida. Los movimientos culturales contemporáneos vienen a estar definidos por la imposibilidad existencial de asimilar con éxito dicha eventualidad traumática, lo cual nos impide construir un prospecto de futuro estable, y de cimientos certeros. De esta manera, el actual orden simbólico y las bases de cualquier orden social dentro del mundo occidental se caracteriza por una completa falta de certidumbre moral y ética, que desemboca a su vez en una emergente precariedad existencial del sujeto que toma parte en dicho orden, tal y como ha venido siendo formulado por los críticos más influyentes (el trabajo de Zygmunt Bauman, Alain Badiou, Giorgio Agamben o Slavoj Žižek, entre otros, informa el contenido de esta tesis).

Como resalta el filósofo Alain Badiou, el 'Ser' está supeditado al 'Evento' hasta el punto de que la propia existencia del sujeto está determinada por el desarrollo de eventos transcendentales (Badiou 2005). De esta forma, es nuestra interpretación y la posterior representación de eventos contemporáneos lo que da forma a nuestro estatus social como individuos pertenecientes a un determinado orden simbólico, o como suplementos de dicha eventualidad. Eventos culturales y sociales de transcendencia mundial han dado forma, de esta manera, a nuestra visión contemporánea de la subjetividad. Y los eventos a los que me referiré a lo largo de mi tesis, dado su gran impacto en el mundo de la representación artística en general, y dentro del mundo de las artes escénicas en concreto, interrogan y cuestionan la construcción del sujeto femenino. Tal y como Christina Wald argumenta en su estudio exhaustivo sobre el Drama del Trauma, los años 90 fueron testigo del descubrimiento de una realidad que jamás con anterioridad había sido inspeccionada como consecuencia de su carácter abominable e

inefable: una serie de eventos que apuntaban al abuso de menores por parte de sus progenitores comenzaron a salir a la luz (el más famoso de dichos casos siendo el denominado escándalo de Cleveland, que tuvo lugar en Gran Bretaña en 1987, tal y como señala Wald en 2007:99). Tal escándalo social sin precedentes se suma al impacto cultural generado por la publicación en los años 70 de la primera obra narrativa autobiográfica en la que la autora se confiesa víctima de abusos por parte de su padre (género que posteriormente pasó a conocerse como 'narrativa de incesto'): *Kiss Daddy Goodnight* (1978), de Louise Armstrong.

Junto con las diferentes posturas feministas que surgieron a lo largo de los años 70 (siendo el feminismo radical, el liberal y el social, los tres tipos de feminismos más representativos por alcanzar un mayor impacto cultural y social), la consolidación durante los años 90 de una atmósfera anti-patriarcal fortaleció la voz feminista en el mundo de la representación artística, que comenzó así a moverse de forma estable y segura en esa dirección (la representación de las inquietudes del sujeto femenino, y la reformulación de una voz femenina ahora más autoritaria y sólida).

El teatro anglófono contemporáneo fue rápido en desarrollar interés por la representación y la denuncia de dichas preocupaciones éticas y políticas, y comenzó a explorar vías a través de las cuales despertar la actitud crítica del espectador, normalmente aletargada y silenciada por la oscuridad del patio de butacas. Esta tesis doctoral se propone desarrollar un estudio crítico de la evolución del teatro contemporáneo en inglés en su búsqueda por representar las preocupaciones de carácter ético que delinean al sujeto contemporáneo en la manera en que críticos contemporáneos como los ya mencionados Badiou y Bauman han venido formulando los últimos años. Desde la formulación de la individualidad fragmentada del sujeto traumatizado y, en concreto, la voz silenciada del sujeto femenino, y pasando por la

reconstrucción de la subjetividad post-traumática en el escenario a través de ciertos movimientos estéticos, el teatro contemporáneo ha llegado a desarrollar una visión amplia y una voz característica y transcendental en lo que concierne a la formulación del substrato ético y moral de los tiempos que vivimos.

Dicha perspectiva abarca, de esta forma, no solo las vicisitudes de formaciones traumáticas a nivel individual (en particular, en lo que concierne a la reformulación de la femineidad), o los diferentes descalabros políticos a nivel doméstico, fácilmente reconocibles por un público euro-céntrico y occidental. La segunda parte de mi tesis (y especialmente el capítulo cuarto) ilustrará y analizará de forma crítica el giro de tuercas experimentado durante el comienzo del siglo veintiuno en lo que respecta a los cimientos éticos sobre los cuales se asienta nuestra subjetividad contemporánea como miembros de una comunidad u orden occidental, y en concreto, el análisis de la voz teatral que se ha ido desarrollando en consecuencia con el fin de capturar dicho giro ontológico. Dicha voz teatral, tal y como argumento en las próximas páginas, ha ido indagando, experimentando y desarrollando formas de interrogar, alienar y desconcertar a un público al que ahora se transporta a escenas distantes y extrañas, en representación de comunidades en las que la subjetividad euro-céntrica es cuestionada, y los valores simbólicos que la justifican, invalidados. Tal y como exponen Mark Berninger, Christoph Henke y Bernard Reitz (2012),

> [n]umerous productions in recent years have taken up the said challenges to moral certainty, sometimes by continuing traditional theatrical approaches rooted in pacifism, feminism or gay rights. Yet, more often than not, familiar ideological standpoints have come under revision and moral didacticism has been deconstructed in contemporary theatre. (2012:9)

Esta tesis doctoral fue planteada con la intención de abarcar un estudio exhaustivo sobre la evolución que ha venido experimentando la voz teatral en su representación de las inquietudes éticas y morales del sujeto contemporáneo. La figura

del espectro y la irrepresentabilidad que ésta evoca, dado su carácter intangible y elusivo, se convierte, de esta forma, en objeto de estudio, al erigirse como estrategia consistente en la representación de estados traumáticos y de deconstrucción o ruptura intra-psíquica. La primera parte de mi estudio (especialmente los dos primeros capítulos de esta tesis) se centra, en concreto, en el análisis de la reconstrucción del sujeto femenino en el escenario, fragmentado tras años de silencio y opresión patriarcal, para pasar a continuación (especialmente en el capítulo cuarto) al estudio de la representabilidad dentro del mundo de las artes escénicas de la precariedad existencial en un contexto de guerra o ruptura sistémica en el que el substrato ético (y por lo tanto, las coordenadas ontológicas que aportan sentido simbólico a la existencia del sujeto social) parece desquebrajarse.

Los tres primeros capítulos de esta tesis se dirigen, de esta forma, al análisis de obras teatrales contemporáneas en las que se explora la reconstrucción de una subjectividad femenina post-traumática (o post-eventual, en términos de Badiou). Dicha preocupación (y como consecuencia de los eventos de carácter socio-cultural arriba mencionados) fortaleció la voz creativa de dramaturgas contemporáneas en direcciones que pretendo clasificar a través del presente estudio. Encaminada hacia un modelo estético delineado por la figura del espectro, o lo no-humano (vampiros, espantapájaros, o apariciones fantasmales de algún ancestro, tal y como se verá en los diferentes capítulos de esta tesis) la representación escénica de la subjetividad femenina, fragmentada por el trauma, trata de representar el lastre de un pasado persecutorio que ha ido reprimiendo o silenciando dicha subjetividad, y un futuro etéreo e inestable en el que predomina la incertidumbre existencial.

Los diferentes análisis de los textos aquí propuestos y cuidadosamente escogidos, van encaminados a demostrar dicha la incertidumbre existencial que

caracteriza al sujeto contemporáneo, la vulnerabilidad y precariedad en que dicho estado se retroalimenta, y cómo esta inquietud ontológica se ha venido reflejando gradualmente en términos estéticos en una desconfianza del orden simbólico y de los instrumentos lingüísticos y sistémicos que lo sustentan. Las obras teatrales a analizar manifiestan, de esta forma, un interés estético común en una visión deconstructiva y de desconfianza ante el lenguaje. El "peligro del habla" (Caruth 1995:154, traducción propia) en cuadros clínicos post-traumáticos reside en la certidumbre de que todo resquicio de verdad en relación al evento traumático se expone a mecanismos racionales, simbólicos y lingüísticos, e inevitablemente predestinados a 'racionalizar' (y por lo tanto, limitar) cualquier componente de verdad en la memoria traumática.

Por este motivo, el drama contemporáneo se propone formular "*la verdad de un evento,* y *la verdad de su incomprensibilidad"* (Caruth 1995:153, traducción propia), ya que dicha incomprensibilidad constituye la naturaleza del evento y por tanto (siguiendo la lógica expuesta por Badiou), del sujeto traumatizado. Dicha incomprensibilidad no puede ser descrita a través de medios simbólicos o racionales, y es ahí donde reside la importancia de la representación teatral, ya que ésta engloba tanto medios narrativos como no-narrativos en su intento por formular la realidad del sujeto contemporáneo (Wald 99). Dicho evento es descrito como "algo que no puede representarse de forma directa, sino a través de la alusión" (Žižek 2008:5, traducción propia), ya que cualquier intento por representar el hecho traumático basado en la estética realista parece estar destinado al fracaso, al caracterizarse el hecho traumático precisamente por su incontenibilidad e irracionalidad.

Es por ello por lo que la figura del espectro y el efecto fantasmal conseguido en las obras propuestas para análisis evocan con éxito la existencia frágil y casi etérea de las protagonistas de dichas obras; una existencia fundamentada en la indecisión y la

inestabilidad, ya que sus vidas penden peligrosamente de un hilo que de forma difusa separa el mundo simbólico y racional, de sus existencias intra-psíquicas en el mundo de lo traumático. Por lo tanto, en su mayoría, las obras escogidas para análisis proyectan la lente deteriorada a través de la cual el personaje principal asimila la realidad que le rodea en un momento crucial, justo antes de que su realidad simbólica se desintegre al encontrarse estos personajes al borde de la muerte. Es por ello que la voz o mirada de estos personajes, formulada a través de medios estéticos objeto de análisis de esta tesis doctoral, se torna cada vez más fragmentada y carente de sentido y de contenido simbólico.

Las protagonistas, ya en un estado semi-espectral, son objeto de un proceso de deconstrucción del que forma parte un lenguaje abstracto y areferencial. De esta forma, y como se analizará en profundidad en cada capítulo, estas obras ofrecen un lenguaje que avanza hacia un estado en el que cada vez existe menor conexión entre significado y significante, conforme las protagonistas van abandonando el ámbito de lo simbólico para pasar a formar parte por completo del mundo de lo espectral. Se formula, así pues, una voz o visión estética a modo de collage, o de mosaico lingüístico, en el que las palabras parecen en un gran número de ocasiones haber coincidido de forma casual, ya que su sentido completo solo alcanza comprensión cuando son observados desde una cierta distancia crítica.

El primer capítulo de esta tesis se centra en el estudio de la representación teatral de la paradoja existencial por la cual el sujeto desarrolla una necesidad imperiosa de hacer frente y asimilar el evento traumático (que se caracteriza precisamente por ser irrecuperable), al mismo tiempo que trata de huir del hecho traumático para poder recuperar la normalidad dentro de su existencia como ser social bajo el orden simbólico. *The Mai* (1994), *Portia Coughlan* (1996) and *By the Bog of Cats* (1998) de Marina Carr,

y *Cleansed* (1998) de Sarah Kane son las obras a ser tratadas desde este punto de vista, dada la inclinación que comparten ambas autoras por la representación del trauma individual en mujeres a través del uso de mecanismos que apelan a lo espectral y lo fantasmagórico. Dichas obras reflejan el carácter elusivo y a la vez persecutorio de la memoria traumática, y compensan las carencias del orden simbólico al tratar de acometer la misma labor al apelar a una estética anti-naturalista. Dicha estética gira en torno a la figura de apariciones fantasmales que cuestionan los límites del mundo simbólico, al introducir de esta forma elementos del mundo intra-psíquico en la realidad de los personajes.

La tarea investigadora que desarrollo al explorar dichos textos toma como punto de referencia las contribuciones de Maria Torok y Nicolas Abraham en el estudio de los procesos internos continuos y en constante evolución que moldean y dan forma a la psique humana (proceso al que ellos llaman 'introyección', en contraposición a otros usos predominantes de dicho término). En concreto, en el primer capítulo, y con el objeto de analizar el uso de dichas estrategias que apelan a lo espectral en el intento de representar la fragmentariedad post-traumática de las protagonistas, me centraré en dos de los fenómenos psíquicos estudiados por Abraham y Torok como causas principales que entorpecen el proceso natural de introyección psíquica: la 'incorporación' (a través de la cual el ego del sujeto hospeda un objeto perdido y que de forma inconsciente permanece así alojado, reprimido dentro de la psique), y el 'secreto intrapsíquico' (que se desarrolla cuando el ego encierra y reprime como en una cripta o recoveco psíquico algún evento traumático no asimilado). Ambos procesos son definidos como obstáculo o impedimento en el crecimiento psíquico natural, o introyección, y constituyen los dos fenómenos intra-psíquicos, según argumento y demuestro a lo largo de este primer capítulo, que vienen a ser formulados a través de la estética fantasmal y etérea con la

que la subjetividad precaria de las protagonistas, que se debaten entre el orden simbólico y la realidad traumática, queda reflejada en el escenario.

El segundo capítulo propone un nuevo acercamiento al análisis de la representabilidad escénica de la subjetividad femenina a través de una estética que apela a lo espectral e intangible. Sin embargo, y respondiendo a las estrategias estéticas a las que en esta ocasión apelan las tres obras objeto de análisis en esta sección, la lente de escrutinio que nos permite comprender el funcionamiento de los mecanismos a los que ahí se apelan se basan en procedimientos que distan del modelo psíquico-represivo al que apelaban Abraham y Torok, tomados como fundamento teórico en el capítulo anterior. En esta ocasión, se lleva a cabo un análisis de los mecanismos estéticos partícipes de la representación de procesos de fragmentación psíquica o ruptura del yo interior, manifestado por sujetos traumatizados, y en concreto en los casos a analizar, por personajes femeninos silenciados por un orden patriarcal ante el cual ahora se revelan. Mientras que *Beside Herself* (1990), de Sarah Daniels, apela a la ruptura del yo interior como consecuencia de un silencio opresor que desemboca en dicha fragmentación psíquica, las protagonistas de *Woman and Scarecrow* (2006), de Marina Carr, y *Self Defense or Death of Some Salesmen* (2001), de Carson Kreitzer, se enfrentan a la amenaza existencial de una muerte certera y próxima, y que (tal y como se muestra a través de los mecanismos a analizar en este capítulo) degenera en una desintegración gradual de lo simbólico, acompañada por dicha fragmentación psíquica, manifiesta en la aparición de un yo interior espectral y fantasmagórico. De esta forma, los medios estéticos reunidos para la formulación de una reconstrucción psíquica post-traumática tras años de silencio (en el caso de *Beside Herself*), y la fragmentación progresiva de un sujeto que degenera gradualmente hasta el punto de la completa ruptura psíquica y simbólica (tal y como exploran Carr y Kreitzer) se convierte en el

epicentro investigativo del segundo capítulo de esta tesis doctoral. Para abordar de una forma rigurosa dicha experimentación estética llevada a los escenarios, mi estudio en este capítulo contemplará los descubrimientos de autores tan reputados como Jacques Lacan o Melanie Klein, cuyo posicionamiento dentro de la escuela de psicoanálisis contemporáneo destaca por su contribución en el análisis de procesos de ruptura psíquica similares a los evocados de esta forma en las obras a analizar.

Por otra parte, y en lo que respecta a la puesta en escena y los procedimientos teatrales a los que aquí se apelan, fundamento mi estudio en las aportaciones de Marvin Carlson dentro del campo de la Teoría de Recepción, en concreto apelando a su definición de 'polifonía psíquica': la libertad del espectador de enfocar su atención en cualquier elemento, actor, o aspecto en particular dentro del mundo performativo creado en escena y que gira en torno a la acción dramática (Carlson 1990:107). Dicha libertad de concentrar la atención, en un principio disipada, en un elemento en concreto dentro del cuadro representativo es ensalzada (tal y como argumento en este capítulo) por las estrategias no-narrativas y anti-naturalistas a través de la cuales se representa la acción teatral. Dichas estrategias provocan una sensación de fragmentariedad en el espectador que apela además a los procesos existenciales representados en el escenario (por ejemplo, la deconstrucción de la subjetividad propia ante la amenaza de una muerte certera, como acontece en dos de las obras a analizar). De esta forma, dichos procedimientos teatrales ponen de manifiesto la vulnerabilidad y fragmentariedad del personaje traumatizado objeto de escrutinio escénico, y además ensalzan los procesos de fragmentación experimentados por la lente subjetiva desde la cual dicha acción es recibida por el espectador. Con el fin de analizar en profundidad dichos procesos semióticos, se tendrá en cuenta la teoría Brechtiana de representación teatral, basada en el extrañamiento, la alienación y demás estrategias capaces de bloquear los prejuicios o

parcialidad simbólica en un principio dados en el espectador. Se analizarán, con este mismo objetivo investigativo, diferentes mecanismos teatrales a través de los cuales se activan los sentimientos de empatía e identificación por parte del espectador (de esta forma contradiciendo los preceptos Brechtianos que fundamentan el teatro Épico), a la vez que se formulan procedimientos Brechtianos de defamiliarización que cuestionan toda certidumbre respecto a la realidad evocada en el escenario.

Este tipo de estética avocada a cuestionar los cimientos ontológicos que constituyen la realidad que nos rodea ha pasado a convertirse en una de las estrategias emergentes en el teatro contemporáneo (Mohr 11). Cuestionar todo aquello que damos por sentado y consideramos como algo 'real' e inequívoco, y debilitar la falacia de una certidumbre existencial o de unas coordinadas simbólicas o sistémicas estables sobre las que apoyar nuestra realidad occidental ha pasado a convertirse en una función principal en las creación teatral más reciente. La interrogación de una serie de valores no escritos pero asimilados de forma pasiva y sin ser cuestionados, o "fantasmic coordinates of meaning" según las palabras de Žižek (2009:xi), ha pasado a ser, de este modo, una inquietud contemplada de forma mayoritaria por la dramaturgia actual.

En este respecto, la crítica-teórica contemporánea se posiciona en un intento por definir la lente a través de la cual el sujeto asimila tal inestabilidad existencial. En el tercer capítulo de este trabajo de investigación comienzo apelando al llamamiento de Judith Butler a reconocer la figura del 'Otro' como precursor o iniciador de la subjetividad y la existencia de un sujeto dentro de una realidad social. Tal y como Butler argumenta, "we come to exist, as it were, in the moment of being addressed, and something about our existence proves precarious when that address fails" (2004:130). El tercer capítulo toma las aportaciones de Butler como punto de partida para el estudio que se convierte aquí en epicentro investigativo: la construcción simbólica del 'Otro' y

el uso de la re-escritura literaria como herramienta o medio dirigido a una reformulación de la memoria cultural, hasta ahora formulada a través del orden patriarcal. Se analizarán aquí el uso de las re-inscripciones literarias como instrumento para deconstruir la subjetividad femenina hasta ahora silenciada, y tal y como había venido siendo formulada por la lente patriarcal predominante. La re-escritura feminista de obras clásicas conlleva, tal y como aquí demuestro, una fragmentación del sujeto femenino que clasifico bajo tres categorías diferentes, tomando como punto de partida las aportaciones de Liedeke Plate en su estudio *Transforming Memories in Contemporary Women's Rewriting* (2011).

Las tres obras que aquí sugiero como ilustrativas de los tres tipos de re-inscripción feminista en el teatro contemporáneo señalan de forma similar la falsedad en la representación del sujeto femenino a través de la lente patriarcal y, sin embargo, muestran caminos diferentes en la reconstrucción de la femineidad contemporánea libre de prejuicios machistas. El primer tipo de re-inscripción feminista, enmarcado en el contexto cultural de finales del siglo veinte, formula una voz radical y certera en el rechazo absoluto de relatos de femineidad predominantemente patriarcales. En concreto, este tipo de re-escritura feminista (dentro del cual yo propongo *The Love of the Nightingale* (1988) de Timberlake Wertenbaker para análisis en este capítulo) articula una reformulación absoluta (y por tanto un rechazo del original) de mitos o relatos clásicos aceptados y asimilados como parte de nuestra memoria cultural.

A diferencia de este movimiento radical con aspiraciones palimpsésticas de re-escritura integral, la segunda tendencia feminista, más reciente que la anterior, se caracteriza por su disposición menos sólida, cerrada o categórica, y más abierta al diálogo con discursos anteriores, a pesar de mantener una postura interesada en señalar los engaños de una imagen femenina silenciada por el orden patriarcal. En otras

palabras, este segundo discurso feminista busca interrogar, en vez de indoctrinar, y para ello crea una estética de notable fragmentación lingüística y ontológica que ensalza el intento de extrañar, cuestionar, alienar y distanciar, generando desconcierto, en vez de proporcionar una línea narrativa plana y radicalmente reivindicativa. *The Cordelia Dream* de Marina Carr ha sido escogida como obra ejemplar de dicho movimiento de reescritura 'líquida' (Plate 2011:29) en mi intento de analizar en profundidad los recursos estéticos en general, y teatrales en particular, a través de los cuales se materializa dicha re-inscripción cultural de la subjetividad femenina.

Finalmente, la última categoría que propongo en el capítulo tercero de esta tesis con el fin de ilustrar el tercer movimiento feminista dentro de esta clasificación que recurre a la re-escritura como arma anti-patriarcal es *Ruined* de Lynn Nottage, obra concebida como re-visitación del clásico de Bertolt Brecht, *Mother Courage*. La obra de Nottage es exponente del innegable auge de la estética y mecánica Brechtiana como herramienta principal de alienación y distanciamiento simbólico para llamar la atención sobre cualquier preocupación de carácter ético y social que transcienda las "coordenadas fantásmicas" (tal y como lo formula Žižek en 2009:xi) en las que se sitúa nuestra realidad diaria, o el orden sistémico que nos ocupa. A través de dicha estética Brechtiana y del uso de estratagemas a analizar en profundidad en este capítulo (por ejemplo, el asignar varios roles a mismos actores) se estimula la reacción crítica por parte del lector/espectador, cuyo letargo como miembro silencioso del conjunto de receptores trata de evitarse de esta forma. En particular, *Ruined* denuncia la violencia hacia las mujeres en la República del Congo durante la revolución del año 2006, pero apela de forma transcendental a la lente opaca y engañosa (siempre expuesta al filtro cultural de la mirada patriarcal) que nos ha impedido hasta ahora conocer las vicisitudes a las que se expone el cuerpo femenino en un contexto de guerra. Desgarramiento físico

(y vaginal, en particular, tal y como se apela en el mismo título de la obra), violaciones, embarazos no deseados, raptos, e incluso el suicidio como vía de escape ante la crueldad inefable de un contexto ineludible; ésta es la realidad a la que apela *Ruined*, y que presenta en toda su crueldad haciendo uso del discurso de lo abjecto (la obra de Julia Kristeva se convierte aquí en referente) y de una estética Brechtiana que busca la ruptura del filtro occidental y euro-céntrico desde el cual analizamos la realidad que nos rodea. Se evita de esta forma, igual que en el caso de *The Cordelia Dream*, un discurso directamente indoctrinante y categórico, para alzar una voz feminista de desconcierto ante una realidad lejana (que es, sin embargo, hecha más próxima a nosotros a través de estos mecanismos) en la que todo fundamento ético y moral incuestionable en un contexto occidental es ahora interrogado.

Según Elin Diamond, el espacio teatral es el más adecuado para explorar la construcción simbólica de género, ya que ofrece múltiples posibilidades (y en particular, a lo largo de esta tesis doctoral se apela al uso de la figura espectral como elemento de defamiliarización Brechtiana) para el análisis de la formulación de la identidad social (1997:44). El estudio, en concreto, de la 'performative rehearsal', o el ensayo performativo de nuestro comportamiento social, ocupará gran parte de mi análisis de *In the Heart of America*, de Naomi Wallace, en el cuarto y último capítulo de esta tesis doctoral.

La publicación de la primera obra auto-proclamada como una autobiografía de incesto se convirtió en epicentro cultural (tal y como se mencionó más arriba) y fuerza impulsora de múltiples movimientos culturales, como el giro estético experimentado sobre el escenario teatral y que apuntaba a la representación del sujeto femenino en un estado de fragmentación post-traumática, tal y como ha venido mencionándose hasta ahora y tal y como se explorará en profundidad, especialmente en los capítulos primero,

segundo y tercero, de esta tesis doctoral. El capítulo cuarto persevera en el análisis del sujeto contemporáneo y su irrepresentabilidad, pero ahora desde una perspectiva que profundiza en la relación de inclusión/exclusión del individuo con la realidad simbólica que le rodea y le etiqueta para validarle o juzgarle según los valores éticos fundamentando dicha comunidad. En concreto, el capítulo cuarto se centra en el estudio de la deconsctrucción del sujeto en un contexto en decadencia sistémica y simbólica como consecuencia de conflictos de naturaleza bélica.

El comienzo del siglo veintiuno fue testigo del auge de un desasosiego existencial avocado a una sensación de vulnerabilidad y amenaza ante lo fantásmico o lo desconocido, como consecuencia de una serie de actos terroristas o conflictos bélicos inesperadamente debilitando la integridad simbólica de comunidades occidentales hasta ahora consideradas impenetrables. El 11S, los ataques terroristas en Madrid y Londres, la guerra de Iraq…Todos estos acontecimientos han modificado la perspectiva y la opinión occidental con respecto al lugar que ocupamos en las comunidades en las que experimentamos nuestra realidad diaria, y también en lo que concierne a la intervención militar, ya que dichos acontecimientos han generado una mayor sensación de necesidad de proteger nuestras existencias vulnerables como individuos tomando parte en una comunidad cuya estabilidad ya no es certera.

El último capítulo de esta tesis centra su atención, por tanto, en lo que ya ha sido definido como una era que apela a una "ethics of unrest" (Middeke 2014) y a la reconstrucción de la subjectividad humana en consonancia con la comunidad en la que se emplaza, a su vez fragmentada y desmontada como consecuencia de conflictos bélicos, revoluciones o inestabilidad sistémica. El foco central de este trabajo de investigación se desplaza, de esta forma, del análisis de la subjetividad femenina en su fragmentariedad post-traumática (o post-eventual, evocando a Badiou), hacia el estudio

de la representación estética de la eventualidad o trauma colectivo y las posibilidades del campo teatral en la exploración de la desintegración ontológica y posterior reconstrucción de una comunidad en este sentido traumatizada (fragmentada, o carente de orden sistémico como consecuencia de la guerra).

Las obras teatrales a ser analizadas bajo este prisma, Caryl Churchill's *Mad Forest*, Naomi Wallace's *In the Heart of America* y debbie tucker green's *Stoning Mary*, recurren de forma similar a una estrategia común: un procedimiento que, a modo de péndulo, se mueve entre la creación de empatía hacia ciertos personajes a través de una exposición de su rutina diaria basada en una estética realista y que apela al componente emocional, y la introducción radical de elementos que distancian de dicha narración naturalista e introducen al espectador en una espiral surrealista y alienante de anti-narración escénica. Tal movimiento estético va encaminado al extrañamiento y la deconstrucción de la mirada occidental, llena de prejuicios, y de esta forma creando una nueva lente desde la cual poder reconsiderar y experimentar una realidad extraña, ahora formulada en el escenario.

La aproximación que Churchill nos ofrece a la Revolución Rumana de 1989 a través de este prisma representativo ilustra dicho intento estético por equilibrar lo que primeramente puede resultar contradictorio: la empatía basada en el apego emocional a algún personaje y sus circunstancias (relacionado con la práctica teatral Dramática), y el extrañamiento más absoluto de la acción representada (que apela a lo que fue denominado teatro Épico). En este cuarto capítulo se profundizará en ilustrar el funcionamiento de dicha estética teatral a través de la cual la acción comienza a desarrollarse ensalzando los aspectos cotidianos de la vida diaria (y, de esta forma, apelando a la narración realista de los eventos), pero que progresivamente, y finalmente de forma radical, se va alejando de dicho modelo naturalista y adentrándose (en

ocasiones de forma inesperada y sorprendente) en un orden no-narrativo, surrealista y anti-naturalista en el intento por representar la auténtica inefabilidad que caracteriza la experiencia traumática del colectivo rumano (en este caso). Dicho giro drástico en el *exposé* al que se apela sobre el escenario evoca, de esta forma, la auténtica aprensión del individuo como partícipe de una realidad comunal post-traumática, y traslada al público de una forma efectiva un interés crítico y distanciado del ojo simbólico implícitamente impuesto por nuestra propia realidad sistémica, de manera que los eventos allí formulados puedan visitarse desde una nueva perspectiva crítica, libre de prejuicios fantasmales generados por el desconocimiento.

A modo de ejemplo, la escena final en *Mad Forest*, de Caryl Churchill, trae a escena a los personajes principales de la trama (uno de ellos un vampiro, personificación del sistema capitalista que ahora amenaza al vulnerable estado Rumano) y les hace repetir, como si de un collage lingüístico se tratara, las líneas más significativas de las formuladas hasta ahora a lo largo de la representación. Dichas líneas, sacadas de sus contextos originales y desplazadas referencialmente, carecen de sentido discursivo, lo cual genera un vacío simbólico desconcertante, a ser interpretado por el lector/espectador.

Las tres obras objeto de escrutinio en el capítulo cuarto comparten dicha disposición por cuestionar realidades dócilmente aceptadas y entidades ontológicas, tales como el espacio, tiempo, o lo real y lo soñado, lo humano y lo no-humano. Es por lo tanto la figura del espectro, o lo no-humano, tal y como expongo a lo largo del capítulo, la que sobresale y destaca en la representación de la precariedad del sujeto cuya realidad externa se tambalea al perder el engranaje sistémico y simbólico que la sustentaba.

El corpus de obras que propongo a lo largo de esta tesis doctoral ha sido cuidadosamente escogido con el fin de ilustrar el auge en el mundo de la representación teatral de una tendencia a cuestionar la construcción del sujeto contemporáneo y los procedimientos que contribuyen a crear la lente interpretativa desde la cual es analizado. La voz teatral contemporánea va encaminada, de esta forma, a una formulación estética que se apoya en la deconstrucción de una mirada que es moldeada a través de un filtro simbólico ineludible. El análisis de las diferentes estrategias traídas a escena (y, en especial, de aquellas que apelan a la estética del espectro, por haber sido detectadas como estética emergente), de su funcionamiento en términos teatrales, tanto a nivel de recepción como a nivel técnico, y el estudio de su repercusión a un nivel trascendental en lo que respecta a la formulación de unos cimientos éticos sobre los que asentar dicha subjetividad, ocuparán el discurso crítico que se construirá a través de las siguientes páginas.

Introduction.

The world of pilgrims- of identity-builders- must be orderly, determined, predictable, insured; but above all, it must be a kind of world in which footprints are engraved for good, so that the trace and the record of past travels are kept and preserved. A world in which travelling may be indeed a pilgrimage. A world hospitable to the pilgrims. And so the modern men and women lived in a time-space with structure; a solid, tough, durable time-space…

The world is not hospitable to the pilgrims any more. The pilgrims lost their battle by winning it. They strove to make the world solid by making it pliable, so that identity could be built at *will*, but built systematically, floor by floor and brick by brick. They proceeded by turning the space in which identity was to be built in a desert. They found out that the desert, though comfortingly featureless for those who seek to make their mark, does not hold features well. The easier it is to emboss a footprint, the easier it is to efface it. A gust of wind will do. And deserts are windy places.

It soon transpired that the real problem is not how to build identity, but how to preserve it; whatever you may build in the sand, is unlikely to be a castle. In a desert-like world it takes no great effort to blaze a trail- the difficulty is how to recognize it as a trail after a while. How to distinguish a forward march from going in circles, from eternal return? It turns virtually impossible to patch the trodden stretches of sand into an itinerary- let alone into a plan for a life-long journey. (Zygmunt Bauman 1996:8)

If there should be an image, form or impression picturing what we identify as the contemporary subject (and finding this image is, after all, the aesthetic task of any artistic piece), that is Zygmunt Bauman's interpretation of subjectivity in contemporary times as constructed in the fashion of a sand-castle, built upon the unreliable and unstable sands of a windy desert. As opposed to the "brick by brick" solid construction of the modern man, contemporary times, Bauman argues, are characterized by the vulnerability of the individual, who undertakes his/her pilgrimage through life no more with the certainty of a substantial and sturdy fixed path, but with the unreliability and inconsistency of an obscure and swampy road where neither footprints nor direction signs are readable anymore. For my doctoral project I have been working on the analysis of an image that similarly seemed to formulate the blurred, the intangible and the elusive as representative of the contemporary subject's precarious existence, as this image seemed to me to be persistently appearing in recent performing arts: just as the unreliable and easily deleted footprints of the contemporary subject point to our postmodern inescapably liquid (and thus malleable and unstable) existence, the ethereal and incorporeal nature of the specter seems to keep haunting recent representations of postmodern subjectivity in its status as a remainder of a more solid past, and yet being incapable of bringing present solace to contemporary unstable and fragmented post-traumatic existence.

Throughout this work I thus intend to explore and classify a series of representative works relying on such aesthetics of spectrality and the ethereal in the attempt to articulate contemporary subjecthood. The formulation of the subject and his/her relationship with his/her symbolic reality has grown to be shaped by a series of social and cultural events changing the course of artistic representation. As already dealt with and comprehensively formulated by a wide range of internationally acclaimed

authors (Dominick LaCapra, Cathy Caruth, Roger Luckhurst, Shoshana Felmann and Ann E. Kaplan, among others) whose contributions will be further contemplated throughout this thesis, ours seems to be a time that has come to be identified as a "trauma culture" (R. Luckhurst 2003:2), defined by the subject's fruitless persistence in the search of a rational and ordered (or, echoing Bauman, solid) record of our past that would allow us to build accordingly, and "floor by floor", a stable and certain future. Such existential attempt proves to be unsuccessful due to the futility characterizing postmodern times and the overwhelming uncertainty concerning the direction of our 'life pilgrimage'. Contemporary culture is thus identified with an existential impossibility to achieve a successful assimilation of traumatic eventuality that would subsequently allow the subject to construct a stable future.

As contemplated by the philosopher Alain Badiou, 'Being' is supplemented to 'Event' inasmuch the very existence of the subject is determined by the course of transcendental eventuality (Badiou 2005).[1] It is thus our understanding and subsequent formulation of contemporary events that shapes our social status as symbolic beings.[2] Worldwide cultural and social events have thus shaped our contemporary views on subjecthood, and the ones that I appeal to, due to their unquestionable impact in the world of artistic representation, interrogate the construction of femininity. As Christina Wald claims in her exhaustive study on Trauma Drama, the 1990's witnessed the

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[1] In his work *Ethics: An Essay on the Understanding of Evil* (2001) Badiou defines the 'Event' as a remnant occurrence that appears unpredictably and in contrast to regular historicized situations, thus effecting a breach that may involve unexpected change in ontological terms. Hence, the 'Being' is supplemented by the event inasmuch he/she remains "faithful" (Badiou 2001:46) and open to such eventuality. And yet, the event vanishes as soon as it is complete, thus eluding, I will argue and try to illustrate throughout this thesis, narrative mechanisms for representability.

[2] In contrast to Badiou's use of the terms around which his philosophy centers, 'Being' and 'Event', I have opted not to capitalize either of them, nor any other of the terms coined by the critics appealed to in my thesis. Only the terms 'Other' and 'Real' (when evoking Žižek's definition of the Lacanian Real) will be capitalized, on grounds of comprehensibility. My use of the term 'Other' will thus appeal to the face of the neighbor, host/hostage or alien being (in the sense of Agamben's *homo saucer*) in the contributions of the contemporary critics informing this doctoral thesis.

formulation of a reality never before articulated due to its abominable nature: a number of events pointing to suspected sexual child abuse were starting to be publicly exposed, the most prominently known being the Cleveland child abuse scandal in Britain in 1987 (Wald 99).[3] Such unprecedented social scandal came hand in hand with the cultural impact brought about by the publication of the first incest narrative openly proclaimed to be autobiographical, *Kiss Daddy Good Night* (1978). Along with the different feminist positions that had emerged throughout the 1970's (liberal, radical and social feminism being the three most encompassing and representative ones), and which thus moved away from the identification of one single and unified feminist movement, the consolidation during the early 90's of such anti-patriarchal atmosphere invigorated the vindicatory nature of artistic representation in that particular direction (women's concerns and the representation of femininity).

Contemporary Anglophone theater quickly developed a preoccupation with the formulation and denounce of such ethical and political questions, and it began to explore means by which to awake the traditionally lethargic audience-disposition, silenced under the darkness of the theater hall. This doctoral thesis aims at a critical exploration of the evolution that contemporary drama in English has been subject to in its appeal to ethical issues and eventuality constructing and delineating subjecthood, in the ways Badiou's contributions above mentioned contend. From the appeal to the post-traumatic fragmented individuality and the long silenced female voice,[4] and from the aesthetic reconstruction of traumatized subjectivity on stage, contemporary drama has

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[3] 121 cases of suspected child abuse were diagnosed in Cleveland (now the county of Middlesbrough, England) by Dr. Marietta Higgs and Dr. Geoffrey Wyatt in 1987, this being the major incest scandal in Great Britain up to our days.

[4] A vast amount of the work integrating this thesis explores the cultural reconstruction of female subjectivity during the late twentieth century due to the social and cultural impact that the revelation of numerous cases of incest and sexual abuse had during the late twentieth century. And I will commit to such investigative purpose particularly arguing that the reconstruction of female subjectivity relied to a great extent on the figure of the specter and other ghostly devices on the stage.

grown to develop a broader gaze contemplating not only the vicissitudes of individual trauma, or the shortcomings of domestic political issues,[5] well known and easily recognized and digested by a Western audience. The second part of my thesis (and especially chapter four) will thus illustrate and critically inspect the ethical turn experienced during the early 2000's and its effects on a theatrical voice that searched now for means to interrogate, alienate and disconcert an audience that is now taken to alien settings and distant communities where predominant Eurocentric subjectivity is time and again thus transcendentally questioned. As stated by Mark Berninger, Christoph Henke and Bernard Reitz (2012),

> [n]umerous productions in recent years have taken up the said challenges to moral certainty, sometimes by continuing traditional theatrical approaches rooted in pacifism, feminism or gay rights. Yet, more often than not, familiar ideological standpoints have come under revision and moral didacticism has been deconstructed in contemporary theatre. (2012:9)

This doctoral thesis was devised in the ambition to attain a comprehensive study of the evolution experienced in contemporary theatrical voice in its address to the formulation of a moral subject and the ethical grounds on which this construction relies. As already mentioned, the figure of the specter and the unattainability it evokes has been spotted, and fully explored, as a consistent strategy for the formulation of traumatic states and individual intra-psychic fragmentation (and here I focus on the analysis of the cultural reconstruction of femininity), as well as for the articulation of undecidable existentiality in a context of deconstructed ethical grounds.

The first three chapters of this thesis are, in this light, directed at an analysis of contemporary plays, where the reconstruction of post-traumatic (post-evental, in Badiou's sense) female subjecthood is explored. As will be illustrated with the different

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[5] Richard Patterson's comprehensive study on late-twentieth century British Drama, *Strategies of Political Theatre: Post-War British Playwrights* (2003), attests this interest mostly restricted to domestic political issues to a great extent characterizing British playwriting of that time.

text analysis carried out throughout this thesis, the existential uncertainty characterizing the contemporary subject cannot but ground a sense of vulnerability and precariousness that is aesthetically reflected in a mistrust of the symbolic order and the instruments erecting it (linguistic and systemic institutions). The plays to be here explored thus manifest a common aesthetic turn relying on a deconstructive and distrustful view of language. The "danger of speech" (Caruth 1995:154) in post-traumatic formulations resides in the loss of the actual truth of the very event as a consequence of exposing it to the rational and narrative mechanisms at the core of human language. Contemporary drama thus aims at a formulation of "*the truth of an event* and *the truth of its incomprehensibility*" (Caruth 1995:153), its incomprehensibility integrating the very nature of the event and so (following Badiou's logic), of the traumatized being. And, as such incomprehensibility cannot be addressed by rational (symbolic) means, theatrical performance, also encompassing non-narrative modes of representation (Wald 99), appears as an apt arena for an approximation to the formulation of the event thus shaping subjectivity.

Because realistic representation fails in the address of the traumatic event, as such event is precisely described as "something that cannot be addressed directly, only alluded to" (Žižek 2008:5), the particular appeal to the ghostly effect in the different plays here explored successfully evokes the fragile and almost ethereal existence of the female protagonists, due to the undecidability characterizing their lives, as they dangerously dwell in the threshold somewhere in between the symbolic and the traumatic. Hence many of the plays chosen for analysis articulate the deteriorating gaze of a character about to pass away, whose voice gradually becomes fragmentary and empty of symbolic meaning. The protagonists' already half-spectral nature is thus further formulated by means of a deconstructing, and abstract kind of language, which

progressively moves to a greater distance between signifier and signified, as the characters gradually depart from the symbolic realm so as to meet their deaths. In a mosaic-like kind of fashion, words seem many times to have been randomly put together and to be made sense of from a critical distance.

In chapter one of this thesis, I explore the theatrical address to the ontological paradox by which a subject develops the imperative need to face and assimilate the yet illusive and irretrievable traumatic event, at the same time that she tries to run away from it so as to resume her life in the symbolic real. Marina Carr's *The Mai* (1994), *Portia Coughlan* (1996) and *By the Bog of Cats* (1998), and Sarah Kane's *Cleansed* (1998) have been chosen for analysis due to their common inclination to perform individual trauma in women through the use of ghostly and spectral means that mirror trauma's at once elusive and haunting nature, as counteracting a lack of words. In order to accomplish this investigative purpose, I rely on Nicolas Abraham and Maria Torok's contributions on the study of the continual process of self-fashioning and nourishment of the human psyche (which they define as 'introjection', thus opposing other predominant uses and definitions of the term). In particular, for the analysis of the aforementioned plays and the strategies there brought about for an effective rendering of a subject's post-traumatic effects, I will rely on Abraham and Torok's contentions concerning 'incorporation' (by which the subject's ego is inhabited by a lost object) and the 'intrapsychic secret' (when the subject's ego finds a cryptic enclosure so as to lock down and repress an unspeakable trauma) as two psychic processes hindering natural introjection.

Chapter two similarly approaches the formulation of a female subject's individual trauma and its representation through spectral and non-tangible figures, although this time tackling with a procedure that is distanced from the repressive

psychic model advocated by Torok and Abraham and explored in chapter one. Here I undertake an investigation of the aesthetic mechanisms involved in the articulation of the psychic splitting procedures experienced by post-traumatized female characters (Sarah Daniels's *Beside Herself*, 1990) and by female characters confronting their own deaths and thus experiencing a gradual symbolic disintegration (Carr's *Woman and Scarecrow*, 2006, and Carson Kreitzer's *Self Defense or Death of Some Salesmen,* 2001). In this fashion, the aesthetic means brought about for the formulation of a subject's psychic re-construction after years of post-traumatic silencing (explored in Daniels's play) and the progressive fragmentation of a decaying subject on the verge of existential downfall (Carr's and Kreitzer's works) will become the object of study in chapter two. From the point of view of psychoanalytic theory, Melanie Klein's stance concerning the psychic life development of a subject as exposed in her work will substantiate my analysis of the above mentioned plays and their theatrical proposal to explore a subject's symbolic disintegration. In this vein, concerning my analysis of the theatrical procedures evoked so as to articulate such intra-psychic reality, I will appeal here to Marvin Carlson's contentions about reception theory and the procedure that he calls 'psychic polyphony': the spectator's freedom to focus his/her attention on any prop, actor, performance aspect or element on stage throughout the development of the theatrical action (Carlson 1990:107). Such scattered attention, I argue, is enhanced by the non-narrative and non-naturalistic presentation of events in the plays to be here analyzed, and which highlights the sense of fragmentariness characterizing the existential processes appealed to on stage. Such and alike theatrical processes hence bring to the performative foreground the disintegration of a traumatized subject's self and also instigate the fragmentation of the spectator's gaze (which is distanced and rid of symbolic bias by means of the Brechtian effects to be here explored). In this sense,

mechanisms activating the spectator's identification and empathy with the action performed on stage coexist with defamiliarizing procedures questioning our means of perception and our certainty about what we call reality.

This kind of ontological interrogation is one of the major concerns of contemporary theater and drama (Mohr 11). What we consider to be real, the safe and fallaciously stable systemic coordinates on which we rely is in this way constructed collectively by the dominating institutions controlling our symbolic community, and one of the major functions of today's theatrical performance is precisely to question such "fantasmic coordinates of meaning" (Žižek 2009:xi) and to define the contemporary subject's positioning and subsistence according to it. In this respect, contemporary critics accordingly formulate their stance concerning the formulation of contemporary subjectivity. In chapter three, I begin by appealing to Judith Butler's prominent claim that it is precisely the call of an 'Other' what initiates subjectivity, or a subject's existence as such in the social realm. Thus, "we come to exist, as it were, in the moment of being addressed, and something about our existence proves precarious when that address fails" (2004:130). The symbolic construction of an Other and the resort to literary rewritings as artistic weapon so as to reformulate our so far biased cultural memory about female subjectivity will thus become the main investigative goal in chapter three. Here, I will analyze the strategy that appeals to literary re-visitations attempting to deconstruct the female subject as formulated by the predominant male gaze. Feminist re-inscriptions of classical works thus carry out a fragmentation of the female subject which I classify under three different kinds, following from Liedeke Plate's study, *Transforming Memories in Contemporary Women's Rewriting* (2011). The three categories, as I intend to show by means of the analysis of the chosen texts,

similarly aim at a vindication of biased constructions of the female subject, and yet appeal to different lenses from which to contemplate contemporary femininity.

While the first approach to the cultural reconstruction of femininity, framed in the late twentieth century, articulates a complete dismissal of earlier patriarchal accounts on femininity by articulating a radical reformulation of culturally accepted myths (Timberlake Wertenbaker's *The Love of the Nightingale*, 1988), the second feminist rewriting mechanism in this classification does not intend to categorically re-inscribe upon a refuted patriarchal account, but rather moves towards an open dialogue aiming at the interrogation of contemporary female precariousness without any pretense to provide definite answers or fixed accounts on femininity that would thus invalidate former patriarchal voices (Marina Carr's *The Cordelia Dream*, 2008).[6]

Finally, the third category that I suggest so as to complete the classification engaging the investigative focus of chapter three explores the use of alienating strategies brought to the stage so as to provoke a critical reaction on the reader/audience, not only on the particular event evoked on stage, but on broader contemporary ethical issues emanating from there. Lynn Nottage's *Ruined* (2007), the play chosen as illustrative of this third category, denounces the violence on women in the Republic of Congo during the revolution of 2006, and from there, it vindicates the formulation of female identity in a context of disintegrating communities. Such aesthetic move integrates the third type of contemporary feminist re-inscription in the classification that I thus put forward in chapter three.

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[6] A process that Plate refers to as "mythologization" (29), as she compares this type of open-ended dialogue with the cyclic and liquid (in the terms above mention when referring to Bauman's contributions) nature of ancient mythology. In chapter three of this thesis I will thus rely on Plate and demonstrate from there that her twofold classification of contemporary feminist rewritings is completed by a third category and, moreover, that, due to the malleability in the representation of ontological establishments (time, space, real and dream, etc…), the theatrical stage emerges as an apt arena for the articulation of anti-narrative means appealing to such liquid and open-ended nature of mythical retellings.

According to Elin Diamond, the theatrical field is the most fruitful terrain to explore the symbolic construction of gender, as it offers the possibility, by means of the Brechtian A-effect (and, as I argue, through its formulation by means of the ghostly effect) to analyze the articulation of social identity (1997:44). Appealing to this, the analysis of 'performative rehearsals' and the deconstruction of particular bits of social behavior will become part of my investigative focus in my analysis of Naomi Wallace's *In the Heart of America* in chapter four. Wallace's play illustrates the aesthetic deconstruction of post-war traumatized subjectivity in an anti-narrative mode that blends past and present war conflicts (the Vietnam War with the Gulf War) thus evoking a surrealist ontological order.

The publication of the first self-proclaimed autobiographical incest narrative above mentioned was then the cultural locust to determine the aesthetic turn towards theatrical experimentation aiming at the formulation of post-eventual or post-traumatic female subjectivity, as articulated in the different ways analyzed through chapters one to three. Chapter four, perseveres on the analysis of contemporary subjecthood and its formulation in performing arts, but from a different prism now more in contact with the subject's relation of inclusion/exclusion with a decaying community that is symbolically and systemically deconstructed due to war conflicts. The 2000's witnessed the rise of a communal sense of existential vulnerability and unappeased fear for a fantasmic unknown as a consequence of massive terrorist attacks on Western countries which threatened the integrity of communities so far viewed as unyielding and symbolically indestructible. 9/11, the bombing attacks in London and Madrid, and then the war in Iraq…These prominent events have inevitably shaped the Western gaze concerning our positioning in the communities where we belong, and also concerning contemporary military intervention, which consequently activated a greater sense of

protection of our vulnerable existences as individuals taking part in no longer certain communities. The last chapter of this thesis focuses its attention on what has been defined as a contemporary "ethics of unrest" (Middeke 2014) and the reconstruction of subjectivity as in consonance with a broader community shattered by war, revolution or systemic instability. My investigative focus thus moves from the analysis of post-traumatic (feminine) subjectivity, to the aesthetic representation of collective evental occurrence (in Badiou's sense) and the potentiality of the theatrical field in the exploration of the disintegration and later reconstruction of a thus traumatized (shattered by either war or revolution) community.

The theatrical pieces to be here considered for analysis, namely Caryl Churchill's *Mad Forest* (1990), Naomi Wallace's *In the Heart of America* (1994) and debbie tucker green's *Stoning Mary* (2005), similarly resort to a common strategy: a back and forth empathizing procedure by which the audience is induced to come closer to the daily and realistic experiencing of the event from the point of view of individual traumatic eventuality, so as to then be radically pushed away from naturalistic narration and into a surrealist move towards extreme Brechtian alienation. Such drastic aesthetic move aims at estranging and deconstructing the audience's Western biased gaze, thus bringing forth a critical lens from which to reconsider the event performed. Churchill's approximation to the Romanian Revolution (1989) emerges as an illustrative piece of such aesthetic trend thus balancing what initially seem to be two contradicting response procedures (one consisting on emotional empathy and Dramatic identification, the other in estrangement and Epic defamiliarization). The action starts by relying on the realistic narration of a number of victims' testimonies, but such realistic exposé of the event evolves into a surrealist, non-narrative and non-naturalistic representation of these same characters' ineffable apprehensions on the revolution and its aftermaths that leads the

audience to a highly critical reading of the events performed: the final scene in the play, as way of example of the aesthetic surrealist procedures here evoked, has each of the most significant characters in the play (one of them being a vampire personifying the spirit of capitalism threatening the now vulnerable Romania) repeat, in a collage-like kind of fashion, their most significant lines from the ones already formulated throughout the play. Their statements are taken out of their contexts, their referents misplaced, and so they make no immediate discursive sense, thus opening a signifying gap to be filled by a bewildered audience. The different war plays to be explored in chapter four hence share a disposition to interrogate taken for granted realities such as time, place, real or nightmare, human or not human. And it is through the appeal to spectrality and the aesthetics of ontological deconstruction, I argue, that subjective precariousness and the no longer solid foundations of a post-war/revolution community are thus represented.

The corpus of works thus approached throughout this thesis has been carefully selected so as to illustrate the contemporary theatrical drive to interrogate the construction of subjectivity by the interpreting symbolic gaze. The contemporary theatrical voice is in this way determined by an aesthetic call with aims at the deconstruction of the subject's gaze and the interrogation of ethical normativity (grounding the communities which shape that very systemic and symbolic gaze). Throughout this thesis, and by the particular means above mentioned, I will try to demonstrate how it is by the appeal to the 'liquid' (in Bauman's terms), ethereal and uncertain status of the specter that such uncertain and precarious reality is thus repeatedly formulated as a prominent instrument thus fulfilling such aesthetic and ethical turn.

CHAPTER ONE.

Ghostly Elusiveness and Melancholic Incorporation: the Haunted

Victim.

In his introduction to *The Shell and the Kernel: Renewals of Psychoanalysis. Vol. 1* (1994), Nicholas T. Rand defines *introjection* in the terms established by Nicolas Abraham and Maria Torok as "the psychic process that allows human beings to continue to live harmoniously in spite of instability, devastation, war, and upheaval" and which represents "our ability to survive shock, trauma, or loss" (1994:14). Departing from previous conceptions of the term, Abraham and Torok grounded their views on psychoanalytic thought and therapy on the very nature of this psychic formation. They considered that the study of the human mind should be directed towards an understanding of the functioning of the manifold traumatic mechanisms damaging the subject's psychic topography, and the identification of the right treatment to provide psychic recovery and facilitate introjection when psychological growth is impeded by such traumatic obstacles. Throughout their many contributions to the field, Abraham and Torok identified and studied the nature of four different mechanisms endangering the continual process of self-fashioning and nourishment of the human psyche (i.e. introjection): 'incorporation' (by which the subject's ego is inhabited by a lost object), the 'illness of mourning', the 'intrapsychic secret' (when the subject's ego finds a cryptic enclosure so as to lock down and repress an unspeakable trauma) and the 'transgenerational phantom' (by which a family trauma is handed down to an unknowing descendant).

Such clinical investigations, however, are not restricted to the field of psychoanalytic therapy, as the authors themselves acknowledge the many connections between their scientific findings and the realm of literature, thus implementing collaborative ties between both disciplines. Both fields of knowledge offer two different contexts where a similar methodological insight may be successfully used. Hence, literature may become an instrument to expand the psychoanalytic understanding of human suffering (Abraham and Torok 1994:19). In this vein, in *The Shell and the Kernel* the reader repeatedly encounters not only clinical study cases but also examples taken from literary texts by which the authors try to illuminate and clarify their theoretical contentions (1994: 12, 19, 115, 118). Maupassant, Poe and Camus are some of the authors whose work Abraham and Torok use so as to illustrate the functioning of the psychoanalytical method they propose. But the most striking example stands out in part V chapter eleven, which shows Abraham's own artistic endeavor at exemplifying his Transgenerational Phantom Theory by re-interpreting the final act in *Hamlet*. He ventures to re-write Shakespeare's classic by adding a further act that would close the action in the play in a way that would help him diagnose a fictional case of what he defines as the Transgenerational Phantom (1994:187).

Abraham chooses this particular form of literary expression to illustrate a case of traumatic interference to introjections, thus drawing attention to the inherent qualities of theatrical representation for the formulation of traumatic upheaval and the representation of the symptoms to be recognized by the analyst/spectator. Furthermore, Abraham and Torok's linguistic choice to describe the psychic disorders analyzed in *The Shell and the Kernel* corroborates the theatrical nature of traumatic reenactment. In this line, in part IV chapter six, they allude to their experience as analysts when treating their patients and trying to deconstruct the symptoms they encounter so as to identify

the inherent trauma. They describe the stance of the analyst in similar terms to the experience of a spectator watching a performance:

> On the couch, even more than in life, the "I" *stages* the words, gestures, and feelings- in short, the entire imaginary lot- of the lover who mourns for his forever "dead" object…From then on, the incorporated [object] becomes "decorporated" onto the analyst, so to speak. (1994:148, emphasis mine)

They develop their ideas on the influence that the traumatic secret grieving the patient exerts upon the analyst's performance with their work on the concept of *phantom*. Initially, Abraham and Torok introduced the term so as to "indicate a rift (inflicted upon the listening analyst by some secret of the patient that could not be revealed) which creates a formation in the unconscious of the listener" (Abraham and Torok 1994:190 footnote), thus alluding to a malady affecting the listener/bystander of the symptoms "performed" by the patient. In later works, they elaborated on the concept of the phantom and still insisted on the patient's need to "stage" the traumatic upheaval so as to release the phantom that was hindering the natural process of introjection or psychic growth:

> Extending the idea of the phantom, it is reasonable to maintain that the "phantom effect" progressively fades during its transmission from one generation to the next and that, finally, it disappears. Yet, this is not at all the case when shared or complementary phantoms find a way of being established as social practices along the lines of *staged words*…We must not lose sight of the fact that to stage a word…constitutes an attempt, that is, to relieve the unconscious by placing the effects of the phantom in the social realm. (1994:176, emphasis in original)

Abraham and Torok were, thus, already pointing at an idea that would later on be taken up again and developed by current Trauma Theory: the need to "stage" (to formulate) the disturbing event preventing a harmonious psychic development (introjection) as a means to heal the wounds caused by the haunting trauma.[1] Similarly, literature has also been acknowledged by current Trauma Theory as a potential means

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[1] (Cathy Caruth, Dominick LaCapra, Ann E. Kaplan, Roger Luckhurst and Shoshana Felman are the most prominent Trauma theorists whose work is contemplated in this thesis).

for the articulation of traumatic memory, as it may offer strategies fostering the reader's understanding of human suffering without losing the original force of the traumatic event. However, Abraham and Torok's implicit reference to the theatrical medium in their attempt to illustrate the nature of traumatic upheaval has not been revised so far by Trauma theorists, nor have they revisited Abraham's definition of the phantom as a psychic disorder asking to be "staged" and acknowledged by an "audience". As already contended by Christina Wald in her study on performative maladies and their representation on the stage, the theatrical field is an appropriate medium to stage traumatic states, as it encompasses narrative and non-narrative modes of representation (2007:99). My investigative concern in this chapter is to resume Abraham and Torok's dialectic of the "phantom effect" as both a psychic disorder and the process consisting on "placing the effects of the phantom in the social realm" (1994:176). I will thus take into further consideration the strengths of the theatrical stage as an apt site for the formulation of haunting traumatic memories due to the possibility to create a particular aesthetics on the stage which would elicit the audience's empathic understanding of the traumatic experience. Along these lines, and by means of a number of strategies to be analyzed in this chapter, theatrical representation may provoke a haunting effect that allows the audience to relate to and partake of the traumatic reenactment performed on stage. To such purpose, I will ground my study on Abraham and Torok's work as well as on the recent contributions made to the field by current Trauma Theory. I will also consider modern theories on audience response (Marvin Carlson and Herbert Blau) so as to demonstrate that such ghostly and uncanny, non-realistic strategies lead the audience towards the experiencing of similar sensations to those outlived by trauma victims, thus verifying what was hinted at by Abraham and Torok and highlighting the

strengths of theatrical experience as a relevant medium for the transmission of traumatic knowledge.[2]

To accomplish this task, I intend to study the contributions of playwrights Marina Carr and Sarah Kane to the articulation of a particular traumatic formation, melancholia or the trauma of loss, by means of the staging of ghosting and spectral effects in their plays. I will concentrate on Carr's early plays, *The Mai* (1994), *Portia Coughlan* (1996) and *By the Bog of Cats* (1998) and Kane's *Cleansed* (1998), so as to illustrate the functioning of the ghostly effect on the stage and its impact in terms of audience response. My analysis of these plays will follow from previous studies on that matter, such as Wald's contributions. Relying on Freud's "Mourning and Melancholia", Wald contemplates melancholia as a gendering process by which female characters incorporate the essential features of a lost object.[3] Thus, Wald defines melancholia as a performative malady in which the acting out of "unresolved grief" (in this case provoked by the loss of a loved male object) is expressed by the unconscious incorporation of identity traits, thus performatively fabricating a new gendered and sexed body (Wald 2007:170). My analysis of the aforementioned plays will, to some extent, follow from Wald's contention about the gendering effects of such traumatic

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[2] According to Trauma theorist Dominick LaCapra, it is by means of a kind of middle voice, in-between the certainty of the present and the precariousness of an already unattainable (in the sense of no longer fully representable in all its certainty) that the "hauntingly possessive ghosts- of traumatic events" (2001:xi) may be approached. "The middle voice would thus be the 'in-between' voice of undecidability and the unavailability or radical ambivalence of clear-cut positions." (LaCapra 2001:20). It is through the theatrical experience, I argue, that such 'middle-voice' stage, in-between realistic narration (the present everyday experience of a given subject) and the anti-narrative of an elusive, irrepresentable and haunting past is better formulated. And it is because of this that the theatrical stage emerges as the site where the empathic settlement required so as to achieve a traumatic understanding is effectively achieved. Such 'in-between-ness' thus offered by theatrical performance (in between diegetic narration and mimetic anti-narration) thus seems to formulate the kind of strategy that LaCapra appeals to for an effective representation of the traumatic effect: "such an objectifying strategy may well posit or assume a radical divide between objectivity and subjectivity (as well as between research and dialogic exchange) and lead to an either/or conception of the relation between empathy and critical analysis." (LaCapra 2001:39). Throughout this thesis I will demonstrate how drama emerges as an apt field aiming at this critical effect simultaneous leading to an empathic understanding of traumatic experience.
[3] Wald explores these issues in her work *Hysteria, Trauma and Melancholia: Performative Maladies in Contemporary Anglophone Drama* (2007).

formation, but it will grow to aim at a classification of spectral theatrical strategies managed by contemporary authors for an effective rendering of a character's traumatic history.[4]

The plays selected to be studied in this chapter share common strategies for the performance of a character's tormenting past. Carr and Kane resort to the construction of ghostly and desolate settings haunted by the specters of male characters. These specters torment the protagonists by evoking an unresolved event, thus messing up with wounds that never healed and reenacting a past that, despite their many attempts, was never forgotten. The elusive ghostly presences in these plays thus elicit the paradox inherent to traumatic recollection: the victim is unable to own complete awareness and full recollection of the traumatic event, and yet the trauma keeps intruding into the victim's life in the form of nightmares, visions or reenactments. In a similar vein, the ghostly presences in the play keep appearing to remind the characters of a painful past, but they belong to the inaccessible realm of the dead, which remains completely unexplored by the protagonists. This is the conflicting groundwork at the core of traumatic reenactment: the imperative need to assimilate the trauma, the victim being haunted by it, and yet the impossibility to do so due to its essentially entropic nature. The plays to be studied in this chapter try to address such ontological paradox by performing traumatic memory through the use of ghostly and spectral means that mirror trauma's at once elusive and haunting dimension. These works hence answer the question posed by the prominent Trauma theorist Cathy Caruth, "[h]ow is it

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[4] Following from LaCapra´s premises in *Writing History, Writing Trauma* (2001), I will rely on his definition of empathy (as opposed to sympathy) in the field of Trauma Studies as triggering a reader's responsiveness and understanding of the traumatic event (LaCapra 2001:41). On that account, I will consider empathy and audience responsiveness as the cornerstone for a relevant and effective transmission of trauma: that in which the passerby/audience introjects the traumatic event despite his or her noninvolvement in the original trauma.

possible…to gain access to a traumatic history?" (1995:151), by providing a performative reenactment of traumatic memory with the help of such uncanny and supernatural means. Furthermore, they also appeal to Caruth's warning about "the danger of speech" when trying to give an account of the traumatic event: "The danger of speech, of integration [of the traumatic event] into the narration of memory, may lie not in what it cannot understand, but in that it understands too much" (Caruth 1995:154). In the attempt to integrate traumatic memory into logical, verbal and narrative mental patterns there is the risk and the fear of losing the precision of recall, the truth-content of that very traumatic memory and the force of the original traumatic event. The fact that the plays to be studied in this chapter rely not so much on the spoken word as they do on the phantasmal and the unearthly makes of them appropriate vehicles for the formulation and transmission of trauma, as they counteract verbal ineffability with the reproduction of ghostly effects when it comes to the formulation of a traumatic history. Keeping in mind Dominick LaCapra's contention about the importance of empathy for a historical re-visitation of trauma (2001:38), such an array of technical support directed to the representation of traumatic memory on stage facilitates the audience's empathic understanding of the perspective from which the protagonists experience the traumatic reenactments (in the works to be explored in this chapter, mostly in the form of ghostly apparitions).[5]

Marina Carr's talent as a playwright resides in her attempt to speak the unspoken, mainly by means of the powerful images that she reproduces on stage, which are in constant tension with the words uttered by her characters. Such visual strength lies in the fact that, once the theatrical illusion is over, it is that very image that dominated the stage only for a few seconds that remains in the audience's apprehension

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[5] See LaCapra 2001:30-42 for more on empathic settlement.

of the play.[6] Sarahjane Scaife, actress working with Carr for the first production of *Low in the Dark* in New York, declared that after the daily rehearsals of the play, she "would leave the theatre with some haunting image burnt onto the retina of [her] imaginative memory, such is the power and the beauty of the image within a play" (Leeny 2003:7). Carr's work thus challenges the limits of representation by going beyond the boundaries not only of the written text but also the theatre house, as her unconventional advocacy to the mythic and the spiritual or her defiance of narrative standards contribute to the creation of images bound to keep haunting the memory of the members of the audience once the theatrical experience is over. Hester (herself a literary ghost, an inter-textual echo of Hawthorne's socially ostracized female protagonist in *The Scarlett Letter*), protagonist in *By the Bog of Cats*, rebuffs the written law (binding her to abandon her house and her land) just as Carr overlooks written English's phonetic, morphological and syntactic rules in order to stick to an Irish Midlands dialect that is "more rebellious than the written word permits" (Carr 1999:191). Rosana Herrero Martín esteems Carr's predilection for orality as a sign of disobedience to "writtenness as a disconcerting, alienating threat…recurrently linked both to the rule of the Church and the British in Ireland" (2007:281). I furthermore regard this inclination for the oral and the performative (as opposed to the verbal written form) as the backbone of her talent to articulate a character's traumatic history.

Similarly, Sarah Kane became widely known for the powerfully visual impact provoked in the audience by the disturbing images she caused on scene. Kane's playwriting may be succinctly defined as the attempt to bring to the stage anything that might be thought of as off-the-scene. Obscenity was thus said to be one of the main

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[6] The recovery of Portia's body from the lake in *Portia Coughlan* (1996), or Hester´s first appearance on stage, trailing the dead corpse of a black swan in *By the Bog of Cats* (1998) are two examples of such theatrically powerful visual images reproduced on stage.

defining traits of her theatrical style, as she adhered to her self-imposed tenet: "there isn't anything you can't represent onstage" (Saunders 2001:24). This conviction materialized on stage in the shape of dead bodies, rape, mutilations and cannibal outbreaks, among other things, which earned Kane the critics' repudiation as well as her reputation as an oddity and a kind of outsider of the British current theatrical trends. Kane's voice as a writer gradually pared down linguistically (Urban 2011:313) and it tended to embrace the visual and sensorial for the representation of her characters' psychological struggles. The great amount of stage directions in her work that are still found almost impossible to materialize substantiates this theatrical taste for the unconventional articulation of the ineffable pain her characters suffer. Thus, her plays grant the privilege for a given audience to introject and relate to the experience of traumatic reenactment, as is the case with *4:48 Psychosis* (2000), which places the recipient in a position other than that of a static audience and rather has him partake of the anguish and ineffable agony experienced by the traumatized character (Saunders 2002:159). As Ken Urban contends in *The Methuen Drama Guide to Contemporary British Playwrights*, Kane "can make an audience feel as it is inside the mind of the character…[she] does not merely *describe* the experience of psychosis, but has the audience *experience* that psychotic state" (2011:316, emphasis in original). This is achieved by means of theatrical tactics such as the overlap of voices, or the non-specificity in the stage directions concerning the number of characters/voices speaking, strategies which encourage the audience's empathic settlement with the experiences the characters on stage are going through.

In the attempt to accomplish the academic ambition motivating this thesis, this chapter explores the aftereffects of such spectral stylistic artifices fabricated to simulate on the stage the haunting effects of traumatic reenactment, thus contributing to provide

a methodic classification of contemporary plays written by women where such practice seems to have become predominant. On that account, the aim is to explore in more depth these performative and aesthetic mechanisms called upon for the formulation of traumatic upheaval, concentrating on the remarkable tendency to perform the delusive and haunting nature of traumatic memory through the treatment of ghostly characters on stage. The interest in the elusive and yet haunting nature of ghosts and specters from the past dates many centuries back and it connects to a well grounded literary tradition resorting to spectrality as a means to shed some light on a blurred and partly forgotten, disturbing past.[7] Nevertheless, the works addressed here, though borrowing from these earlier attempts at ascertaining an agonizing and deceitful past, involve a new approach to the retrieval of a damaging memory. Abraham and Torok's views of psychic life "in terms of the vicissitudes of introjection, self-making versus the obstacles of self-making" (Abraham and Torok 1994:102) and their findings concerning the different procedures for the working through of such agonizing mental states will be considered here, as well as the contributions of current Trauma Studies theorists who resumed and elaborated on the psychoanalytic findings on traumatic upheaval. Abraham and Torok found that their traumatized patients invented "particular forms of obfuscation in their speech" (1994:105) to the extent of becoming unintelligible in the endeavor to narrate and make sense of the traumatic event. On similar terms, Caruth contends in *Trauma: Explorations in Memory* that "the attempt to gain access to a traumatic history … can only be perceived in inassimilable forms" (1995:156). As if in conversation with these critical debates, contemporary playwriting has resorted to the experimentation with unprecedented performative techniques as a means to appeal to the uncertainty in the

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[7] The specter of Hamlet's father and the many uncertainties raised in the play as a consequence of this ghostly apparition or Ibsen's *Ghosts* from the past carrying a silenced and shameful secret trying to formulate a perturbing past are examples of the more than well-known and ever present literary tradition that resorted to the representation of the unknown and indescribable in the attempt to gain complete access to a traumatic event.

reconstruction of traumatic memory. Unconventional techniques such as Kane's desire to bring performance to its extremes or Carr's interest in the supernatural and her treatment of landscape as an unlisted character are alternatives to be analyzed in this chapter. The reexamination of Brechtian strategies provoking a breach in the audience's suspension of disbelief is also investigated here with the purpose to identify the processes undergone by a theater audience when certain theatrical stratagems are brought to the stage in the attempt to decipher traumatic experience. Thus, the re-visitation of well-known classical stories is another tactic analyzed in this chapter as a means for the elucidation of traumatic memory.[8] The audience's familiarity with the story being told elicits a partial Brechtian detachment from the action which produces a sense of duality similar to the dissociation effect that overcomes trauma victims. As Carmen Lara-Rallo contends, there is an enriching relationship between spectrality and intertextuality that relies on "the superimposition of presences and absences, heard and unheard voices, the living and the dead" (103) and the fact that both disciplines share notions such as those of doubleness, repetition and return (104). Accordingly, my thesis results from the intersection of separate (and yet here related) fields that contribute to the achievement of a relevant and accurate formulation and transmission of trauma, thus counteracting potential verbal weakness.

The first section of this chapter will be devoted to the analysis of the aforesaid devices in Carr's *The Mai* (1994), *Portia Coughlan* (1996) and *By the Bog of Cats* (1998), the three of them sharing underlying elements which integrate Carr's early voice as a writer. The three female protagonists from these early plays are experiencing the effects of a traumatic event: the loss of a loved male character. Traumatic loss can lead to the melancholic incorporation of the lost object (Eng and Kazanjian 2002:4) and

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[8] Chapter three of this thesis will further explore literary re-inscription and rewriting as an instrument to articulate traumatic ineffability.

likewise prevent the subject from introjecting and recovering from the loss, as the phantom of the unresolved traumatic event keeps haunting each of the characters in these plays. This is additionally made manifest in these works by the state of homely enclosure undergone by the protagonists, which inevitably reminds of Abraham and Torok's revelations about a victim's cryptic or intrapsychic secret. The Mai, Portia and Hester, the three main characters of Carr's early stories, refuse to leave their homes in a frantic attempt to hold on to the material confirmation that the event ever took place. This is so to the point that in *The Mai*, the house where she eventually dies was built by the Mai herself, so that it literally becomes in the end some kind of cryptic prison in the terms established by Abraham and Torok.[9] The analysis of akin strategies devised for the articulation of a traumatic experience, its effects on a character's performance and also on audience reception will be the main investigative focus of the following section. Thus keeping in mind the double nature of Abraham and Torok's concept of phantom (described in their work as a malady but also as prompting a particular haunting effect on the listener), this chapter will explore both the impact on stage of such haunting effects as calling forth a particular aesthetics, and also as predisposing the response that such performative phenomena incite on the audience.

"So you've come back to bury me":[10]

The Return of the Dead and the Ghostly Effect in Marina Carr's Playwriting.

    a) *The Mai*

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[9] Maria Torok and Nicolas Abraham define 'cryptic mourning' as the process which impedes introjection in a patient's experiencing of loss. The theory and terminology I will be referring to in this chapter in relation to melancholic processes and traumatic introjection are based on Maria Torok and Nicolas Abraham´s contributions in *The Shell and the Kernel. Volume I* (1994).
[10] *TM* 125.

In *The Shell and the Kernel*, Abraham and Torok study the psychic affliction by which a subject becomes unable to introject a trauma related to the loss of a love object.[11] According to their findings, the memory of that traumatic loss is never assimilated by the subject, but rather remains enclosed in a restricted space created in his or her psyche, "a sealed-off psychic place, a crypt in the ego" (1994:141), where the very event of loss is confined, thus impeding the subject's natural process of mourning and introjection. This state of memory reclusion is what Abraham and Torok define as intrapsychic tomb or intrapsychic crypt. Crypt is the memory that is "buried *without legal burial place*" (Abraham and Torok 1994:141, emphasis in original), and as such, it is the memory that the subject tries to avoid at all costs in the desperate attempt to preserve the love object alive.[12] This struggle to repress such a painful reality contrasts with similar but manifestly divergent mental processes to be explored in upcoming chapters of this thesis. In particular, the dissociative mechanisms suffered by trauma victims and represented in plays such as Daniels's *Beside Herself* point to a different traumatic formation by which the victim does not remember the trauma fully (the experiencing of the traumatic event is not processed and assimilated as any other life experience would).[13] As a consequence, the victim is doomed to lead a double existence, as her ego unconsciously dissociates the unassimilated trauma, which is time and again elicited in the form of nightmares, reenactments, visions, etc, when exposed to unexpected stimuli. As opposed to these dissociative processes, with the repressive

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[11] Torok and Abraham define introjection as "the psychic equivalent of growth" (1994:9) or as "the psychic process of expansion" (1994:11).

[12] The concept of cryptic mourning is defined by T. Rand, editor of *The Shell and the Kernel*, as "the mechanism of setting up a psychic enclave – the crypt- "housing" the departing love-object in secret because the survivor is being deluded into behaving as if no trauma or loss had occurred" (104). This finding would later on lead Abraham and Torok to develop a particular view of language as a product of psychic processes. They would contend that obstruction of speech appears as a common symptom in patients housing an intrapsychic secret in their attempt to prevent its verbal formulation, as the sudden assimilation of the traumatic event would prove to be fatal for their mental topography (Abraham and Torok 1994: 105, 142).

[13] This particular psychic process and its representation on stage by means of the aesthetics of ghostliness and fragmentation will be one of the research concerns in chapter two of this thesis.

model explored by Abraham and Torok the victim is also being haunted by the traumatic event at the same time that she is unable to face it or to formulate it, but such mechanism is based on repression and on the unconscious formation of an intrapsychic secret 'housed' in the subject's ego. This prevents his or her assimilation of the trauma to the extent that the subject refuses to accept the very eventfulness of the trauma.[14] Repression is thus at the core of the subject's symptomatic silence and brings about the ineffability of a memory that is rejected (repressed) at the impossibility to articulate it. This is what induces the ego to create such illegitimate 'burial place', the intrapsychic crypt, where the love object is secretly "entombed in a fast and secure place, awaiting resurrection" (Abraham and Torok 1994:141). And the result of this psychic construction is the refusal to mourn and to accept the loss, "to disguise the wound because it is unspeakable, because to state it openly would prove fatal to the entire [mental] topography" (Abraham and Torok 1994:142). The process thus fashioning cryptic mourning begins then with the subject's incorporation of the lost object, which invades the subject's mental topography to the extent that the subject suffers from a secret identification with it. As a consequence, the subject's topography is divided between the subject's ego and the incorporated love object so that he is possessed by the clash between his melancholic drive to reenact the encrypted love for the lost object, and the attempt to survive the loss so as to continue with the natural process of psychic growth.

In her early work, Marina Carr consistently devised a physical space that the protagonist of the play (always a female character) would refuse to abandon, as it is the place where the memory of the lost object comes back to life. The houses or living spaces in these early works are hence symbolic for what Torok and Abraham define as

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[14] For more on repression and dissociation as opposed traumatic processes see van der Kolk and van der Hart 1995:158.

the intrapsychic crypt: they are burial places for the memories of a love object whose loss the characters try not to face. The characters try to lead a normal life at the same time that they refuse to accept the loss and desperately cling to the lost object, not letting it go. Such burial places, the houses where these female characters try to re-experience the libidinal desire they deposited on the lost object, are built artificially and forcefully so as to, paradoxically, prevent their dissolution and grant the repression of the painful memory of its loss. This becomes literal in the case of Carr's *The Mai* (1994). Here, the protagonist, The Mai, builds herself a fairy tale house facing The Owl Lake, a wild setting whose nostalgic influence invades the domestic indoors atmosphere through an immense living-room window. Throughout the play, the Mai frequently sits on the window threshold looking towards the lake as if evoking past memories and as if expecting to find the past reformulated in front of her eyes:

> **Millie.** And so the new house was built, and once she had it the way she wanted, The Mai sat in front of this big window here, her chin moonward, a frown on her forehead, as if she were pulsing messages to some remote star which would ricochet and lance Robert wherever he was, her eyes closed tightly, her lips forming two words noiselessly. Come home- come home. (*TM* 111)

Marina Carr's *The Mai* (1995), first performed at the Peacock Theater in Dublin, was her first internationally acclaimed play. The play evidences the iterative quality of theatrical performance, as the sense of duality and split awareness experienced by both the performers and the audience is put forward by means of the constant reference to mythic and legendary tales haunting the characters throughout the play.[15] The sense of familiarity with such mythic background becomes an obstacle for a successful suspension of disbelief in the audience, as they are torn between their attempt to

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[15] Herbert Blau´s contributions regarding the status of theatrical performance as a kind of collective remembered vision of a dreamed ideal (Blau 1982 and 1992, in particular) become relevant for an analysis of Carr's early work, as she will develop a taste for literary re-writing and re-visioning in works such as *Portia Coughlan* or *By the Bog of Cats*, to be studied in this chapter.

empathize and partake of the action on the stage and their awareness of the fictive nature of the events performed, due to the many resemblances between the action on the stage and some other popular and easily recognized stories (the inter-textual reference to Hawthorne's *The Scarlett Letter* is probably noteworthy). As argued by Bessel A. van der Kolk and Onno van der Hart, the non-assimilation of the traumatic event causes the victims to "experience long periods of time in which they live, as it were, in two different worlds: the realm of the trauma and the realm of their current, ordinary life" (1995:176). Similarly, the audience is inevitably moved by a drive to engage with the action performed and yet at the same time, through inter-textual referencing, they are reminded of the fictive character of the action performed on stage, and so, of the fabricated nature characterizing the grounds on which their emotional involvement relies. The plot in *The Mai* is in itself a reenactment (or rather a repetition) of a past story, as it tells about the coming back home of the Mai's husband, Robert, who had abandoned her and their children five years earlier and who, throughout the play, gradually displays an inclination to repeat the same behavioral pattern again. The leading voice in the play is that of Millie, the Mai and Robert's daughter, who is trying to re-tell The Mai's tragic story. In that attempt, she becomes a sort of spectral apparition ("*Note: Millie remains onstage throughout the play.*" *TM* 107), to the point that she ignores narrative restrictions such as those of time and place. She is at the same time a character from the story and the narrative voice, so she is allowed to jump forwards and backwards from the past and to the present, eluding any narrative boundary and thus providing a somewhat confusing account of the events (hence reproducing the functioning of a victim's traumatic memory). The action takes place inside the house whose construction the Mai had commissioned herself in her attempt to confine within its walls the memories of a happier past, and also evoking a dreamlike

reality that would allow her to recover what she had lost (her husband). Therefore, the Mai seems to, not only accept, but to intently search for and embrace the ghostly atmosphere projected in her cryptic house, as it is represented in the initial scene where Robert's coming back is performed as a dream or fantasy:

> *The Mai passes the window, turns to look out on Owl Lake, hears a cello note- decides she is dreaming. She enters the room, wearing a summer dress and carrying an armful of books. She places the books on the bookshelf, a few here, a few there. Drawn to the window, she looks out at the lake, waiting, watching. She places a few more books, then moves again to the window.*
>
> *A low cello note floats across the room. The Mai startled, freezes, listens: the cello plays, melodic, romantic, beautiful. The Mai moves to the double doors. She slides them across to reveal Robert engrossed in his playing.*
>
> […]
>
> **Robert.** How did you know I'd come back?
>
> **Mai.** Don't know. Just knew.
>
> *Robert lifts The Mai and carries her to a chair by the bay window […]*
>
> (*TM* 107-8).

Such dreamlike scenarios generate a ghostly atmosphere that contributes to blur the line between what is real and what is imagined or remembered (a puzzling effect that Carr will pursue in her later works by the introduction of spectral characters on the stage). Along these lines, Carr's use of windows on the stage in her early theatrical career becomes significant, as is the case with the huge window on stage in *The Mai*, which seems to exert some kind of enrapturing influence on the protagonist. The Mai is constantly "drawn to the window" (*TM* 107) as if bound to end up her days sitting by it, looking towards the lake and waiting for elusive past memories to materialize. Similarly, in *The Mai*, the window is designed to be the center of the audience's attention to the point that it becomes the lens from which we can see the action performed on stage. The Mai is time and again seen through the window, or sitting by

the window threshold in a contemplative, dreamlike manner; some of the secondary characters access the house not through the main door, but through the window (*TM* 112); and it remains a central element in all the decisive moments in the play, as the scene where the Mai finally realizes she has been once again deceived by Robert:

> *It´s evening, sound of a car door closing. The Mai stands at the window. Robert walks past the window, and stops. He looks at The Mai. The Mai takes of her knickers, and throws them at him through the window! They land on his face.*
>
> **The Mai.** (*banging window*) Fukin' bastard! (*TM* 153)

The big bay window in the Mai's house may be regarded as the threshold cultivating daydreaming, nostalgic memory and imagination, and as fostering the Mai's fanciful existence the many years she spent sitting by it and dreaming about her husband's return, longing for his coming back. It is her sitting in the window threshold all day long that grounds the Mai's distracted and imaginative nature, more in contact with her dreams and fantasies about her husband's return than with the taking care of her everyday life. The window is thus used as an existential threshold or as a frame from which the Mai's fancied world of lost memories is represented.

The ghostly effect is also managed on the stage by intermingling dreams ("elusive things" *TM* 125) and reality and by the blending of memories about the past and the more tangible daily existence. The dominant presence of dreams as a source for the interpretation of everyday life becomes, thus, essential in the construction of the haunting atmosphere predominant in the play. The many conversations revolting around the dreams that some of the characters have also work as foreshadowing for the Mai's irremediably tragic doom:

> **Robert** …You really want to know what brought me back?
>
> …

> I dreamt that you were dead and my cello case was your coffin and a carriage drawn by two black swans takes you away from me over a dark expanse of water and I ran after this strange hearse shouting, 'Mai, Mai,' and it seemed as if you could hear my voice on the moon, and I'm running, running over water, trees, mountains, though I've lost sight of the carriage and of you… (*TM* 125)

In Robert's dream, the cello case becomes another reference to the Mai's cryptic enclosure where her traumatized ego remains confined, thus refusing to face the traumatic event originating her psychic repression and her absent, apparitional and almost incorporeal current existence: the fact that her husband already abandoned her and her children once, and that he is bound to do it again. The Mai thus lives in denial of the traumatic past (which the audience is able to access thanks to the intervention of Millie as the narrative voice) and remains submerged in a dreamlike state allowing her to idealize her past and to repress the trauma of loss, thus disdaining her daily existence (her children and family, her professional career and her social life) and, "like sleepwalk[ing] along a precipice" (*TM* 148), blindly approaching her inescapable fate.

Adding to her disembodied existence, the Mai herself is described as a kind of apparition or as a lady in a portrait. The set of clothes designed for her additionally accentuate her ghostliness and her proximity to the intangible world of lost memories and dreams, as she is time and again described as wearing a "summerdress" (*TM* 103), "a waterly blue silk dress" (*TM* 129), or a "stunning black ball gown" (*TM* 165) towards the end of the play, once the audience already knows the Mai's suicide is imminent. She is in this way projected on the stage as one of the blurry visions she muses about and beholds from the window threshold.

> **The Mai.** Now, honestly, tell me, am I all right?
>
> **Beck.** Mai, you're a picture.
>
> **Millie.** You are, Mom.
>
> **Granma Fraochlán.** An apparition if I ever saw one (*TM* 166).

The effect achieved by showing the most revealing moments through the window glass becomes one of the main ghostly effects employed in the play and contributes to the attainment of a greater visual impact. It is because of this that the author does not need to resort to words to articulate the most unsettling moment in the play, the Mai's death by suicide: At the end of ACT I and right before the beginning of ACT II the phantasmic image of Robert holding the dead body of the Mai in his arms is seen through the huge bay window: *Ghostly light on the window. Robert stands there with The Mai´s body in his arms, utterly still. Millie watches them a minute. Ghostly effect.* (*TM* 147-8). The ghostly effect is intensified by the fact that the audience learns about the Mai's death long before the end of the play and so her ghostly nature, her proximity to the world of the deceased, is accentuated in her subsequent appearances on the stage. This vision of the Mai's death is a traumatic flashback interrupting the regular narrative flow generally procured in the play by Millie, the Mai's daughter, who formulates a failing attempt of detached post-traumatic narration. Therefore, the vision of Robert holding The Mai's dead body in his arms may be understood as both a traumatic flashback (a glimpse of the kind of traumatic reenactments suffered by Millie) and as a narrative flashfoward (as it also anticipates the tragic ending of the story).

Carr's early work, in particular the three plays integrating the focus of this chapter, present a setting dominated by the presence of either a lake or a bog that is haunted by stories of death and suffering, as is the case of the Owl Lake in *The Mai*. It is Millie, the narrative voice, who, in a moment of traumatic regression, tells the audience about the mythic story accounting for the existence of the lake (a story also tainted by unfulfilled love and tragic death), and it is the very account of that story that elicits Millie's memory of her mother's corpse recovered from the lake. Eilis Ní Dhuibhne analyzes Millie's double role as the narrative voice and as a character in the

traumatic story being revisited and describes how her narrative control is "fractured completely" as a consequence of her involvement in the story as a character (72). As illustrated in the traumatic flashback commented above, Millie does attempt to provide an ordered and well-structured account of the events, but inevitably fails, as she is herself vulnerable to constant interruptions due to the intromission of the traumatic memory into her narrative in the shape of disturbing images (*TM* 147-8) or disordered thoughts connected to the traumatic event (*TM* 128-9). Such interruptions render a linear account of the traumatic event impossible to achieve and Millie's (thus anti)narrative becomes in this way an instance of a victim's failing attempt to work through her trauma. She endeavors to formulate her traumatic memory following an ordered or a linear structure so as to make sense of the events, but she fails in her attempt to understand, as a traumatic history "is constituted by the very incomprehensibility of its story" and by the need to transcend simple (verbal) understanding (Caruth 1995:153). Millie's narrative attempt is in this way interrupted by multiple traumatic symptoms such as flashbacks or traumatic reenactments. This anti-naturalistic disposition inevitably provokes a Brechtian effect which distances the audience from the action on stage, as it is perceived as something unreliable due to the traumatic flashbacks interrupting the narrative and blurring the course of events comprising the performed "reality".

The traumatic interruptions found in Millie's account anticipate The Mai's death, hence foreshadowing the traumatic ending culminating with her suicide. This is another regular trait in Carr's early work: in *The Mai*, *Portia Coughlan* (1996) and *By the Bog of Cats* (1998) the non-chronological disposition of the plays anticipates the death of the main character long before the story is coming to its end. In the case of *By the Bog of Cats* we are provided with this piece of information right on scene one ACT

I, while in *The Mai* and *Portia Coughlan* it is towards the end of ACT I where Carr uncovers the fatal course of events. Regardless of the exact moment when the death of the main character is revealed within the action of the play, this theatrical strategy that anticipates the protagonist's death has a similar effect in all cases: that of altering the existential nature of the main character. If right from the very beginning Carr's female protagonists seemed to be walking the line between real existence (their attempt to survive the loss and continue with their everyday lives) and the imaginary world of flashbacks and visions about the traumatic memory (their melancholic drive to reenact the encrypted love and their desire to recover the lost object), once the audience discovers that the protagonist is bound to die, their remaining apparitions on stage will situate her closer to the realm of the dead and the spectral than that of the living. This is reinforced throughout the course of ACT II in *The Mai* and enhanced by elements such as the protagonist's apparel: "a stunning black gown" (*TM* 165).

Wald already explored this idea in her analysis of *Portia Coughlan*, where she argues that "the temporal structure of the play … advances Portia's death and thus gives her a ghostly character in the final act" (2007:197). This lack of a temporal structure following a logical narrative pattern becomes a common feature in Carr's early work and another means by which her protagonists' traumatized state is represented on the stage. The acting out of a traumatic event provokes "undecidability and unregulated différance, threatening to disarticulate relations, confuse self and other, and collapse all distinctions, including that between present and past" (LaCapra 2001:21). In relation to this, Wald also contends that in *Portia Coughlan*, "Portia displays her inability to conceive of a future that is radically different from the past and the present" (2007:196). This is reflected in each of Carr's early plays to be analyzed in this chapter. There, the past and the present blend in an ever going process of traumatic collapse and

melancholic incorporation. *Portia Coughlan* (1996) becomes another example of this trend to disrupt the taken for granted narrative order of the play so as to provide the audience with a non-chronological line of action that imitates the chaotic experience of traumatic reenactment and memory intrusion into a victim's everyday life, where past and present blend in the victim's attempt to make sense of the traumatic experience. Similarly, such non-chronological plot disposition also raises the audience's detachment to the action performed on the stage, as it is presented as something unreliable in terms of temporal disposition and also in terms of the characters' trouble to distinguish between dreams, visions and apparitions, on the one hand, and their everyday 'true' existences on the other. This theatrical strategy prompts the interrogation of (ir)reality regarding the action in the play and "enhances the sense of inescapability, of being performed, that pervades the play" (Wald 2003:195). The sense of uncertainty and unreliability concerning the temporal disposition of the action on stage is to be found in the three plays by Marina Carr studied in this chapter.

b) *Portia Coughlan*

Portia Coughlan (1996) premiered at the Peacock Theatre in Dublin and was later on produced at the Royal Court Theatre in London, also in 1996. The play is named after its main character, a thirty-year-old woman who is constantly judged by her family, friends and her town neighbors as a consequence of her behavior concerning her husband (whom she deceives on a regular basis) and her children. Portia's cold and distant attitude is explained by the traumatic loss of her twin brother fifteen years before the time in which action of the play develops (the temporal setting of the play is Portia's thirtieth birthday, and so the fifteenth anniversary of her brother's death by suicide). Portia's melancholic state seems to be the cause of her careless attitude regarding her family and friends as she seems unable to take care of them, declines her husband's

many intimate approaches and remains submerged on a constant state of dismay, most of the time confined in her house, her life seeming to her meaningless and superfluous.

Portia Coughlan entails a further step into the analysis of a female character's traumatization as a consequence of loss. In the play, Carr explores in more depth a character's critical state between the urge to understand the traumatic process she is going through and her need to deny it so as to escape its damaging influence in her everyday life; and this is presented through the main character's conflicting thoughts and behavior regarding the death of her twin brother, Gabriel. Gabriel has been haunting Portia in the shape of a ghost ever since he committed suicide, thus impeding Portia's social integration and her harmonious psychic growth as an adult. As a consequence, Portia has remained on a state of continued childhood, as she demonstrates she has not developed some of the qualities expected of an adult. She behaves childishly, her behavior is still watched and controlled by her family ("**Portia**. I'm sick of you gawkin' at me from behind hedges and ditches and sconces. I'm a grown woman and what I do is none of your concern" *PC* 214), she hardly leaves her room and she seems unable to take on the responsibilities that would be assumed by any mature person, such as taking care of one's children (*PC* 233). Gabriel's intrusive spectral apparitions seem to be the main reason originating Portia's mental derangement, as these ghostly visions continually interrupt Portia's otherwise natural social development and to impede the assimilation and working through of her trauma, which would grant her access to a 'normal' or regular existence as an adult.

In this sense, Marina Carr works towards the representation of a similar and yet divergent model to the one provided by Daniels in her play *Beside Herself*, to be explored in chapter two of this thesis. There, the audience was granted access to the not fully developed, childish and dissociated ego of the main character, Evelyn, by means of

a vision represented by 'Eve'. This illusory character symbolizes Evelyn's fragmented self still in touch with the traumatic event that the 'grown up' Evelyn was not able to accept. In contrast to the model visited by Daniels, and as already mentioned in this chapter, Carr's protagonists do not undergo dissociative processes leading to the split of a character's ego into two (the social self who attempts to lead a 'normal' life and the traumatized self, who remains submerged in the re-experiencing of the trauma). Instead, and in agreement with the model defended by Torok and Abraham, in Carr's plays the psychological defense mechanism undergone by the characters points to repression and reclusion (Portia barely leaves her house) as the main means to elude the agonizing past. And yet, Portia's psychological strategy to evade (her need to deny the trauma so as to be able to lead a normal life) clashes with her inherent need to know about and to understand the trauma, so as to be able to assimilate it. In this way, by staging Portia's conflicting behavior caused by the unsettling spectral apparitions of her brother, the play puts forward the processes undergone by a traumatized subject submerged on a state of melancholic incorporation. Portia thus attempts to elude the pervading presence of her brother's ghost to become able to lead a normal life at the same time that she frequently attempts to reach this spectral figure so as to understand the meaning of these apparitions and finally to become able to work through the trauma: "*Exit Raphael. Sound of Gabriel's voice begins again. Portia listens a minute, puts on a CD to drown out voice and turns it up. Gabriel's voice subsides. Exit Portia*" (*PC* 195) and

> *Sound of Gabriel singing. Portia registers this, runs from the living room. Gabriel appears by the bank of the Belmont River. Disappears as Portia arrives, out of breath. Sound of singing fades. She looks around. Silence, except for the following river and birdsong...*
>
> Portia: Can't you leave me alone or present yourself before me? Is heaven not so lovely after all? ...Do you miss me at all? (*PC* 235)

This paradoxical behavior (Portia's attempt to deny and repress her brother's apparitions, and thus the memory of his death, and then her need to reach that very spectral vision in the attempt to understand) coincides with the essentially entropic nature that characterizes traumatic aftereffects. The victim remains unable to evoke the unassimilated memory or to ascertain its truth-content, as it remains evasive and elusive in the victim's mind, and yet, the trauma is time and again elicited by external stimuli in such a way that the victim is vulnerable to traumatic reenactments, nightmares or visions, as is the case with Portia and the ghostly apparitions of her dead brother.

The directions for time and place in the play are already revealing in terms of Portia's psychological struggle. The stage should be devised to incorporate three different spaces: "The living room of Portia Coughlan's house; the bank of the Belmont River; the bar of the High Chaparral" (*PC* 191). As argued above, Portia's living room symbolizes her cryptic ego, as it is the physical space where she remains confined literally, and also the symbolic place where her traumatic memory remains buried, where the memories of her brother (the love object) try to reach her in the shape of a ghost ("*Enter Gabriel Scully. He wanders by the Belmont River singing; effect must be ghostly. Portia is in her living room, eyes closed, leaning against the door listening*" PC 209). The second space on stage where the action takes place is "*the bank of the Belmont River*", which is the place where Gabriel's ghosts seems to wander (as it is the place where he died), but also the place where Portia keeps having intimate encounters with her lover, Damus Halion, where she first noticed her husband, Raphael, and where she decided she wanted to marry him in her attempt to enter the 'real world', as Raphael looked "so real" to her: "if Raphael Coughlan notices me I will have a chance to enter the world and stay in it, which has always been the battle for me" (*PC* 255). Therefore, the Belmont River appears as a kind of gateway between Portia's everyday existence

and the spectral world where the memory of her brother's death is enacted in the shape of a ghost. Finally, "the bar of the High Chaparral" points to the social life and daily life that Portia yearned for but was never able to fully access or understand (*PC* 207 and 239) due to the damaging influence of the spectral visions of her dead brother and the re-enactment of the trauma thus elicited.

The multiple setting thus puts forward the fact that Portia lives traumatized by her brother's death and haunted by the spectral visions at the same time that she attempts to adapt to real life. She inhabits a double existence, as she makes the effort to become a good mother and wife

> *Portia sets the table, lights, candles…*
> **Portia** I'll bring the dinner if you're ready.
> **Raphael** Belt away.
> *Portia brings in the dinner, serves it up* (*PC* 253),

but then she is dragged by the pervading influence of the Belmont River, nearby her house, where she can sense (mostly hear, through his singing) time and again the presence of her dead brother, Gabriel.

> *Enter Gabriel Scully. He wanders by the Belmont River singing; effect must be ghostly. Portia is in her living room, eyes closed, leaning against the door listening. Hold a while. Doorbell rings…Enter Marianne Scully, Portia's mother…Gabriel's song gets fainter.* (*PC* 209)

These abrupt downfalls of Portia's delusive existence in a world where she is allowed to stay in touch with her dead brother become commonplace in the play, as Portia is frequently transported by her brother's absorbing and pervasive presence, and then pushed back to real life by the sudden interruption of some character reminding her of her earthly obligations ("**Marianne.** So you don't even bother answerin' the door anymore." *PC* 209). This points to Portia's state of traumatic regression and

melancholic paralysis at her attempt to gain a full recollection of what her relationship with her brother was at the same time that she tries to leave behind such melancholic existence so as to reunite with her family and friends into a regular daily existence. As argued by van der Kolk and van der Hart, "a feeling of helplessness, of physical and emotional paralysis, is fundamental to making an experience traumatic" (1995:175) and Portia's melancholic condition abides in such state of deadness and apathy preventing her from introjecting and going through her traumatic loss. The phantasmal apparitions of her brother, which are persistent but elusive at the same time, symbolize Portia's dormant state between her need to know, to process and to assimilate her brother's death so as to continue with her life, and her urge to deny it, to repress it so as to keep the memory of her brother alive and stored inside the cryptic coffin she has for a house ("the house creakin' like a coffin" *PC* 207) in a desperate attempt to preserve the lost object.

Such dual existence is also formulated in the play with respect to Portia's identity. As mentioned above, her ghostly nature is accentuated, especially in the third act, by the author's strategy to reveal her death before the end of the play (Wald 2007:197). Portia manifests difficulties regarding her distinct identity, which also points to her failed working through of the trauma of her brother's death and the traumatic process of melancholic incorporation she is going through as a consequence:

> **Portia.** Don't know if anyone knows what it's like to be a twin. Everything is swapped and missed up and you're either two people or you're no one. He used call me Gabriel and I used call him Portia. Times we got so confused we couldn't tell who is who… (*PC* 241)

Portia seems to have incorporated her brother's identity to the point of a lack of self-recognition which, again, also reminds of the traumatic process by which all referential distinctions collapse and disarticulate, the victim losing her ability to distinguish, for

instance, between the past and the present time (LaCapra 2001:22). Hence, the traumatic model represented in *Portia Coughlan*, based on the processes and symptoms of the trauma of loss, clashes again with Daniels's representation of the traumatic aftereffects of a different kind of traumatic formation (that of child abuse) in her play *Beside Herself*. There, Evelyn's psychic dissociative processes worked as an unconscious psychological defense mechanism protecting her inner ego from the damaging memory of her father's abuses when she was a child. In contrast to this, Portia's trauma of loss is characterized by repression and incorporation; by her inability to work through her melancholic state of paralysis, which impedes the natural mourning process of acceptance that should have followed her brother's death. Instead of this, she denies the trauma of her brother's death and begins to incorporate her brother's identity in her "refusal to acknowledge the full import of the loss" (Torok and Abraham 1994:127).

In her illuminating reading of Freud's "Trauer und Melancholie" Wald explains how Freud understood melancholia as the psychic process by which "the subject does not eventually regain 'respect for reality' but, to avoid suffering from loss, he or she introjects the beloved object and thereby preserves it phantasmatically within the ego" (2007:164).[16] Following from Freud's contention, Torok and Abraham developed the concept of melancholic incorporation and defined it as "a basic intrapsychic situation: the situation created by the reality of a loss sustained by the psyche" and the process by which the subject "[introduces] all or part of a love object or a thing into one's own body, possessing, expelling or alternately acquiring, keeping, losing it" (1994:126). In *Portia Coughlan* the main character incorporates some of the defining traits of the love

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[16] It should be noted that Freud's use of the term 'introjection' does not equate the definition provided by Torok and Abraham in their study on melancholic processes in *The Shell and the Kernel* (1994). As already stated, my own understanding of the term relies on Torok and Abraham's findings, i.e. introjection as the natural process of psychic growth and fashioning.

object (in this case, her brother Gabriel) into her own ego so as to fill the 'intrapsychic emptiness', which is that cryptic gap originated and caused by the event of unassimilated loss. Instead of going through the process of psychic growth that Torok and Abraham denominate introjection and that would naturally lead to the healthier mental state of mourning after the loss of a love object, Portia remains on a lethargic state of everlasting melancholic incorporation to the point that she gradually loses the ability to recognize referential indications that would connect her back with the social world. Hence, she remains in a state of intrapsychic struggle where she is no longer able to identify her own ego as distinct from that of the love object that has been assimilated.[17]

As will be further explored in the next chapter of this thesis, in Sarah Daniel's *Beside Herself* the theatrical layout is directed at the representation of dissociative processes or the split of a traumatized character's ego into two distinct selves produced as a consequence of a different traumatic disposition (child abuse). One of these two selves (Eve) was still in touch with the trauma, and she represented the childlike Evelyn at the time the abuses were being carried out. On the contrary, the other self (Evelyn) was completely and mechanically submerged into the everyday social routine of the adult world and denied her traumatic past. *Portia Coughlan* stages the psychological mechanisms experienced under another type of traumatic event, melancholic incorporation as a consequence of a traumatic loss. Here, instead of suffering from a dissociative rupture in her identity, the victim incorporates some of the traits of the lost object in the attempt to fill that tormenting emptiness, that psychic crypt or the space where the victim stores the traumatic loss in her denial to assimilate it. This process by

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[17] In the particular case of the trauma of loss, the adequate introjection or working through in the victim would lead to the natural process of mourning and the assimilation of the death of the love object (Torok and Abraham 1994:125-38).

which the victim denies the loss impedes the natural process of mourning (the acceptance of the love object's disappearance) and triggers the victim's incorporation of some of the traits of the lost object.[18] The mental formation of a psychic space (intrapsychic crypt) where to store and recreate a reality in which the love object is present was already hinted at in *The Mai* by the main character's reclusion and her disregard for her everyday responsibilities as a consequence of her melancholic disposition (The Mai is found time and again seating by the window threshold evoking past memories and thus neglecting her present responsibilities as a mother). Melancholia in contemporary drama has become a touchstone for subject formations (Wald 2007:163). The exploration of melancholic mental states is further developed in *Portia Coughlan,* where Carr works with the development of more explicit ghostly effects (as the ghostly apparitions of Portia's dead brother) so as to recreate traumatic regression and melancholic incorporation. Melancholic incorporation and Portia's unsettled identity are represented on the stage through a number of strategies such as the use of slow motion, background music so as to evoke the presence of Gabriel's ghost or the use of silent screams (all of them predominant in Jochen Schölch's 2012 production of *Portia Coughlan* at the Metropol Theater in Munich).

Hence, while the process of mourning would lead to the introjection and appropriate working through of the trauma of loss, in *Portia Coughlan* the protagonist remains suspended on a suffocating state of constant acting out and trauma reenactment, which eventually leads to Portia's internal struggles regarding her own identity.[19] According to Torok and Abraham, "[i]ncorporation is the refusal to reclaim as our own the part of ourselves that we placed in what we lost…the refusal to acknowledge the full

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[18] For more on melancholic processes and incorporation, see Torok and Abraham 1994:99-165.
[19] My understanding of the term 'introjection' relies on the definition provided by Torok and Abraham in *The Shell and the Kernel: Renewals of Psychoanalysis* (1994). The process of traumatic introjection implies the effective assimilation and working through of the loss of a love object.

import of the loss, a loss that, if recognized as such, would effectively transform us" (1994:127). The protagonist in *Portia Coughlan* avoids such painful process of psychic reorganization (or mourning) that would naturally follow the traumatic loss of the love object. Instead, the remaining gap left in Portia's psyche after the loss of her brother Gabriel is filled by the intrapsychic crypt built so as to preserve the memory of the deceased person.

Portia's paradoxical mental state has her trying to lead a regular life at the same time that she elicits and looks for the ghostly atmosphere where the spectral figure of her brother materializes. This is exemplified by the fact that she marries her husband because, like his brother Gabriel, he has an angel's name (thus attempting to replace her dead brother), but then, as mentioned before, she also married him hoping to escape such deadly atmosphere of traumatic regressions with the help of her husband, as Raphael is grounded and focused on everyday responsibilities such as family income, she sees him as her last chance "to enter the world and stay in it" (*PC* 255):

> **Portia** Do ya know the only reason why I married Raphael? Not because you and Daddy says I should, not because he was rich, I care nothin' for money, naw. The only reason I married Raphael was because of his name, a angel's name, same as Gabriel's, and I thought be osmosis or just pure wishin' that one'd take on the qualities of the other… (*PC* 210)

> and

> **Portia** I seen you long before you ever seen me, seen ya fishin' one Sunday afternoon and the stillness and sureness that came off of you was a balm to me, and when I asked who ya were and they said that's Raphael Coughlan, I thought, how can anyone with a name like that be so real, and I says to meself, if Raphael Coughlan notices me I will have a chance to enter the world and stay in it, which has always been a battle for me. (*PC* 255)

In *Writing History, Writing Trauma*, LaCapra argues that the collapse of all human discerning capabilities enabling us to distinguish between self and other or past and present "prevail[s] in trauma and in post-traumatic acting out in which one is

haunted or possessed by the past and performatively caught up in the compulsive repetition of traumatic scenes –scenes in which the past returns and the future is blocked or fatalistically caught up in a melancholic feedback loop." (2001:21) This traumatic distortion of self and Other is given expression in *Portia Coughlan* in terms of the struggles concerning the main character's identity, as Portia does not seem to be able to discern her own identity traits from those of her twin brother's as a consequence of suffering from extreme melancholic incorporation. Along these lines, the deconstruction of time boundaries is another characteristic of traumatic reenactment, and is also a regular trait in Carr's early playwriting. As seen in the analysis of *The Mai*, Millie (the narrative voice) finds difficulties when trying to make sense of and provide narrative order to the past traumatic events she revisits with her story. The non-chronological order established in *Portia Coughlan* also adds to the strategies Carr resorts to in her formulation of traumatic states. In the play, the action in Acts I and III takes place in consecutive time, but Act II jumps forwards and offers the audience a glimpse of the events taking place after the final act, Act III: Act II shows the moment when Portia's dead body is retrieved from the Belmont River after her suicidal act, and the ensuing funeral gathering at her house. The representation on stage of such chronological distortion provoked by traumatic upheaval affects the audience's perception of the action and facilitates their empathic understanding of the events there staged, as they are granted the opportunity to experience the post-traumatic disarticulation of the victim's discerning capabilities (the distinction between past and present, in this case). Similarly, in Carr's *By the Bog of Cats* (1998) time boundaries seem to blur at some point, thus provoking a similar foreshadowing effect. The play opens with the appearance of Hester Swane (the main character) trailing the dead corpse of a black swan that she was attached to since she was a child. She is soon interrupted by the unexpected appearance

of the Ghost Fancier ("*A handsome creature in a dress suit*" BC 261) who claims to be looking for the ghost of the late Hester Swane. This initial misunderstanding is solved when the Ghost Fancier learns that it is still too early: he had confounded the early times of the day with the late evening, which is when he will find Hester dead. Thus, the opening dialogue between Hester and the Ghost Fancier and the latter's temporal displacement reveal the dramatic outcome of the action from the very beginning of the play, Hester's death at dusk:

> **Ghost Fancier** I'm ghoulin' for a woman be the name of Hester Swane.
>
> **Hester** I'm Hester Swane.
>
> **Ghost Fancier** You couldn't be. You're alive.
>
> **Hester** I certainly am and aim to stay that way.
>
> **Ghost Fancier** (*looks around, confused*) Is it sunrise or sunset?
>
> **Hester** Why do you want to know?
>
> **Ghost Fancier** Just tell me.
>
> **Hester** It's that hour when it could be aither dawn or dusk, the light bein' so similar. But it's dawn, see there's the sun comin' up.
>
> **Ghost Fancier** Then I'm too previous. I mistook this hour for dusk. A thousand apologies.
>
> *Goes to exit*… (*BC* 266)

In this vein, and as was the case with *The Mai* and *Portia Coughlan*, in *By the Bog of Cats* the audience learns about the death of the main character before the theatrical action reaches its end, thereby contributing to the spectral semblance of the main character ("**Hester** …for a long time now I been thinkin' I'm already a ghost." *BC* 321). The non-chronological order of the action in Carr's early plays thus build up the uncertain lives of all the female characters, who debate between real life and their illusory existence triggered by their melancholic psychic mechanisms preserving the lost object. In addition to this, the disrupted action in the plays also transmits to the

audience the kind of traumatic upheaval experienced by the characters, as they are unable to make sense of and reconstruct the different events integrating their traumatic memory (the death of a brother, being abandoned by a mother or a husband, etc.). Such staging of the action provokes confusion and a slight sense of disorientation in the audience thus paralleling this experience with traumatic states of shock such as the ones encountered by the characters in these plays.

c) *By the Bog of Cats*

By the Bog of Cats premiered at the Abbey Theater (Dublin) in 1998 as part of the Dublin Theatre Festival. The setting in the play points to a certain continuity regarding *The Mai* and *Portia Coughlan*, as the action in *By the Bog of Cats* also takes place in a natural landscape where either a lake or a river becomes predominant (to the extent that, in this case the importance of the bog for the development of the action is already made explicit in the title). As opposed to the flowing waters of the Belmont River in *Portia Coughlan* (indicating the passing of years in contrast to Portia's permanent drowsiness, as well as reminding of the maternal womb where Portia and Gabriel blended and confused self with other), *By the Bog of Cats* introduces the presence of an equally enrapturing soil that the main character refuses to abandon (just a The Mai's house or the Belmont River). The bog is the place where the past comes back to life (again, here, in the form of ghosts and dreams) and the last resource the main character has to cling to the past, thereby neglecting her present. Hester Swane (whose last name reminds of the black swan that is found dead at the beginning of the play) presents similar traits and afflictions to the other feminine characters analyzed so far in this chapter. As was the case with The Mai and Portia, Hester's psychic life is also determined by the loss of a loved one. In this case, the source of her melancholic state is twofold, as she was abandoned by her mother as a child, and then also by her partner,

Carthage, who is now going to get married. She refuses to acknowledge such loss and keeps insisting on the idea that Carthage belongs to her ("Carthage Kilbride is mine for always or until I say he is no longer mine" *BC* 269), thus depriving him of any human trait and describing him as a mere object to be possessed. In a similar way to Hester's apprehension of Carthage as completing her own self ("My life doesn't hang together without him" *BC* 269), in *The Mai* the female protagonist saw Robert as something that should belong to her ("he always comes back to me. He always does, and has done and always will" *TM* 161), and, also similarly, Portia claimed that she "owned" the most accurate memories of her dead brother ("**Portia** You fuckin' liar, ya! You come in here talkin' about Gabriel as if you owned him! He was mine first! And I lost him first! And I was the only one that mattered to him" *PC* 249). Hence, they all appropriate the love object, refusing to accept the loss and claiming to possess it, moved by their drive to complete the intrapsychic gap they developed after the loss. In addition to this, in *By the Bog of Cats* Hester is also attached to the place where she can reenact past memories. Despite the fact that she has signed a contract that compels her to abandon the place, she refuses to leave the bog because, as we will eventually discover, her mother promised her before she abandoned her that she would come back to the bog. Moreover, the bog houses all the memories that Hester and Carthage shared as a couple, and that Hester does not want to let go. In this sense, the bog is symbolic for the main character's stagnant state.

In "Reflections Across Water: New Stages of Performing Carr", Melissa Sihra argues that "[t]he names which Marina Carr gives her characters also reflect those used in fairytales, where proper names are either avoided totally, or tend to be either so commonplace that they have no specificity whatsoever…these personal names resonate with mythical association" (70). Such sonority in the choice of names is accentuated in

some of Carr's early plays as they appear on the very title, thus echoing the familiar fairytale tradition where the title of a story draws the audience's attention to the main character around which it revolves. *The Mai*, *Portia Coughlan*, *Ariel* or *The Cordelia Dream*, are some of Carr's plays where this is the case. Considering that the title of a play determines the audience's first approach to the theatrical representation they are about to witness, Marina Carr's consistent choice regarding the title of her plays irremediably generates a particular set of consequences in terms of both the initial expectations the spectator will develop concerning the theatrical experience before watching the play, and the aftereffects or the socio-cultural associations and implications the spectator will necessarily draw once the theatrical experience has come to an end. Consequently, Carr's choice concerning the titles of her early works, in which the attention is focused on a female name that sounds familiar to the spectator (Portia, Cordelia or Ariel), generates a whole set of expectations that the audience will, consciously or not, hope to see fulfilled during the course of the play.

In this vein, and especially concerning the names of the female protagonists in *Portia Coughlan* and *By the Bog of Cats* (Portia and Hester, respectively), the choice of names here indicates that Carr is directing her audience to a set of culturally endowed assumptions that are inevitably elicited by the literary associations that both names implicate. Such (probably inadvertent) expectations raised by the names of the protagonists are gradually fulfilled by the development of the action in each of these two plays: *Portia Coughlan* deals with a brother and a sister and the intricacies by which they never manage to concur in time and space, as he is a ghost (he drowned some years before) but still keeps haunting her sibling on a daily basis. Eventually, as happened with the two twins that are separated in Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night*, Portia reunites her brother, in this case by committing suicide and succumbing to the realm of

the dead. Similarly, the name 'Hester', protagonist in *By the Bog of Cats*, also raises some implicit expectations that are met throughout the course of the play as the audience gets to know about Hester's situation as an exiled mother (she lives with her nine-years-old daughter) in a somewhat withdrawn town ruled by primitive laws, thus very much echoing Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter*.

In *Theatre Semiotics* (1990) Marvin Carlson argued that "[i]n the highly concentrated narrative world of the drama, the names given to characters potentially provide a powerful communicative device for the dramatist seeking to orient his audience as quickly as possible in his fictive world" (1990:26). In this vein, the choice of a particular name for the main character may resonate, as is the case here, with familiar connotations due to the taken for granted cultural background shaping the audience's stance towards the performance. This will generate a particular set of effects in terms of the audience's experiencing and understanding of the theatrical event. Literary re-writing and borrowing from popular stories thus becomes an effective strategy to implicitly elicit a particular set of meanings in the audience. It instigates and accentuates an 'already behaved behavior' theatrical effect according to which theatrical performance elicits a sense of doubleness and split awareness in both the performer (actor and character at the same time) and in the spectator (who is exposed to the performed events, and also the act of performing).[20] The re-visitation of popular literary works thus emphasizes the iterative nature of performance and the audience's 'hyperconsciousness' (Kubiak 2002:158) concerning the fictive mechanisms functioning on the stage that generate such meaning-negotiation processes. As Patrick Campbell contends in his introduction to *Psychoanalysis and Performance* (2001), the receptive processes undergone by each of the members of the audience when watching a

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[20] For more on this see Marvin Carlson's introduction to his book *Theatre Semiotics* (1990).

live performance render the spectator's self to split into two, as it were, since he is subject to a double experience by which he is both suspended into the fictive action represented on the stage (which effects a particular set of emotions and elicits a given number of memories) and also witness to the performative processes by which the same events are acted out time and again by a group of actors: "the spectator's psyche operates in a world of potential double consciousness, a world in which…there is a 'mobile concurrency' of our empathising and reflective selves" (Campbell 2001:8).

By borrowing a particular number of elements from well-known literary works, Carr is establishing and trying to control the interpretative situation that the spectator will experience as a consequence of being exposed to the theatrical message. Just from the knowledge of the title of the play or the names of some of the characters, the audience will already inevitably (and yet sometimes unconsciously) associate the events expected on the stage with some other theatrical or cultural messages they have been exposed to before so that he would be re-visiting anew some already experienced situation. It has been one of my intentions in this chapter to demonstrate how, in a similar way, and to some extent, such is the mental process undergone by a victim suffering from traumatic flashbacks or reenactments, and how this parallelism consequentially distinguishes theatrical representation as an appropriate medium by which traumatic memory may not only be elicited, formulated or made known to a wide audience, but also be empathically assimilated and introjected by the observant spectator, despite his initial natural lack of knowledge and detachment to the traumatic events performed on the stage in the early stages of the theatrical experience. The victim is condemned to re-visit time and again an already suffered traumatic episode thus becoming subject to live in a state of "permanent duality", "in two different worlds: the realm of the trauma and the realm of their current, ordinary life" (van der Kolk and van

der Hart 1995:177). In other words, when transported to the stage, the strategy to re-visit a story or a particular literary work that is familiar to the intended spectator accentuates the audience's dual state as witnesses suspended into the particular story being performed on the stage on the one hand, and as partaking of the collective role of theater audience on the other. Thus, re-writing strategies may contribute to the spectator's self-awareness about the tactics employed on that technical theatrical level. This is the sense in which theater semioticians such as Carlson, Anthony Kubiak or Richard Schechner have defined the theatrical experience as "imitat[ing] or actualis[ing] a rehearsed 'model'" (Wald 2003:12), and such is the cornerstone of the argument defended here concerning the theatrical suitability for the articulation of the also double, repeatedly or many times experienced and essentially entropic traumatic memory: the spectator is bound to "perform" the double role of empathizing with and wanting to partake of the action performed on stage at the same time that his status as a member of the audience is accentuated by means of theatrical strategies (for example, the use of literary re-writings or the use of non-realistic means such as spectral and ghostly characters) thus highlighting the fictive level of any theatrical representation.[21] Hence, and as if in a state of Brechtian detachment, the spectator is led to a situation where he is asked to partake of the action on stage at the same time that he remains aware of his status as active participant in the collective theatrical experience. Such strategy activates the spectator's empathic settlement and involvement in a procedure that parallels the one suffered by trauma victims to the extent that he is subjected to the same alienating processes effected by the carrying out of a double role that is contradictory in its very essence. The everyday life of a trauma victim bounds him to experience his own memory's paradoxical and essentially entropic nature by re-visiting the traumatic

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[21] The spectator is familiar with the story represented on the stage to the extent that he may become hyperconscious (Kubiak 2002:158) about the fictive nature of the representation and his role as a member of the audience at the same time that he is asked to engage in terms of the plot.

situation time and again in the form of unexpected flashbacks, visions, etc. despite his attempt to forget and continue leading a normal life. In this vein, the re-writing of popular literary works or the re-visitation of well-known literary traditions is a particularly effective theatrical device to bring to the stage in the attempt to formulate psychic traumatic processes, as the effect managed on the members of the audience parallels the dissociative processes suffered by trauma victims. This is so to the point that such techniques may activate the audience's empathic identification with a traumatized character's suffering. In this way, theatrical re-visitation thus complies with LaCapra's contention signaling empathy as the central element for any reader/audience's successful understanding of a particular traumatic disposition

The iterative nature characterizing theatrical representation is acknowledged by Carlson in *The Haunted Stage* (2003), where he studies the effects of drama's potential to "conjure the ghosts of previous productions" and how this "stimulates the spectator's memory" (1998:49). In my analysis of Marina Carr's plays I have tried to demonstrate how the re-writing of literary classics and its performance on stage accentuates drama's inherent 'haunting' nature and how this 'haunting effect' functions as a means for the effective formulation of traumatic memory. Herbert Blau's concept of the theatrical ghosting effect contends that theatre is not simply mimetic, as it rather reconfigures the present, to some extent, through the refracting lens of emotion and memory (2001:21-33). In the context of trauma representation, theatrical re-writings play with both the spectator's emotive response (trying to elicit his empathic settlement in trauma understanding) and his cultural memory concerning his previous knowledge of a given literary text or genre. The spectator is hence inevitably conducted to the re-experiencing of an already 'witnessed' literary event, thus paralleling traumatic acting out. This

semiotic correspondence elicits at the same time the spectator's empathic understanding of the traumatic event reproduced on stage.

The strategy to perform an already known story so as to stimulate the audience's sense of familiarity, so common as a traumatic symptom for victims condemned to re-experience the traumatic event time and again, along with the device to represent the haunting presence of the past trauma in the shape of a ghost, both become especially effective instruments to articulate ineffable trauma. This is put in practice in a literary medium that seems to be essentially appropriate for such purposes, due to its naturally anti-logocentric nature and its dream-like quality prone to provoke such 'ghosting effects' in terms of audience reception:

> Not only can dreams be likened to drama, but […] dramatization is in fact the primary activity in dreaming…The spectatorial process is one both of decoding, however haltingly, what is being staged, but also of reaching down into the unknown, of getting involved in the interpretive business of 'dreamwork' (Campbell and Kear 2001:4).

The ways in which an audience gets involved in the action performed on stage was one of the main concerns that can be traced in Sarah Kane's writing. As a writer, she attempted to foster an intellectual reading/experiencing of her work that brings her theatrical style close to the epic theater favored by Bertolt Brecht. Kane's work has become nowadays a herald for the rupture with the predominant less demanding dramatic tastes of the nineties and the accommodation of a new type of theater aiming at a more (re)active and conscious social repercussion. Concerning the extremely violent and vivid images in her plays, Kane has argued that "experience engraves lessons on our hearts through suffering whereas speculation leaves us untouched" (Langridge 1997: 133), thus stating her stark intention to shock and repel. In this way, the idea underlying Brecht's work "that drama ought not to be a surrogate for experience but

experience in itself" (Gilman 1975: 116) is also one of Kane's primary theatrical ideas that instill her plays with an invigorating energy.

Kane's third play, *Cleansed* (1998), has been often analyzed in retrospect by critics as a continuation of her first work, *Blasted*, or as closely connected to it in its appeal to similar issues, the similar word choice for their titles, and also the thematic structure of the play: a despondent male character holding an authoritative position and exerting his power so as to produce pain and anguish to the other characters. In *Cleansed* this male character is named Tinker (most probably after the name of Kane's most implacable detractor, the critic Jack Tinker). Tinker's job seems to be to take care of the people under treatment in a reformatory. The measures he employs to correct the behavior of the inmates are based on violent means, to the point that he ends up chopping the hands, feet and tongue of one of the characters as a way of punishment. In "Sarah Kane from Terror to Trauma" (2010) Steve Waters compares Kane's work with a form of terrorism. He argues that Kane's work looks for an identification with pain and trauma and the need to communicate it, an urge that is symptomatic in trauma victims and that is literally represented in *Cleansed* by this chopping of hands, feet and tongue of Carl, the very character trying to express his feelings. Carl's inability to find a proper narrative to make sense of his experience denotes the frustration resulting from the attempt to express one's anguish and finding no means to do so ("**Carl** (*Tries to speak. Nothing. He beats the ground in frustration*)" *CL* 2001). In this vein, *Cleansed* stages a victim's need to re-tell his traumatic experience in the attempt to make sense of and work through it and the consequent frustration at the impossibility to do so. Anthony Kubiak argues that in *Cleansed* Kane avoids any type of "writerly" flourishes and that this refusal of "writerly-ness" is central to Kane's theatre, which is thus characterized by her flat style in terms of dialogue (2002:12). Kane's work does not

describe the experiencing of a post-traumatic situation, but rather tries to find the means by which the reader/spectator may go through that experience himself, thus encouraging a more reactive attitude. The final section of this chapter analyzes Kane's *Cleansed* (1998) and the non-narrative strategies it offers as means for the articulation of such traumatic upheavals. It concentrates on the use of ghostly effects and intertextuality with classical texts as a means to play with the spectator's involvement with the action performed on the stage and so as to raise the audience's awareness about the experiencing of a traumatic situation. As mentioned above, a trauma victim's double existence (his attempt to lead a normal life at the same time that the traumatic event is reenacted time and again) is paralleled in the works being analyzed for this chapter with the spectator's dual receptive role: that of trying to partake of the action performed on the stage at the same time that he is led apart from it by means of defamiliarizing effects such as those achieved by the fragmentary introduction of intertextual references. Such effect thus contributes to the audience's better understanding of the traumatic experience staged, and also counteracts verbal weakness in the attempt to make sense of and gain access to traumatic memory. Kane's stark linguistic style and her distinctive use of shocking theatrical effects are directed at imprinting a disturbing image on the audience's perception thus contributing to the transmission of the trauma to a major audience.

"Think about speaking it's pointless":[22] Sarah Kane's *Cleansed.*

Cleansed premiered at the Royal Court Theatre on April 30th 1998 and its first production was directed by James Macdonald (who had also directed the first production of *Blasted* three years before). As with *Blasted*, in *Cleansed* Kane does not provide many clues about the setting, described as "*The perimeter fence of a university*"

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[22] *CL* 150.

(*CL* 107), but from the action in the play it is understood to be a kind of mental institution that in many ways reminds of a World War II concentration camp, just like the action in *Blasted* used the Bosnian War as a background referent. In this way, a surrealist setting reminds again of a nightmarish war landscape and the way to cope with its horrors and traumatic aftereffects. In this sense, in *Cleansed*, Kane focuses on the same themes that she had started to explore in *Blasted* and *Phaedra's Love*, and that she will keep analyzing in *Crave* and *4:48 Psychosis*: the obstacles impeding the fulfillment of love, obsessive love and the loss of self when love is brought to its extremes. This is metaphorically represented, among other things, by an uncanny setting, trying to reproduce the atmosphere of a concentration camp, where human beings were gradually de-humanized. Extreme love, the play implies, may destroy us and strip us down of our humanly features until we lose ourselves as a consequence of the irrationality and incoherence provoked by the loss of a love object.[23]

Hence, the intricacies of love become the main source of pain and anguish: being loved back or not, as is the problem in the homosexual relationship between Carl and Rod; having lost the loved one, as is the case with Grace; or falling for a platonic and unrequited kind of love, as happens with Robin. In this context, Tinker appears as the figure inflicting physical punishment to any of the patients in this institution whenever they commit a mistake in the way they deal with love relationships. With this purpose, he attempts to prevent Carl from expressing his love to Rod by cutting off his tongue, hands and feet:[24]

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[23] The dehumanization of a subject member of a community at war and the representation of it by means of spectral aesthetics will be one of the investigative focuses in the last chapter of this thesis. Giorgio Agamben's theory of the *homo sacer* will be the theoretical grounds on which such analysis will rely.

[24] Ovid's account of the myth of Procne and Philomele in his *Metamorphosis* tells about the story of two sisters, one of them married to Tereus, king of Thrace. Procne, the youngest sister, is raped by Tereus when he was taking her to visit her sister and, afterwards, he cuts off her tongue. In *Cleansed*, Sarah Kane borrows some of the facts told by Ovid, such as the amputation of a character's tongue so as to symbolize

> **Tinker** (*He strokes Carl's hair*) Show me your tongue.
>
> **Carl** *sticks out his tongue.*
>
> **Tinker** *produces a large pair of scissors and cuts off Carl's tongue.*
>
> **Carl** *waves his arms, his mouth open, full of blood, no sound emerging.*
>
> …
>
> **Rod** Baby.
>
> **Carl** (*Looks at Rod. He opens his mouth. No sound comes out…Tries to speak. Nothing. Beats the ground in frustration*) (*CL* 118-129)

In *Cleansed* Kane explores the failure of narrative means (such as verbal ones) as tools to make sense of the trauma (in this case, the failure to overcome the obstacles impeding the 'fulfillment' of love). It is based around the idea of love when experienced in extremity, how it survives or fails under these conditions (Saunders 92), and how the characters struggle to find suitable means other than verbal, which prove to be insufficient, for the expression of such intense feelings. There is an initial emphasis on verbal language reflected on how Robin is taught how to read and write, the importance placed on naming things by their name ("**Rod**. Sweetheart honey baby I have a name. You love me so much why can't you remember my name" *CL* 110 and "**Robin**. Miss? **Grace**. I have a name" *CL* 124) and also in the love relationship between Carl and Rod, whose conversation insists on the semantic load and value of words that are traditionally used in love relationships:

> **Carl** You don't have to say anything.
>
> **Rod** I do.
>
> **Carl** Please, baby
>
> **Rod** Fuck's/sake-

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the frustration and the impossibility to verbalize the traumatic memory of a character that has been abused or tortured. Such ineffability of the traumatic experience and the idea that verbal language does not suffice when it comes to the formulation of trauma is one of the basic ideas behind Kane's many attempts to overemphasize the visual over the verbal component in her works. *The Love of the Nightingale* (1988) by Timberlake Wertenbaker also rewrites the myth and deals with the notion of silence and frustration at verbal repression concerning traumatic memory.

> **Carl** Rod, Rod, sorry. Please.
>
> …
>
> **Rod** Listen. I'm saying this once.
>
> …
>
>> I love you now.
>>
>> I'm with you now.
>>
>> I'll do my best, moment to moment, not to betray you.
>
> **Carl** I'm not lying to you. (*CL* 111)

Therefore, the characters soon start to look for alternative means to articulate their extreme love, or the loss of a love object, as it is seen in Grace, who states her need to express physically, by her outward looks, the way she feels inside: ("**Graham/Robin** What would you change? **Grace** My body. So it looked like it feels. Graham outside like Graham inside" *CL* 126). There are different psychological mechanisms described in the play, all of them connected to failure in love relationships (the loss of a love object, not being loved back or the impossibility to measure and to prove one's feelings for the other person and the internal uncertainty this involves), and all of them blocking the expressive power of language. In *The Shell and the Kernel*, Abraham and Torok view language as the product of the psychic processes that embody a subject's whole psychic life. They talk about mechanisms such as 'designification' or 'demetaphorization' by which patients destroy the significational component of language due to a latent trauma hindering the natural process of introjection (psychic growth and the expansion of the ego). Language should function as the instrument enabling a subject's inner world into the external social reality so as to make full sense of it and overcome (assimilate or work through) any possible trauma or psychic obstacle impeding the natural process of introjection (the constantly renewed process of self-creating-self). And, according to Torok and Abraham, when that is not the case and

some obfuscation in speech is found, this should be understood as a symptom that there is some kind of obstacle obstructing the subject's natural process of psychic introjection.

In *Cleansed*, most of the characters encounter some sort of impediment when trying to formulate their inner struggles through verbal means. Kane brings to the foreground the process of word-building from an analytical perspective, as she does, for example, in scene seven:

> **Grace** It's talking without your voice. Same words you use all the time. Each letter corresponds to a sound. If you can remember which sound corresponds to which letter you can start building words.
>
> **Robin** That letter don't look like it sounds.
>
> **Grace** R.
>
> **Robin** That one does/but that one don't.
>
> **Grace** O. You know what this word/says? (*CL* 123)

Robin's struggles to formulate his thoughts through verbal means is pointed out several times throughout the play:

> **Grace** You can't write, can you.
>
> **Robin** (*Opens his mouth to answer but can´t think of anything to say.*)
>
> **Grace** It's not the end of the world.
>
> **Robin** (*Tries to speak. Nothing.*) (*CL* 115).

And this same image capturing a character's frustration at the impossibility to articulate one single word is also met by other characters in the play. As was mentioned before, Carl's tongue is chopped off by Tinker as a punishment for going against the 'rules' of the institution where they remain, concerning his relationship with Rod:

> **Carl** Commitment.
>
> **Rod** You've known me for three months. It's suicide.

Carl Please.

Rod You'd die for me?

Carl Yes. (*CL* 109)

…

Carl Please don't fucking kill me God…Not me please not me   don't kill me Rod not me   don't kill me   ROD NOT ME   ROD NOT ME…I couldn't help it, Rod, was out my mouth before I-

…

Carl *sticks out his tongue.*

Tinker *produces a large pair of scissors and cuts off Carl's tongue.*

Carl *waves his arms, his mouth open, full of blood, no sound emerging.* (*CL* 117)

…

Carl *(Looks at Rod. He opens his mouth. No sound comes out.)*

…

(tries to speak. Nothing.

He beats the ground in frustration). (*CL* 129)

Such frustration as a consequence of language obstruction is further explored in scene eighteen. The scene takes place in The White Room, where both Carl and Grace have been subject to an operation by which their physical traits have been modified so as to match Grace's inner desire to preserve the love object (Graham) alive, thus refusing to accept the loss. The reaction of both characters when first faced by their new external reality is that of unspeakable amazement:

> **Grace** F- F-
>
> …
>
> **Grace** *focuses on the mirror.*
>
> *She opens her mouth*
>
> …
>
> **Grace** F-

…

Carl *lets out a silent scream.* (*CL* 146)

The power of Carl's final silent scream reflects the complete state of shock experienced by a traumatized victim who is unable to articulate any recognizable verbal sound, being paralyzed by fear. It signals the unspeakability of inaccessible trauma and points to a state of obfuscation in the victim's psyche that prevents the natural process of introjection. The idea to stage inarticulate fear and trauma by a silent scream was also carried out in a production of *Portia Coughlan* at the Metropol Theater (Munich) in December 2012. This production of Carr's play both opened and ended with a ghostly and frozen portrayal of Rafael, Portia's husband, letting out a silent scream that appealed to the same idea of unspeakable and paralyzing anguish explored in Kane's *Cleansed*. This very image was not included in Carr's original text but was introduced in this production by Jochen Schölch articulating a sense of deadening fear which transmitted that very experience of paralyzing trauma.[25] Similarly, with *Cleansed*, Kane experiments with the idea of bringing audience and actors to the same level: the many creepy and unsettling stage directions for the effects to be carried out on stage, such as the constant sound of rats as a background noise which is supposed to accompany the action in a metaphoric, rather than literal way (Saunders 2002:91). This creates an overall effect aimed at the translation of nightmarish glimpses of the trauma so as to grant the audience access to the traumatic experience.

In an introductory note to chapter six in *The Shell and the Kernel*, Rand analyzes the initial model for introjection as posited by Torok and Abraham, so as to clarify its

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[25] A certain sense of paralyisis was also transmitted to the audience in Schölch's production throughout Act II, which shows the moment when Portia's body is found in the Belmont River. In this version of the play, the dead body is retrieved and left hanging up in the ceiling throughout the whole act while the rest of the characters remain onstage. Similarly, this very act opened with a frozen shot of all the characters standing at the background of the stage, wearing white raincoats and so projecting ghostly shadows and shapes on the stage.

functioning and to prevent any possible misunderstanding involving such psychic process and that of incorporation (which Abraham and Torok defined as one of the obstacles preventing a subject's natural introjection). Torok and Abraham understand the primary role of introjection as the "communion of empty mouths" or as a process of "transferential love" that appears soon after birth (Rand 1994b:127). Rand explains how for Torok and Abraham the initial stages of introjection emerge when the baby experiences the mouth's emptiness after having gone through the breast-feeding period. Introjection is a psychic developmental process that is based on the subject's ability to react, assimilate and adapt to new life situations after the experience of a traumatizing or an unexpected event. Introjection also encompasses the consequent psychic changes that those events instill upon the subject's life. The first model of introjection takes place therefore once the mother's presence is gone and the baby is forced to experience oral emptiness and isolation, as this is the first 'traumatizing' experience undergone by human beings: having to react to the sense of isolation provoked by the absence of the mother. The baby reacts by trying to fill that oral emptiness by playing with the empty cavity with his tongue. That emptiness is initially experienced, according to Abraham and Torok, "in the form of cries and sobs, delayed fullness, then as calling, ways of requesting presence" and finally, as verbal language (1994:127). In this way, the baby needs to experience abandonment and emptiness so as to react, assimilate the new situation, and develop a mechanism (verbal language) which would help him adapt to the new circumstances. This is the first instance of such process of psychic growth and development that Abraham and Torok define as introjection: "The transition from a mouth filled with the breast to a mouth filled with words occurs by virtue of the intervening experiences of the empty mouth. Learning to fill the emptiness of the mouth with words is the initial model for introjection" (1994:127). Furthermore, the both

social and psychic growing up process involves the formulation of desires, fears, pain, happiness, and other experiences characterizing inner psychic life, so as to match the internal development of a subject's ego with the external experiencing of the social world. Verbal language becomes thus the main instrument by which our inner and external lives meet: "Introjecting a desire, a pain, a situation means channeling them through language into a communion of empty mouths" (1994:127).

Kane's *Cleansed* offers glimpses of this human need to work through (react to, and assimilate) a given traumatic situation, and it also analyzes the frustration present as a consequence of introjection being obstructed by such impossibility to formulate and make sense of the traumatic event. Such paralyzing state experienced when introjection is interrupted is represented in the play by images such as the silent scream or the use of tedious and redundant repetitions, such as the counting down of numbers, which is carried out at two different points in the play and which, when performed, support this sense of suspension and repetitiveness signaling failed introjection.[26] Hence, *Cleansed* offers a view of introjection as interrupted by trauma that contributes to elucidate Abraham and Torok's ideas about the initial model for introjection, as filling the oral cavity with words so as to overcome emptiness. When a subject becomes unable to formulate his or her traumatic experience, as represented by different characters in *Cleansed*, introjection is interrupted and there is no psychic growth or expansion whatsoever, but rather, the victim remains in a state of post-traumatic shock similar to the sense of emptiness experienced by a baby going through the initial model for

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[26] The production of *Cleansed* directed by Johan Simons and performed at the Münchner Kammerspieler in November 2012 stressed the tediousness aimed at in both scenes where there is a lengthy countdown by sitting all of the characters (and not only Grace/Graham, as established in the original script) in front of Robin, all of them attentive to Robin's seemingly endless counting off of beads aimed at showing Grace that he has learnt how to count the numbers out. By bringing all of the members of the cast to the stage, who silently sat and watched Robin's hypnotizing countdown in emulation of a theater audience, the director of this production accentuated such sense of complete paralysis on the stage that was thus transported into the audience.

introjection mentioned by Abraham and Torok. Language becomes in this way a flawed prosthesis (as it remains unable to fully convey such traumatic loss in its entirety) which compensates a traumatic absence and additionally grants us contact with the outer (as opposed to intra-psychic) world.

In the terms established by these authors, speech is the first human reaction to a traumatic situation (the confrontation with isolation and emptiness due to the removal of the mother's feeding breast), and so the whole psychic process of introjection remains to an extent connected with the oral cavity.[27] In *Cleansed*, Kane portrays several characters who face such inability to introject and who remain under such a state of speechless shock (to the point that such state of unspeakability is literally represented by the cutting off of Carl's tongue). In tune with Abraham and Torok's findings, many of these characters face such inability to introject by returning to the initial model of introjection: that of ingestion as a means to avoid the emptiness provoked by the impossibility to articulate the non-introjected trauma and as an instrument to convey that transferential love initially founded by the mother's feeding breast and later on carried out by the word. In this sense, we find scenes throughout the play where each of the different stories (that of Graham/Grace, Rod/Carl and Robin/Grace) portray ingestion of food, drugs and even the ingestion of a love token as a reaction to post-traumatic speechlessness, which are somehow connected to the fruitless attempt to convey love or affection. That is the case with Grace, who asks Tinker to treat her as a patient after the shock of her brother's death:

Grace Treat me as a patient.

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[27] In his introductory remarks to *The Shell and the Kernel*, Rand explains how for Abraham and Torok verbal language is the best testimonial trace granting access to a subject's psychic trauma: "they [Abraham and Torok] create avenues to study and overcome the obstruction that serve to separate linguistic entities from their potential and concealed sources of signification. Abraham and Torok view the unintelligibility they encounter in their patients as psychically motivated disturbances of meaning, as instances of psychic aphasia" (Rand 1994a:17).

> **Tinker** (*Considers in silence. Then takes a bottle of pills from his pocket*)
>
> Show me your tongue.
>
> **Grace** (*Sticks out her tongue.*)
>
> **Tinker** (*Puts a pill on her tongue.*)
>
> Swallow
>
> **Grace** (*Does.*) (*CL* 114)

Tinker's unfulfilled affection for Grace is ratified by his obsession to transform the woman in the booth, whom he calls 'Grace', into his love object. Grace becomes an inmate in this center where Tinker treats his patients, who are sick of love, despite the fact that he declares that he is not a doctor (*CL* 146). Therefore, due to the impossibility to expand his affection for Grace, he uses the woman of the booth as an object where to deposit both his unfulfilled love (scene six) and his frustration about it (scene fourteen). Likewise, Grace experiences a state of unspeakable shock after the loss of her brother, whom she metaphorically devours by acquiring his ways, voice and even his looks. Before that metaphorical ingestion, scenes such as the ones quoted above already point to this idea of the return to the initial model for introjection as established by Abraham and Torok by means of the ingestion of pills so as to suffocate the ineffable anguish that cannot be relieved by words.

Similarly, the scene already mentioned and commented where Carl's tongue is cut off, thus obstructing any future attempt of verbal communication, is followed by a scene where Carl's now empty mouth (both literally, by the cutting off of his tongue, and metaphorically, as he has been deprived of the power of words) is filled by the one love token he gave Rod in another attempt to convey his love for him:

> **Tinker** *produces a large pair of scissors and cuts off Carl's tongue.*
>
> **Carl** *waves his arms, his mouth open, full of blood, no sound emerging.*
>
> **Tinker** *takes the ring from Rod's finger and puts it in Carl's mouth.*

> **Tinker** Swallow.
>
> **Carl** (*Swallows the ring*.) (*CL* 118)

Later on, Carl swallows the other ring he was wearing himself and that becomes another symbol to represent unspeakable love and the unutterable suffering both characters were subject to, as they were aware they were about to part:

> **Rod** *takes off the ring and puts it in Carl's mouth.*
>
> **Carl** *swallows it. He cries.*
>
> *They hug tightly, then go to sleep wrapped around each other.*
>
> **Tinker** *is watching.*
>
> *He pulls* **Rod** *away from* **Carl**.
>
> **Tinker** You or him, Rod? what's it to be?
>
> **Rod** Me. Not Carl. Me.
>
> **Tinker** (*Cuts Rod's throat*.) (*CL* 142).

The interruption in the process of transferential love by the cancellation of words due to inner trauma renders the different characters to return to the initial model of introjection, when words were similarly not available, and such oral emptiness is filled by, in this case, a token representing the love object and such transferential love process (the ring by which Carl was trying to formulate his eternal love for Rod at the very beginning of the play). According to Abraham and Torok,

> the passage from food to language in the mouth presupposes the successful replacement of the object's presence with the self's cognition of its absence. Since language acts and makes up for absence by representing, by *giving figurative shape* to presence, it can only be *comprehended* or *shared* in a 'community of empty mouths.' (1994:128)

In Kane's *Cleansed* that transference is reversed, as characters lose the ability to communicate through words the traumatic anguish they are experiencing as a consequence of the extreme way in which they deal with love relationships. In this sense, characters such as Robin, unable to write, read, and even speak at some points

(see quotation above) experiences the agonizing punishment to eat one by one all of the chocolates he had managed to get for Grace, thus again ingesting a token which becomes metaphorical of transferential love, as it as aimed at Grace, a removed or absent love object:

> **Tinker** (*He sees the chocolates.*)
>
> …
>
> **Robin** They're for Grace.
>
> …
>
> **Tinker** lets go of Robin
>
> *He opens the chocolates.*
>
> *He takes one and tosses it at* **Robin**.
>
> **Tinker** Eat.
>
> **Robin** (*Looks at the chocolate. He starts to cry*.)
>
> They are for Gracie.
>
> **Tinker** Eat it.
>
> **Robin** *eats the chocolate, choking on his tears.*
>
> *When he has taken it,* **Tinker** *tosses him another.*
>
> **Robin** *eats it, sobbing.*
>
> **Tinker** *throws him another.*
>
> **Robin** *eats it*
>
> **Tinker** *throws him another.*
>
> **Robin** *eats it.*
>
> **Tinker** *throws him another*
>
> **Robin** *eats it.*
>
> **Tinker** *throws him another.*
>
> **Robin** *eats it.*
>
> **Tinker** *throws him another.*
>
> **Robin** *eats it.*

Tinker *throws him another.*

Robin *eats it.*

Tinker *throws him another.*

Robin *eats it.*

Tinker *throws him another.*

Robin *eats it.*

Tinker *throws him another.*

Tinker *tosses him the last chocolate*

Robin *retches. Then eats the chocolate.*

Tinker *takes the empty tray out of the box – there is another layer of chocolates underneath.*

Tinker *throws Robin a chocolate.*

Robin *eats it.*

Tinker *throws him another.*

Robin *eats it.*

Tinker *throws him another.*

Robin *eats it.*

Tinker *throws him another*

Robin *eats it.*

Tinker *throws him another.*

Robin *eats it.*

Tinker *throws him another.*

Robin *eats it.*

Tinker *throws him another.*

Robin *eats it.*

Tinker *throws him another.*

Robin *eats it.*

Tinker *throws him another.*

Robin *eats it.*

Tinker *throws him another*.

> **Robin** *eats it.*
>
> **Tinker** *throws the empty box at him, then notices that* **Robin** *has wet himself.* (*CL* 138).[28]

A further image of thwarted introjection is that of an unresponsive Grace. The loss of a love object, as is Grace's situation after the loss of her brother, leads to a state of "unexplained or unrecognized depression, apathy, and insensitivity or unresponsiveness to social and societal expectations…a sense of futility and emptiness pervades their actions; it is as if they were absent from their own lives." (Abraham and Torok 1994:21). Such is Grace's throughout the play as a consequence of the loss of a love object (Graham). Furthermore, the literal ingestion of food, drugs or a love token standing for the love object is also symbolically represented in Grace's metaphorical ingestion of her dead brother Graham. The gradual physical and psychological transformation of Grace equates her with the now ghostly of her brother, both by such apathy analyzed before, and by her physical transformation throughout the play:[29]

> **Graham** More like me than I ever was.
>
> **Grace** Teach me.
>
> **Graham** dances- a dance of love for **Grace**.
>
> **Grace** dances opposite him, copying his movements.
>
> *Gradually, she takes on the masculinity of his movements, his facial expression. Finally, she no longer has to watch him- she mirrors him perfectly as they dance exactly in time. When she speaks, her voice is more like his.*
>
> **Graham** You're good at this.
>
> **Grace** Good at this.
>
> **Graham** Very good.

---

[28] This repetitive pattern of action aims again at the consecution of a sense of paralyisis both on the stage and the audience. And this same game with paralysis onstage can be compared with the use of slow motion and frozen mimics in Schölch's production of *Portia Coughlan* at the Metropol Theater in Munich (2012). All of these strategies playing with time development on stage portray the timelessness associated with traumatic belatedness, and so become theatrical instruments by which the audience is allowed to experience the trauma.

[29] For more on Grace's transformation and the performance of gender performativity on stage see Christina Wald's *Hysteria, Trauma and Melancholia: Performative Maladies in Anglophone Theater* (2007).

> **Grace** Very good.
>
> **Graham** So/very very good.
>
> **Grace** Very very good. (*CL* 119)

Scene Five in *Cleansed* thus provides a superb portrayal of what Abraham and Torok consider as one of the major obstacles for effective introjection: the incorporation of a lost love object (in this case, Graham). Hence relying on Abraham and Torok's findings, Grace metaphorical devours her own lost brother, "[b]ecause our mouth is unable to say certain words and unable to formulate certain sentences, we fantasize, for reasons yet to be determined, that we are actually taking into our mouth the unnamable, the object itself. As the empty mouth calls out in vain to be filled with introjective speech, it reverts to being the good-craving mouth it was prior to the acquisition of speech" (Abraham and Torok 1994:128).

The theatrical frame here analyzed portrays the reaction of different characters to thwarted introjection by the literal ingestion of objects standing for the love object (Carl's ingestion of the rings, Robin's eating of the chocolates in the box he got for Grace, and Grace's ingestion of pills so as to assuage her pain). This last scene where Grace fantasizes with her dead brother and tries to imitate his gestures and voice represents a further step in a subject's reaction to failed introjection that Abraham and Torok identified and classified as incorporation. The subject does not let go of the lost object and starts to assimilate identifying traits associated to the lost object. This was the case with Portia and her dead brother, Gabriel, in *Portia Coughlan*, and also to an extent the case of Hester in *By the Bog of Cats*, as she was doomed to repeat and imitate the same behavior and mistakes her mother had committed in the past.

In a way which contrasts with the post-traumatic deconstruction of time and space in the plays by Carr here analyzed, Kane's theatrical style is characterized by a

sense of fragmentariness that gradually becomes more explicit, especially in her later plays, *Crave* and *4.48 Psychosis*, which explore a traumatized subject's split self in terms of the dissociation of the mind and the body. However, already in *Cleansed* Kane analyzes the questioning and the reduction of a subject's identity by exchanging different characters' clothing and by the extreme sex-change operation performed in scene eighteen (Sánchez-Palencia Carazo 2). This fragmentariness that pervades Kane's later work through means based on verbal language is already hinted at in *Cleansed*. By means of controversial stage directions, non-referential dialogue and, especially, in the metaphorical ingestion of Graham by Grace's gradual acquisition of her dead brother's identifying traits, Kane portrays the existential deconstruction of the self at the moment of deprivation of the love object, which leads to a lack of self-recognition. Identity is in this sense questioned through ghostly and also obscene strategies such as the literal fragmentation of a character by the cutting off of his tongue, feet and hands or the massive ingestion of food, a love token or the metaphorical devouring of the love object itself in the desperate attempt not to let it go, for example. These put forward a subject's traumatized state dominating his psychic functioning when words fail to fill the subject's void, thus transforming the loss of the love object into an intrapsychic secret.

While this chapter aimed at an investigation of the aesthetic procedures that contemporary drama experiments with for an effective representation of intra-psychic post-traumatic stages interrupting natural introjection (psychic procedures such as the repression of the ego in an intra-psychic tomb, as explores in Carr's works, or the metaphorical ingestion of a lost love object, as in Kane's *Cleansed*), the next chapter of this thesis resumes such investigations where the ghostly effect similarly emerges as a predominant aesthetic mode, so as to now focus on the use of spectral figures and further non-naturalistic strategies in the formulation of a subject's existential struggle.

In this particular case, the aesthetic mechanisms exploring the reconstruction of the psychic and symbolic self after a traumatic event (Sarah Daniels's *Beside Herself*) and the de-construction of a subject's symbolic identity as a consequence of an upcoming death (Carr's *Woman and Scarecrow* and Carson Kreitzer's *Self Defense*) will take up the focus of the next chapter.

CHAPTER TWO.

Perspectives of Selfhood:

Ghosting and the Split Self as a Lens to Traumatic Memory.

In *The Haunted Stage: the Theatre as Memory Machine* (2003), Marvin Carlson compares the mechanics of theatrical performance with the functioning of cultural memory. He contends that, as is the case with memories whenever they are elicited, reproduced by different individuals, for different purposes and in different situations, theater is also subject to constant readjustment and is characterized by the unique nature of each of its performances. Therefore, considering the findings in the field of Trauma Studies, Van der Kolk's distinction between traumatic memory and narrative memory becomes useful here for an understanding of such parallelism suggested by Carlson between the human memory machine and the experiencing of a theatrical performance. As already mentioned at the introduction of this thesis, one of Van der Kolk's major contributions to the field of Trauma studies was his definition of traumatic memory as opposed to narrative memory (1995:158-82). Relying on Pierre Janet's findings, Van der Kolk associates narrative memory with social acts and daily performances in which the subject uses certain memories of past experiences so as to construct new social situations, thus rendering human interaction. Therefore, narrative memory becomes an instrument for socializing and is a natural and daily voluntary reaction whereby the subject consolidates his or her place in the social world.

Contrastingly, traumatic memory is not social or voluntary, but experienced in the isolation of a trauma victim's attempt to assimilate the event and it is unexpectedly triggered by uncontrolled stimuli. As Wald mentions in her study of trauma concepts and trauma culture, "traumatic memory…is a literal *presentation* rather than a distorted

representation of the traumatic experience" (2007:97, emphasis in original). Narrative memory represents and reinterprets a given subject's recollection of a past event with the purpose of fabricating new social situations, while traumatic memory is rather associated with the actual realization, experiencing and reenactment of the original traumatic event (Caruth 1995 and 1996; Herman 1992). Then, as opposed to narrative memory, where a single event is differently interpreted, experienced and then recollected by different individuals, traumatic memory has not been distorted by memory mechanisms; it "oscillates between the precision of recall and the elision of memory" (Wald 2007:97), which is to say that, while the victim is unable to recover the memory of a traumatic event, such shocking event (which remains unassimilated and is characterized by its precision) reappears time and again whenever elicited by an external stimulus that escapes the victim's control. The victim would need to 'work through' the traumatic event and make sense of it so as to be able to assimilate the event and thus narrativize such memory.[1] However, as soon as the traumatic event is made subject to such narrativizing mechanisms in the victim's attempt to assimilate it, the memory loses its original force, precision and reliability, as it becomes liable to subjective representation and its reality content has been murdered by the word repressing the memory upon its symbolization. This is the main difference between traumatic and narrative memory: narrative memory *represents*, while traumatic memory *presents* and condemns the victim with unexpected re-experiencing of the original event, which remains uncorrupted by individual memory mechanisms and thus preserves its original force (Wald 2007:97).

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[1] Traumatic memory involves two different but cooperating forms of representation: acting out and working through. The acting out of the traumatic event entails the repetition of the trauma as it was initially experienced (though not yet assimilated). Thus, the acting out of the trauma brings about non-narrative symptoms such as flashbacks or nightmares that escape the victim's control. Contrarily, the working through of the trauma does imply narrativization, as it is the process by which the trauma is 'made sense of', or scrutinized by narrative means (language). It is the process by which trauma is assimilated and, according to authors such as Herman and Caruth, by which it "may lose both the precision and the force that characterizes traumatic recall." (Caruth 1995:153)

The comparison Carlson draws between theatrical performance and a human being's memory machine is therefore effective and accurate when dealing with social, narrative memory. A conversation among friends is shaped by each of their previous experiences (and recollections) on a given subject matter and the extent to which such experiences are coincidental or asunder, determines each of these individuals' implication and involvement in social interaction. In a similar way to this social exchange, "[t]he expectations an audience brings to a new reception experience are the residue of memory of previous such experiences" (Carlson 2003:5) and a spectator's involvement on the action on stage will inevitably be determined by his previous personal schema related to the issues represented on the stage. We are dealing here with representation (the re-visitation of an already experienced act) both in narrative memory and theatrical performance. So, in which ways can theatrical performance become a valuable instrument in the presentation of traumatic memory, purposefully elicited so as to be experienced with the precision of its original occurrence by the members of the audience?[2]

Taking into consideration Carlson's contributions where he compares theatrical performance with social (narrative) memory, in this chapter I aim at an exploration of how the stage is also an apt site for the re-construction and presentation of traumatic memory. The performative mechanisms Carlson mentions in his introduction rely on already behaved behavior, which is the cornerstone for the classification of literary genres from the point of view of audience/reader reception studies: "the audience of a new work in the genre can be normally expected to have read other works in the genre and to apply the memory of how those works are constructed to the understanding and

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[2] According to Caruth and Herman, one of the distinguishing symptoms of post-traumatic stress is the authenticity of the traumatic recollections and reenactments, as the victim re-experiences the event as if lived by the very first time (Caruth 1995 and 1996; Herman 1992).

appreciation of the new example" (Carlson 2003:6). In this sense, while performance relies on the re-experiencing by the audience of a number of strategies already familiar to them and associated to previous aesthetic processes, there are also mechanisms by which the theatrical experience may present the original traumatic event with accurate precision, thus transporting the audience to the reality (and not the representative imago of a reconstructed fictionalized memory) of the original traumatic event. In this line, Carlson talked about what he defined as a 'ghosting' effect which "presents the identical thing […] experienced before, although now [presented] in a somewhat different context. Thus, a recognition not of similarity [as is the case with the identification of a genre], but of identity becomes part of the reception process" (Carlson 2003:7). As I intend to show in this chapter, this is the process the audience go through when certain theatrical mechanisms are encountered that make extensive to them the experience of a particular disturbing event. This evocation of a traumatic memory is characterized by the precision of recall, as it is experienced not as a narrativized or rationalized memory, but as the truthful unassimilated traumatic event, still uncorrupted by the logocentric mechanisms of narrative memory.

Henceforth, mechanisms which activate the spectator's identification and empathy with the action performed onstage coexist with this defamiliarizing aspect in theatrical performance that evokes other realizations of one same act, thus consolidating an already known genre and pointing to the fictional nature of the action onstage. In other words, the ghosting effect that Carlson mentions very briefly at the introduction of his book puts forward drama's likeliness to establish a personal and individual bond with each of the members of the audience who, I argue, are in this way transported to the actual first person experiencing of the traumatic event represented on the stage, thus becoming able to understand the intrinsic paradoxical nature of traumatic memory

mechanisms: the victim's urge to cope with the traumatic event comes into conflict with the development of psychological defense mechanisms attempting to deny it so as to normalize the victim's everyday life.

In "Foreword: The Camera's Posthuman Eye", for the collection of essays *Lacan at the Scene* (2009), Slavoj Žižek talks about the network of already behaved behavior that surrounds each individual's life experiences, and how this network, or as he defines it, "the complex web of past experiences, affections, and so on…"

> …colors our raw perceptions [and] plays exactly the role of a transcendental horizon which makes our reality meaningful. When we are deprived of this transcendental network, that is, of the fantasmic coordinates of meaning, we are no longer engaged participants in the world, we find ourselves confronted with things in their *noumenal* dimension: for a moment, we see them the way they are "in themselves" independently of us. (Žižek 2009:xiii).[3]

In this way, the same distinction spotted by Carlson in his analysis of performance and memory mechanisms is also explored by Žižek from a psychoanalitic point of view. His stance aims at an exploration of the different ways in which reality can be perceived, and how that perception of things may be easily distorted when the 'fantasmic' safety network (the things already known or experienced by the individual) is removed or somehow displaced. In this light, both authors point to a duality when it comes to the experiencing of reality (Carlson concentrates on the onstage performed and fictive reality and how it is perceived by an audience), and both of them turn to a terminology that foregrounds the haunting nature of such dual experiencing of life events. Žižek refers to the "fantasmic coordinates of meaning" (that is to say, the safety network built out of the things we already have some knowledge of and those memories which build up our individual perspective on things), while Carlson talks about the 'ghosting' effect on drama (appealing to the spectator's recognition of an element in a play moved by a

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[3] Throughout this thesis I will favor Žižek's spelling and use the term 'fantasmic', as it regularly appears in many of his works to be here much cited.

sense of identity that is not corrupted by the symbolic order). Žižek contends that it is only when we are deprived of the "fantasmic coordinates of meaning" (Žižek 2009:xiii), our schemata or previously given assumptions about reality, that we are granted access to the way things are by themselves, independently of us and our individual pre-conceptions. Drawing from this idea, and relying on Carlson's contributions to the field of audience response already hinted at above, in this chapter I will argue that this state of pristine and uncorrupted perception, untainted by our preconceived coordinates of meaning, is aimed at through the management of a number of theatrical strategies on the stage which employ haunting effects to be analyzed in the plays included in this chapter.[4] And it is precisely by this receptive state that the plays I hereby explore manage to delve into the nature of traumatic memory, characterized by a precision of recall that moves away from subjective retelling and narrativization.

The fantasmic onstage mechanisms to be studied in this chapter explore one of the distinguishing symptoms in post-traumatic stress disorder victims: dissociation and the split-self psychological mechanism. The dislocation of a given character's ability to distinguish between her inner reality and the external reality, and the different theatrical devices employed so as to present such fragmentary perception of things will be the main focus of the present chapter. Three plays will be analyzed from the perspective of contemporary psychoanalytic criticism, Trauma studies, and Audience Response Theory: Sarah Daniels' *Beside Herself* (1990), Marina Carr's *Woman and Scarecrow* (2006) and Carson Kreitzer's *Self Defense or Death of some Salesmen* (2001). One of the main tenets on which this chapter relies is the idea that theatrical performance stands

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[4] The correlation in the use of terminology to identify this experiential process signaled by Žižek and Carlson points to the fantasmic nature of the experiencing of life events, which is elusive, changing, and always bonded to the subject´s perception. Similarly, I rely on the metaphor that compares traumatic memory with ghostly psychic mechanisms, as the trauma is elusive (the victim cannot have the power to access that memory in a voluntarily way) and yet keeps reappearing time and again, unexpectedly. In this chapter I will explore different theatrical mechanism (both drama and performance-based strategies) by which such metaphorical ghostliness finds onstage realization.

out as an adequate site to present this distortion in the perception mechanisms of trauma victims and to make that experience extensive to the members of the audience. Drama is a medium able to shift a human being's sense of perception from self-centeredness to other-centeredness. The spectators are led to feel identified with the action on stage (as mentioned above) and to leave behind their transcendental coordinates of meaning (as put by Žižek) so as to be able to experience the traumatic events performed on stage without the corrupting involvement of their individual life experiences and (narrative) memories. The haunting strategies carried out on stage in the three plays to be analyzed in this chapter are devised so as to lead the audience into the experiencing of the splitting of a victim's traumatized self by the presentation of a fragmented reality on the stage. Strategies such as the use of TV sets, mirrors and imaginary characters who unveil a subject's internal world (which at the same time clashes with the social reality she is living) are brought on stage, thus providing a Brechtian effect which foregrounds a sense of duality both in the performed action and in the reception process: the audience is asked to empathize with the characters on the stage, and yet this identification process is interrupted time and again by the introduction of non-realistic and defamiliarizing devices by which access is granted to the traumatized character's inner reality. The result is an experience based on the spectator seeing himself (reflected on a character he has developed empathy for) from another perspective, thus developing a sense of duality. This duality is reflected both in the traumatized characters, doomed to experience a double reality (their everyday lives and their inner struggle to work through the trauma), and in the audience, as the spectators feel a close identification with the action performed on stage at the same time that the Brechtian devices used in the plays remind them of its fictive nature. Henceforth, this chapter will study several strategies that, as I will try to show, explore the attempts carried out on stage to

formulate psychic identity, subjectivity and the functioning of the traumatized human 'eye/I' when interacting with and interpreting reality.

Melanie Klein's contributions to the field of psychoanalysis come to the foreground in the study of a human being's perception of reality and of selfhood. Her work focused on the role of the split self, child identity formation and the establishment of an inside and an outside world as cornerstone for the creation of healthy interpersonal relationships. Unlike Freud, she contended that there is not a one-way staged process, moving from a beginning towards the end in the formation of human identity. Instead, she believed in psychic 'positions' and the idea that a human being's psychic life was defined by the constant shifting from two different positions: the paranoid-schizoid position, and the depressive position. Both positions may appear time and again, and are not fixed psychic 'stages' (thus departing from Freud) that we all go through as children, never to return to them. Therefore, despite her interest in the study of children's psychic mechanisms and the relationship with the mother as a key factor for subject formation, Klein's contributions may as well be applied as a lens to interpret adult behavior. The first of these two psychic positions, the paranoid-schizoid position, already delves into the nature of psychic splitting, which Klein initially associates with the way in which the child has been brought up: "People who have been brought up by adults whose behavior combined elements of both cruelty and care towards them, may have problems separating good from bad." (Julia Segal 34). Being unable to tell good apart from evil is as damaging for the child's psychic development as deeply splitting good from bad in such a way that the child becomes unable to conceive of the two as being part of one same object. Splitting thus becomes a defense mechanism the child automatically resorts to. The paranoid-schizoid position is characterized, therefore, by the child's limited ability to establish a relationship with external objects, which is only

reduced to the child's perception of reality as partial and fragmentary (the mother's breast, hands, etc). However, Klein's positions, though based on the formation of a child's inner and outside world, may reappear at a later stage during adulthood. When this is the case, the subject splits not only the external object in question provoking the traumatization, but also himself, as his psychic mechanisms are shaped by his perception of the world (which is in this case corrupted by the splitting mechanism, separating things that may belong together).[5] In her reading of Klein's work, Julia Segal explains the functioning of the paranoid-schizoid position and the splitting mechanism:

> When one set of perceptions and phantasies is kept apart from another, the child (or adult) splits not only the object but also him or herself…Adults often have perceptions of themselves as more than one self. They might say 'I'm not feeling myself today' or 'That wasn't like me', when they have done something which surprised them. (34)

The second position the child goes through in this process of subject formation is that of the depressive position. Here, the baby acquires the internal emotional maturity that allows him to experience others as a whole, containing both good and bad aspects.

Jacques Lacan's famous contributions to the studies of split identities go in the same direction, but there is the major difference that, according to Lacan, the splitting process is not a 'position' that may be elicited time and again both in childhood and adulthood, but a single psychic transition ('étage') in childhood that he defined as 'the mirror stage'. This phenomenon was initially explored by Henri Wallon, who in 1931 developed an experiment with a child put in front of a mirror with the purpose of studying this child's identification of his own body reflected on the mirror. Later on, Lacan revised Wallon's findings and changed the name given by the latter ('epreuve du miroir') into 'stade du miroir', thus synthesizing the Kleinian concept of psychic

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[5] For more on human character being shaped by the way the individual perceives the world see Slavoj Žižek's Foreword to *Lacan at the Scene*, by Henry Bond (2009).

phenomena as 'positions' the subject may return to during his lifetime, and the Freudian sense of psychic life made up of different 'phases' that are gone through by each individual, never to return to them. However, it was not until he worked on his famous collection of essays and speeches *Écrits* (1953) that Lacan developed in full depth the question of the different stages in the formation of the individual as a rational and social being. On a speech included in this collection and first delivered at the International Congress of Psychoanalysis in 1949, he dealt with this subject matter and provided an in depth analysis of the 'mirror stage' in a person's development into a social being. In this mirror stage, the child discovers his own reflection in the mirror, and becomes aware that there is a social self which goes beyond his own recognition of selfhood. This is the moment "that will henceforth link the 'I' to socially elaborated situations" (Lacan 2002:5). This Lacanian notion of the 'split-self' has been later on considered on many other different spheres other than psychological sciences. Feminist critics have referred to women writers' processes of splitting and disassociation when dealing with the gap between the demands of the patriarchal literary tradition and those of their own authorship.[6] In their monumental analysis of 19th C female authors, *The Madwoman in the Attic* (1979), Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, point out that women have been doubly repressed by patriarchal language by not only being excluded from authorship but, in addition, by being subjected to male authority (Gilbert and Gubar 11). They argue that repression would explain that, under the disguise of patriarchal discourse, women writers resorted to strategies such as palimpsest, rewriting and parody so as to "attempt the pen" (11) and tell stories of their own. That would explain, for instance, that, instead of dismantling the stereotypical binaries defining women within patriarchal culture, women writers have tried to re-signify their position by "alternately defining

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[6] The emergence of literary re-inscriptions as a cultural weapon against the patriarchal symbolic order will be further explored in chapter three of this thesis.

themselves as angel-women or as monster-women" (Gilbert and Gubar 44) and through "creating dark doubles for themselves and their heroines" (Gilbert and Gubar 79); that is, by simultaneously conforming to and subverting patriarchal discourse. Catherine Belsey contemplated a similar notion in literary discourses. Belsey studied the historical construction of subjecthood and argued that Lacan's mirror stage is a double process when studied from the point of view of a female subject, since there is a further splitting of the initial first person identification that was originally male. This position of double alienation has as a consequence that the female subject is silenced, since it is downgraded to a secondary position (Belsey 149).

According to Klein, a subject going through the paranoid-schizoid position creates a part-object where to deposit the internal psychic conflict. In other words, the subject in the paranoid-schizoid position involuntarily splits his own perception of the objects involved in the conflict, thus distorting his view of reality: "In the paranoid-schizoid position, one-dimensional, one-characteristic part-objects created in this way are often used as a 'solution' to internal conflict…These part-objects serve the purpose of avoiding (rather than working through) internal conflict and guilt" (Segal 44). These notions on 'doubling' one's identity and the silencing and later resurfacing of the female subject are further explored in Sarah Daniels's *Beside Herself*. *Beside Herself* offers several theatrical devices so as to present on stage these mental processes involving the splitting of the victim's self. The major strategy is the apparitional device to introduce an imagined character, Eve, a child-like split-self of the main character, Evelyn, who seems to have no notion of appropriate social behavior whatsoever, as is the case with any subject's ego before going through Lacan's mirror stage. A second major strategy in the play so as to present such sense of fragmented reality is the use of a broken mirror

at the center of the stage. The distorted image offered by the mirror creates a sense of fragmentariness that is thus managed by means of its constant presence on the stage.

Similarly, Marina Carr's *Woman and Scarecrow* resorts to the use of the split-self so as to present the inner struggles of Woman, who is on her deathbed and going through a process of self-examination of her past. Such struggle is represented by Woman's arguments with Scarecrow, her psychic life-partner. This imaginary presence will be analyzed in this chapter from the point of view of Klein's 'objective identification': the process that "involves a fantasy in which some aspect of the self, felt as unbearable, is got rid of into someone else." (Segal 37). Moreover, Carr makes also good use of the mirror image as a metaphor for the human need of self-recognition and reassurance about one's existence in a familiar context just some hours before disappearing, or leaving behind everything that is known (Woman's life, so far, which she is about to lose).[7] Just as in Lacan's mirror stage a little child becomes aware of his existence as a social being by the discovery of his reflection on a mirror (and thus, by the discovery of subjectivity in a social world), Woman tries to metaphorically grab that very self-image reflected on a mirror granting her existence in the world she knows. That self recognition in the mirror is her proof that she has not disappeared yet and it establishes and verifies the reality she tries to hold on those very few hours before passing away.[8] There is, likewise, a significant trend in contemporary drama to use mirrors with the intention to translate the ineffable sense of fragmentary self.[9]

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[7] **Scarecrow** What do you want the mirror for?

 Woman To watch myself die. I want to see how I am. I always look in mirrors to find out what's happening to me. Please, bring it to me. I want to see if I'm still here. (*WS* 165)

[8] The subject's instinctive search for the authenticity of the self will result in a sense of displacement and distrust of our collective reality, which will bring about the deconstruction and fragmentary of the subject and his reality. As will be further explored in the analysis of Carson Kreitzer's *Self Defense or Death of Some Salesman* in this same chapter, contemporary theater brings to the foreground the proliferation of a multiplicity of individual lenses by which the contemporary and precarious Real is represented, imitated

The last play to analyze in this chapter, Kreitzer's *Self Defense or Death of Some Salesmen*, offers akin mechanisms that facilitate the performance of traumatic fragmentariness and is exponent of the tendency to bring TV screens on stage so as to implement the spectator's awareness about the uncertainty and instability that our means to discern reality are subject to. The play thus explores how differently our symbolic reality may appear when experienced through a lens distant to our own (Western-biased) eye, when we get the illusion that we leave behind our unavoidable perceptive subjectivity.[10] As Barbara Ozieblo contends when she refers to Richard Foreman's *Particle Theory* over the spectator's reaction, "immersed in what one is doing, one is unable to observe the spectacle of one's actions. And so, the theater provides the excitement that is necessary to awaken one's 'sense of the self as a perceiving (by choice, consciously) entity.'" (Ozieblo 2012:158).

In this chapter I will thus try to demonstrate that, through the use of particular strategies, theatrical performance is capable of depriving the spectator of the transcendental network by which his/her reality is symbolized. Therefore, these

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and simulated. Much of nowadays drama and theater explores the contemporary subject's faculties of perception and centers its focus of interest in the study of the collective process by which our reality is constructed (Hans-Ulrich Mohr 11), thus foregrounding the precariousness of each individual's stance and his/her taken for granted reality. This sense of precarious existence in terms of the unreliability of a subject's discerning lens as a member of a symbolic community will be one of the main topics to be studied in Carr's *Woman and Scarecrow* and Kreitzer's *Self Defense or Death of Some Salesmen*.

[9] The production for the premiere of Sarah Kane's *4:48 Psychosis* at the Royal Court Theater the 23th of July 2000 is another prominent example of such theatrical mechanism.

[10] Other contemporary theatrical examples that experiment with the audience's perceptive mechanisms are the Romanian re-inscription of the Danish 'Dogma 95' Film *Festen* by Thomas Vinterberg, to be performed at the London Centre in November 2011 under the direction of Vlad Massaci, and Claire Dowie's *Easy Access (for the Boys)* (1998). Massaci's particular strategy to multiply the fantasmic gaze filtering the action performed on stage for his 2011 production of *Festen* at the Barbican Centre comes to the foreground as astonishingly original and fully effective in terms of traumatic inscription and transmission to a broader audience: Massaci had the idea to introduce a hand-held camera recording the action from the perspective of the actors/characters on the stage, and to have this same recorded action simultaneously projected on two screens facing the audience. In this way, the action on stage was fantasmically multiplied, and the audience was granted a further perspective, granting a genuine intra-psychic gaze. As way of example, the hand-held camera (operated by a character playing the role of camera-man at the celebration occupying the main action of the play) offered a unique perspective of the gaze of the main character (Christian), facing his father and the rest of his family, there reunited, at the moment of his very confession to have been regularly abused by his father as a child.

strategies to be here analyzed shift a human being's perception from self-centeredness to other-centeredness at the same time that the spectator is developing a sense of self-identification in the action performed on stage by the characters (or some of them). The spectator is empowered to watch him/herself from a different, new (and until now unexplored) perspective, which thus broadens his/her view of a double self, both as Lacan's social being after going through the mirror stage on the one hand, and on the other as the inner being who has not yet been exposed to symbolic castration,[11] but is the product of a series of psychological (in this case, traumatic) eventualities. Drama brings about a "balance of audience empathy and distancing that brings understanding" (Ozieblo: 2012:159) and in this chapter I will show how the use of haunting mechanisms on stage have become a predominant strategy for the presentation of a series of traumatic events in a way that facilitates the spectator's understanding of a character's memory and experiencing of the trauma.

Sarah Daniels' *Beside Herself.*

"I see myself seeing myself":[12] Lacan's Notion of Subjectivity in Eve/Evelyn's Traumatic Struggle.

In the introduction to their volume *Performing Gender Violence: Plays by Contemporary Women Playwrights* (2012), Noelia Hernando-Real and Barbara Ozieblo recall the importance in the field of drama to create role models for women who confront the expectations established by the patriarchal order and "manage to control, if not triumph over, traumatic experiences" (2012:4). Both authors argue in favor of theater's capability to examine these different role models and their confrontation with a given traumatic event, as onstage performance invites the audience to take a step back

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[11] Žižek 2005:32.
[12] Elin Diamond on Lacanian anamorphis in "The Shudder of Catharsis in Twentieth-Century Performance." (1995).

in a Brechtian mode of detachment, thus encouraging the audience to digest what is being performed from a more critical perspective. The different strategies to perform traumatic dissociative models that are analyzed in this chapter contribute to achieve this sense of detachment from the action performed on stage, while simultaneously inviting the audience to sympathize with and partake of the traumatic experience reconstructed. This is the case with Daniels' interpretation and recreation of the splitting of a victim's traumatized self in her play *Beside Herself.*

Born in 1956 in London, Sarah Daniels earned a name as a reckless writer whose works aim at a balance between comic and tragic elements, hence Boireau's choice of the appellative "Emotional realism" (Nicole Boireau 104) so as to distinguish her work. Daniels's work was initially classified as exponent of the rise of cultural feminist movements during the early nineties, with plays such as *The Gut Girls* (1988), *Head-Rot Holiday* (1992) and *The Madness of Esme and Shaz* (1994). However, it is her determination to challenge established institutions, such as the taken for granted male dominance in scenarios such as the medical or work field that persist in contemporary revisions of her work. And yet, her plays do not only aim at a political and social denounce of contemporary establishments, as they also endeavor to challenge the audience's 'fantasmic coordinates of meaning' by addressing hidden truths that will unsettle and shock, and by appealing to forms of representation that call for audience sympathy and detachment at once. The traumatic situation described in *Beside Herself* is child abuse. The play has been traditionally classified as an incest narrative, a genre that was shaped in the 80's and that acquired prominence after the publication of *Kiss Daddy Good Night* (1978), an autobiographical work by Louise Armstrong.[13]

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[13]The plays to be explored throughout this thesis present appropriate means for the formulation of a traumatized subject's inner struggle in the attempt to symbolize her traumatic experience due to the fact that the play relies in non-narrative means based on mimetic, rather than diegetic, modes of

Armstrong was the first author to declare that she was the victim of her story and that she was a survivor of child abuse. As a consequence, her work served as a model for subsequent works on child incest. *Beside Herself* provides several of the features Armstrong identifies in her work as characteristic in incest victims. Armstrong talks about the feelings of guilt she felt and the notion of incest as a punishment for not having behaved "in a properly lady like fashion" (Tal 1996:163). In "Not Outside the Range: One Feminist Perspective on Psychic Trauma", Laura S. Brown also discusses this idea of the "willing victim" (106) and makes it general for all PTSD victims, not only for the particular case of incest. Similarly, the idea that when dealing with a case of child incest the mother could have taken a more active role in protecting the child establishes a mistaken course of action, Brown argues, since it is only a means to lay all the blame in the figure of the mother while the father, and the society that allows him to perpetrate the transgression, are left free of guilt (106-7).

In "We Didn't Know What Would Happen: Opening the Discourse on Incest and Sexual Abuse", Kalí Tal explains how victims of incest experience in adulthood a post-traumatic situation in which "personal healing and public perception are inextricably intertwined" (1996:203), and how such fragmentariness is reflected in their attempt to reconstruct their reality, shattered to pieces as a consequence of their impossibility to make sense of the abuse. The split procedure experienced by Evelyn in *Beside Herself* points to such duality gone through by incest victims and, similarly, her chaotic perception of reality is blurred by such impossibility to get rid of the traumatic memory: she carries on with her daily social tasks and employs her social agenda as a shield covering and repressing her wounds. The split of Evelyn's social face and inner (traumatized) self thus represents a victim's psychic struggle and her engagement in the

representation. Therefore, despite the traditional classification of *Beside Herself* as an incest narrative, the analysis I provide here foregrounds the recurrent use of anti-narrative modes of representation in the play.

process of reconstructing reality. By means of a number of non-realistic devices brought to the stage, Daniels' play explores the lens from which the victim reconstructs her reality, hence granting the audience the possibility to participate in such communal struggle. And yet, and in ways which will be further explored, simultaneously to the identification with the survivor of the abuse, the play aims at a series of Brechtian effects entailing a detachment from the action, bringing about a distanced critical reading.

In *Beside Herself*, Daniels is able to reflect such recurrent issues on child abuse by offering two different but parallel accounts on incest. The play focuses the action on Evelyn, her relation with her father, and the social work she feels obliged to fulfill as the wife of an MP. Evelyn meets Nicola, the other incest victim in the play, at the community group home where she volunteers, although they don't become close and barely exchange a word until towards the end of the play. Nicola is a nurse who meets her mother, Lil, again at the community center, after years of not knowing of each other. Nicola abandoned her home when she was a teenager because her stepfather abused her. Her mother, Lil, stayed with her husband, who denied Nicola's accusations. This issue of non-participating mothers is, consequently, introduced in the play, and in a very straightforward and revealing monologue spoken by Lil when Tony, her husband and Nicola's stepfather, is asleep:

> **Lil** …But if I'd have left you while you [Tony] were ill the accusatory fingers would have pointed at me. For our language is cluttered with "she´s to blame". And the knowledge that we won´t be heard or have a safe place to run to and those that do, their struggle will be ignored. What I wanted and what I didn´t get are not worth considering. (*BH* 66)

Daniels' interest in the traumatic eventuality rendering dissociation and the doubling of a victim's ego is further developed in later plays such as *Head-Rot Holiday* (1992). Her playwriting is acclaimed and distinguished by her traditional engagement with social-feminist politics of the 1990's. Issues such as pornography, the anxieties and

agitation associated to the home making and child caring and suicide as way of reaction to the abuses fostered by a patriarchal society (*Ripen Our Darkness* 1981) have contributed to the classification of Daniels' work as feminist-oriented. Daniels accepted the critics' tendency to label her work as feminist, as the underlying idea for much of her work was the determination to challenge the status quo of contemporary patriarchal society. As Elaine Aston explains, "Daniels focused on the male domination of women in the home, from drudgery to domestic violence" and *Beside Herself* "is replete with stories of women who, though abused, carry on nurturing, providing" (2003:41).

Such feminist overtones are already made manifest by Daniels' stylistic choice to open the play with a prelude that to a great extend reminds of the opening to Caryl Churchill's *Top Girls* (1982), which premiered almost a decade earlier. In both instances, the stage action focuses on a group of women whose stories have become relevant in terms of the construction of socially accepted coordinates of meaning from which the individual digests reality. In *Top Girls*, famous women from history tell about the stories by which they have become well-known, and provide their own testimony, thus refuting and demystifying the predominant patriarchal approach to history. Daniels' prelude brings to the stage four female figures from the Bible (Eve, Delilah, Mary and Mrs. Lot), who thus retell the stories that made them famous and that reinforced their negative reputation, gained through the predominant male-biased perspective in storytelling. According to authors Mica Howe and Sarah Appleton Aguiar:

> For the feminist author, revision serves the triple purpose of renewing an established narrative, extending the boundaries of the female character's subjectivity inhabiting the text, and, to quote Nancy A. Walker, "to expose or upset the paradigms of authority inherent in the texts they appropriate" (7). (10)

In *Beside Herself*, Daniels' attempts to challenge patriarchal impositions are made explicit throughout, beginning with the non-naturalistic prelude against the audience's expectations, as the connections between the prelude and the subsequent action in the play are not clarified, and so the audience's critical mechanisms are awakened. The four female characters at the opening of the play discuss the veracity of male-biased statements concerning their stories, and the consequences that these inaccurate reports of their lives have had on their reputation. The fact that their discussion about the authoritative nature of the male voice in storytelling takes place at a hairdresser's reinforces Daniels' humoristic voice from the very beginning of the play as the women try to demystify the male view predominant in storytelling but they do so at the very place that traditionally highlights the stereotypical patriarchal view of women as superficial, shallow and vane.

> **Delilah** …What d'yer want to know, Eve? That I was damned for being an evil castrating bitch? And that's what everybody believes I am. But do they ever bother to try and imagine what it was like for me –being married to a man for whom and afternoon's work was killing a few hundred people with the jaw bone of a donkey? Do they heck.
>
> **Mary** Oh, what did you do?
>
> **Delilah** It was his hair weren't it? To cut a long story short, I did.
>
> **Mary** You cut your husband's hair without his permission? That's terrible. (*BH* 2)

Yet, at the same time, the non-naturalistic nature of this opening prelude sets the audience's attention into a critical mode that is directed to certain topics that will be further developed throughout the play by means of comments made by different characters where they refer to, for example, the functioning of memory ("**Mrs Lot** Funny what gets remembered and what gets forgotten" *BH* 3) or the unquestionable supremacy of men's voice in storytelling ("**Delilah** In the beginning was their Word" *BH* 5). This non-naturalistic setting for the opening prelude already establishes a

Brechtian mode of detachment for the audience which arouses their critical mechanisms and establishes a number of topics that will be discussed and presented throughout the play so as to be scrutinized by the audience's thus awakened critical gaze. The fact that the characters in the prelude cannot be seen ("**Eve** What difference does it make. She can't see or hear me. Nobody's taken any notice of us for centuries" *BH* 6) along with the fact that their discussion and storytelling is silenced by a man's voice ("**Man** (*voice over the tannoy*) Would those women causing a fracas in the biscuit aisle please be quite" *BH* 6) are further strategies hinting at the critical overtone the rest of the play will put forward. One of the aims of the prologue, therefore, is to establish a sense of split reality by questioning well-known stories that were taken for granted and offering an alternative vision to reality through the first person accounts told by the four female characters on stage. This interrogation of the traditionally accepted male truth and the presentation of a new view of reality will be further developed in the play by means of several strategies that will support the sense of split existence established in the prologue. The use of certain props (a mirror, a painting hanging on a wall…) and the introduction of a character playing the role of a psychic double for the main character will be some of the theatrical strategies pointing to the splitting of the main character' s self (Lacan's *innenwelt* vs. *umwelt*). Additionally, the action of the play will question the supremacy of the predominant interpretative gesture, generally tainted by a prevailing male view, and will point to the unreliable nature of words and the deceitful process of symbolic appropriation by which a misleading version of a given event main gain authority over the Real, that remains, thus repudiated.

The predominant critical procedures in current analytical and philosophic trends increasingly search for the essence of humanity by spotting out the means that distort a subject's view of reality. The notion of subjectivity is thus questioned time and again,

and a new task seems to dominate today's critical procedures: "to think the essence of humanity outside the domain of subjectivity" (Žižek 2005:15). The theatrical stage offers an optimal terrain where to delve into the functioning of subjectivity and a subject's perception of reality. Brechtian theory already explored theatrical means questioning the logical unity of the real, and managed to do so with his *Verfremdungseffekt*, which offered a fresh and distanced (thus unbiased by society's symbolic impositions) view of reality. Today's performing mechanisms have inherited Brecht's approach to performance in the search for a trustworthy means to reproduce traumatic memory and the procedure undergone by the subject's traumatized inner self. Belatedness and dissociation, traumatic symptoms dealing with the perception of reality, have been explored on stage in the attempt to spread an understanding of how a given traumatic event may distort the perception of reality. Belatedness deals with the inability to assimilate the trauma at the moment of its occurrence, and dissociation involves the split of the subject's perception into a double apprehension of reality (one in which the subject accepts society's impositions, and one where the trauma dominates perception mechanisms, thus ignoring the symbolic order). The idea that theatrical perception is also guided by analogous mechanisms makes of performance an apt terrain for the analysis of the domain of subjectivity. The audience needs time after each performance so as to digest the aspects dealt with on the stage, and experiences a process that may be paralleled with traumatic belatedness. Similarly, the reception processes are subjected to the split procedure by which the spectator's imaginary identification with the onstage action is interrupted by the contradictory relations of the symbolic. The audience's experiencing of the action performed may be analyzed, therefore, at two different levels: the identification with the reality represented on the stage and the simultaneous challenge to and distancing from such theatrical sub-reality

achieved by means of the explicit reference to the performing mechanisms (which is the case, especially when the theatrical action is exposed by means of Brechtian effects).

In her analysis of Lacan's statement "I see myself seeing myself" included in his study on "anamorphosis", Diamond concludes that "The subject never really sees herself, then, except through the gaze of the other" (1995:152). In Daniels' *Beside Herself*, Eve is this 'Other'-perspective from which Evelyn gets to see herself. This new perspective offered by Eve is distanced from the symbolic order and so complies with Žižek's stance that we need to see things anew so as to approach the Lacanian Real (in this case, the truth of the initial trauma):

> It is in such weird experiences that one catches what Lacan called gaze as *objet petit a*, the part of our image which eludes the mirror-like symmetrical relationship. When we see ourselves 'from outside,' from this impossible point, the traumatic feature is not that I am objectivized, reduced to an external object for the gaze, but, rather, that *it is my gaze itself which is objectivized*, which observes me from the outside; which, precisely, means that my gaze is no longer mine, that it is stolen from me. (2009: xiv)

> and

> …once a fantasy is realized, once a fantasmic object directly appears in reality, reality is no longer the same…what happens to the body when it is separated from its voice, when the voice is substracted from the wholeness of the person? (2009: xii)

The role Eve plays in *Beside Herself* coincides with the fantasmic object Žižek refers to, the angle or the lens from which Evelyn is now allowed to observe and examine anew her bodily and social relations and her surroundings. Her entire view of a reality (which is biased by society's standards and the symbolic order) is now fragmented and estranged (defamiliarized) through this procedure that thus suppresses our transcendental coordinates of meaning. This brand new view of herself that is now granted to Evelyn by the apparition of Eve as a spectral lens from which to analyze her reality is further developed by the use of certain props on the stage, such as the broken

mirror that presides the stage and which Evelyn covers with a painting by Pieter Brueghel (*Landscape with the Fall of Icarus*, c.1558):

> **Evelyn** I knew it was supposed to be unlucky to have a mirror over a fireplace but (*Pause*.) I look good.
>
> **Eve** Stupid
>
> **Evelyn** I feel okay
>
> **Eve** Dirty
>
> **Evelyn** I'm alright.
>
> **Eve** Worthless
>
> **Evelyn** Just go away. Now, best place for the picture.
>
> **Eve** You shouldn't talk to yourself. Not here of all places. (*BH* 14)

Evelyn then hangs Brueghel's painting on the wall so as to "disguise some of the mess until you've had time to clean up" (*BH* 14). In this fashion, she performs a similar move to her daily struggle to conceal and disguise her own psychic "mess", and by doing so complies with the kernel of ideology that dominates the social realm, where the patriarchal order monopolizes the formulation of the symbolic real. During her entire life, Evelyn has been running errands, doing charity work, and decorating, thus making up a life that seems like a beautiful painting that covers "the mess until [she has] had time to clean up". Evelyn's *Innenwelt* and *Umwelt* are hence antagonistic: Evelyn's "big Other" (in Lacanian terms, the symbolic order that regulates social life) and her spectral self (Eve, or her fantasmic self that does not seem to fit the symbolic social order) are in complete contradiction, to the point that Evelyn's sense of identity, or her own conception of selfhood, breaks into pieces, just as her own fragmented reflection in the broken mirror presiding the stage, which "merely reflects on [her] sanity." (*BH* 14)

The notion of the 'split self' is thus introduced in the story by the doubling of the main character, Evelyn, who splits into two at the very opening of the play, her alter ego

being Eve.[14] There is, in this sense, a doubling of Evelyn's experiencing of reality: her attempt to fit in the symbolic-social order at the same time that her fantasmic self breaks apart the taken for granted symbolized materiality. The broken mirror is thereof introduced as a device adding to the splitting effect which furthermore increases the sense of fragmentariness already aimed at by the doubling of the main character. In "The Mirror Stage as Formative of the *I* Function" (1949), Lacan described the mirror stage as

> a drama whose internal pressure pushes precipituously from insufficiency to anticipation – and, for the subject caught up in the lure of spatial identification, turns out fantasies that proceed from a fragmented image of the body to what I will call an "orthopedic" form of its totality –and to the finally donned armor of an alienating identity that will mark his entire mental development with its rigid structure. Thus, the shattering of the *Innenwelt* to *Umwelt* circle gives rise to an inexhaustible squaring of the ego's audits. (2002:6)

Daniels also uses the mirror as a means to reveal Evelyn's undecidability concerning her existential drive to ascertain the truth of it, at the same time that her symbolic self keeps denying the event and conforming to the fragmentary self it generated. When she comes into the living room and faces her shattered reflection in the broken mirror, she likes what she sees, as if she was satisfied with having just a partial view of herself and did not need (or was trying to avoid) having a complete picture of herself. Eve, her alter ego representing her repressed subconscious, tells her that attitude is "stupid". Evelyn's attempt to silence the voice of the repressed ("go away" in the quotation above) indicates she does not want to face the traumatic memory. Moreover, she utters out loud affirmative statements that sound redundant but are actually aimed at convincing herself of their truth, so she is not only trying to avoid the traumatic memory, but she is also hiding it under the false pretense that she is alright.

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[14] Eve also stands for a more primitive version of Evelyn's female self within the biblical echoes of transgression and sin.

The analysis of Eve/Evelyn in terms of their naming is also revealing of what the function of each of these two characters is from a Lacanian point of view. "Eve" can be considered as short-name for "Evelyn", just as the character itself works as a kind of child-like Evelyn, or an Evelyn whose personality is not well developed into the adult, social world. Eve might be regarded, therefore, as a child-like Evelyn before going through the mirror stage and discovering her external, social self. She is uninhibited enough to state out loud what she really thinks about people or about a given situation, while Evelyn is the voice of what is socially more appropriate to do, considering the given circumstances:

> **Shirley** I've got to go out. It shouldn't be too long but we are destined to have a call from a couple on behalf of the local ratepayers' association. Would you see them and give them the benefit of your diplomacy?
> **Evelyn** Me?
> **Shirley** If you don't mind.
> **Eve** I do mind.
>   …
> **Shirly** (*curtly*) Try, if at all possible, to put the liberal point of view.
> **Eve** No, I don't want to
>   …
> **Evelyn** Shirley, I'd love to, but I'm afraid –
> **Shirley** (*not hearing*) And thanks very much for doing the decorating… (*BH* 44)

Thus, Eve plays the role of an Evelyn that has not gone yet through the whole process described by Lacan, but who is stuck in that initial step before the mirror stage and before developing social skills. On the other hand, Evelyn is nothing but a social being, and because of that, she seems to have lost that touch of humanity, sensibility or the ability to deal with the Other, that characterizes the social subject. That is especially made visible in the scene where she finds the dead body of Dave, one of the patients living in the community house. While Evelyn is only worried about the impression it would cause on the neighbors visiting the community center, it is Eve the one that first notices the dead body and alarms Evelyn. Thus, while Evelyn remains untouched, Eve demonstrates having feelings that override any social politeness rule.

Eve He's dead! He's dead!
Evelyn I'm afraid the mirror got broken and we're still waiting for a replacement.
Eve Stop being so polite.
Gaynor Not a very welcoming omen.

…

Eve That man in that chair has died
Gaynor *(ruefully)* Not to the first seven years at least.
Evelyn Can I get you a cup of coffee?
Eve Try and say excuse me but I think something's wrong and I can't cope.
Evelyn Please, come to the kitchen. This kettle's boiled and you can see what it looks like. *(Turns to go into the kitchen)*
Eve Don't just pretend it's all right…
Are you mad? Are you mad?
Weeps. (*BH* 49-50)

It is Eve, then, who first notices and who first wants to do something about Dave's situation. She urges Evelyn to get rid of her social commitment (she is showing the community house to two neighbors) so that she can attend this other task that Evelyn is not able to cope with because of her inability to deal with feelings and tasks appealing to human sensibility, since she seems to have lost that capacity for empathy. Evelyn's daily life is thus reduced to her social façade and to a number of habits and routines that she herself acknowledges to perform only so as to fit into the symbolic order (such as the fact that she "only smokes socially" *BH* 18). It is the fact that she does not seem to find the way to fit her *Umwelt*, or the Eve inside her into this social world (Lacan's *Innenwelt*) that tears her inner world into pieces (which is, as mentioned before, symbolized by the broken mirror). The broken mirror is therefore symbolic for Evelyn's fragmentariness, as her inner self is also broken to the point that she does not react at the sight of a dead body of someone she used to know, lest her social image (and thus her role in the symbolic order) is damaged.[15] It is precisely this event that triggers Evelyn's nervous breakdown and that finally forces her to face the trauma and to try to put everything on its place, just like the broken mirror needs to be moved and replaced for another one showing a reassuring reflection of the symbolic real: **Lil** Unnerving,

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[15] Evelyn avoids acknowledging Dave's death so as not to alert the two neighbors visiting the social center that very moment (*BH* 49).

ain't it- how you can only see a piece of yourself in a shard of mirror. It's sort of like trying to recall a dream when you can only visualize the bit that woke you up. (*BH* 12)

Lacan elaborated his theory about the mirror stage between the years 1936 and 1949. Borrowing Henry Wallon's terminology, Lacan's contributions, especially his latest version of the lecture on the mirror stage, offered a view of the mirror stage as a phase that determines "the function of imagos, which is to establish a relationship between an organism and its reality- or, as they say, between the *Innenwelt* and the *Umwelt*" (Lacan 2002:6).[16] The mirror stage establishes the transition by which the subject moves from a view of the self that is fragmentary and prosthetic to a comprehensive social view of the self. In addition to this, our holistic view of any given object (the one we gain after we go through the mirror stage, when we acquire a perspective of reality as filtered by our symbolic apparatus) is biased by our existence in a given community. This view of the symbolic real may be fragmented and estranged by certain procedures by which our transcendental coordinates of meaning are suppressed. When we are deprived of this biased view of the symbolic order and dispossessed of our fantasmic coordinates of meaning, then we are granted access to things the way they are "in themselves" (Žižek 2009). These procedures by which we are, so to say, separated from our body (from our taken for granted relations with the external world) allow us to access a non-biased (and maybe prosthetic) view of reality, untainted by the symbolic order, thus approaching the unbiased Real (Hegel's Absolute).

Beside Herself and the other two plays to be analyzed in this chapter offer such strategies by which the audience is removed from their seats and from their daily and taken for granted relations with the outer world, in the attempt to make the experience

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[16] Lacan's views on identity formation coincided with Freud's notion of a given subject's psychic life as constituted by a series of phases with a beginning and an end never to be gone through again. Thus, Lacan's stance opposed Klein's line of thought according to which a subject's psychic life is determined by a series of fluid 'positions' that are not restricted to one stage of the subject's life but which can be re-experienced at other stages throughout life.

of traumatic dissociation extensive and understandable by the wider audience. Eve and the use of a broken mirror on the stage are examples of such theatrical procedures dominating the stage that aim at an authentic approximation to the Hegelian Absolute Real.

Žižek's ideas on the distortion of our "raw perception" (2009:xiii) remind of Klein's major theoretical contributions, which already supported the idea that "Nothing is seen simply as it is: some kind of unconscious fantasy is attached to every perception" (Segal 29). Her stance on identity formation revolved around the idea that a subject's psychic growth is determined by the going through different positions that might be re-visited in adulthood. The paranoid-schizoid position and the depressive position were introduced by Klein as the two main psychic stands accounting for anxieties determining the development of the self. The paranoid-schizoid position is the psychic process where the child/subject's perception seems to be blurred and characterized by a tendency to split the perception of the symbolic real into the extreme 'good' or the completely 'bad', while the process that tends to follow this one, the depressive position, is identified by the acquisition of a level of discernment that provides the subject with a more comprehensive and inclusive perception of the symbolic real. In *Beside Herself*, Evelyn's psychic position is characterized by her split perception of reality. Eve represents all that has not been assimilated and worked through by Evelyn's inner self or *Innenwelt*, the fantasmic Other or what cannot be processed and is thus esteemed as strange and 'bad', while her *Umwelt* is that which she esteems to be 'good', correct, or 'normal', if measured from the perspective of symbolic coordinates of meaning. The paranoid-schizoid position is, therefore, "The process of sorting out good and bad objects [which] involves projection of parts of the self. Perception is distorted…The boundary between self and other is in some ways denied"

(Segal 35). In *Beside Herself*, the staging of Eve provides a lens from which the audience is granted access to Evelyn's unassimilated trauma, which she unconsciously locks down and which remains repressed due to the fact that the reality evoked by Eve is esteemed as the 'bad' object by Evelyn's subconscious, as it does not fit the social and symbolic order that she so hardly tries to conform to (as this is what her ego perceives as the 'good' or the acceptable object):

> **George** …How's things otherwise?
> **Evelyn** Oh, you know, busy.
> **George** Keeping busy is the wicket keeper of copying, that I do know.
> …
> **Evelyn** You know I want to finish redecorating the house and with my daytimes rather full, the only chance I get is in the evenings.
> **George** You take on too much, Evelyn. Being the wife of an MP doesn't mean you have to spend every waking hour in voluntary work.
> **Eve** It fills the time.
> **Evelyn** It's important to practice what you preach. (BH 7-8)

One of the main reasons why Evelyn seems to be unable to assimilate the trauma of her childhood abuse is that there seems to be no language, no words anointed to formulate it, which prevents her from making sense of her traumatic memory and from including it in her perception of what she esteems to be the 'good', the normal everyday life, or the reality she knows. In other words, Klein's ideas about the paranoid-schizoid subject's inability to arrive at a holistic view of reality, where there is place for objects housing both good and bad, is reflected on Evelyn's inability to make sense of the 'bad' that she has been denying for years, being unable to accept it and adapt it to the reality she knows, as a consequence of the lack of mechanisms that would enable the working out of the trauma. As a consequence, Eve materializes as the psychic location where to set free what cannot be uttered and symbolized.

In *Beside Herself*, Daniels commits to Tal's contention that the work of the critic in the literature of trauma is its attempt "to deconstruct the process by which the dominant culture codifies their traumatic experience" (1996:18). The spectator/reader of

the plays analyzed in this chapter is pushed to deconstruct a victim's reality so as to share her traumatized gaze and her struggle to recover a cohesive-comprehensive view of reality (as opposed to their chaotic and split discerning capabilities during the post-traumatic stage). And, simultaneously, such cohesive view of reality never reaches a satisfactory formulation as a consequence of a lack in the symbolic order, insufficient to provide the symbols, language or words so as to formulate, in this case, Evelyn's inner traumatic world:

> **Evelyn** They look and act differently so you can tell they are not the men you marry, depend on, threw your lot in with, build your whole life around. Because if they were, there would be the language to say 'Don't marry my son- he can't be trusted with those weaker than him.' Or 'Don't be alone with your father-he's…he's… (*She cannot finish the sentence. She looks at the ground.*)
> **Nicola** A rapist.
> …
> **Lil** [to her husband, who is asleep] …But if I had left you while you were ill the accusatory fingers would have pointed at me. For our language is cluttered with 'she's to blame'. And the knowledge that we won't be heard or have a safe place to run to and those that do, their struggle will be ignored." (*BH* 66)

Eve is therefore a mechanism helping Evelyn in the transition from the paranoid-schizoid position (characterized by the inability to develop an integrated view of the world and by the development of a split perspective of reality) to the depressive position (the overcoming of the paranoid position and the initiation of a new position where her perspective of the real is not split but multi-layered). It is because of this that, while Eve appeared as a mechanism opposing Evelyn's social face, at the end of the play both Eve and Evelyn (the subject's traumatic self and her social self) converge and come to an agreement, thus leaving behind the psychic position in which the subject was only granted a fragmented view of the symbolic order (either Eve's traumatized view or Evelyn's view, restricted to the social, symbolic realm). The two sides of one single subject who initially confronted each other, now converge and struggle to achieve one single aim: the working through of the trauma so as to obtain a comprehensive view of reality by means of the symbolic formulation of traumatic memory.

Beside Herself also explores the duality characterizing a subject's perception, the different layers of reality, or the multiple gazes from which reality is approached. The symbolic order where Evelyn feels compelled to fit in so as to suppress and silence her inner fantasmic self is dominated by patriarchal restrictions that predispose each subject's coordinates of meaning (perception of reality). The play thus exposes how words function in the exact same way as the painting by Brueghel that Evelyn brought to the community house so as to cover the mess, the broken mirror. Language creates a whole view of reality (the symbolic order) based on words, what they hide (by means of acronyms or euphemisms, for example) and what is implicitly signified with the use of certain words. Just like the broken mirror in St. Dympha's, language projects a distorted view of reality, and Daniels's play explores the extent to which words and the symbolic may taint each individual's perception of the Real and how language distances a given subject's *Innenwelt* from the symbolic universe or *Umwelt* (the external social reality). The research work that one of the characters in the play carries out works in this same direction: **Shirley** …I am doing an M Phil but on how our language is obsessed by turning everything into a noun. Naming it there by distancing it from personal experience, er making it safe… (*BH* 26)

Language distorts a subject's inner world in the way it is symbolized or "made safe" so as to fit in into the symbolic order. Thus, as mentioned above, Evelyn's childhood trauma finds no means to accommodate the symbolic real, as she is unable to find the words to formulate it ("Don't be alone with your father- he's…he's… (*She cannot finish the sentence. She looks at the ground.*)" *BH* 66). Words subjugate the trauma to the rules that dominate the symbolic order thus eliminating the stroke of unmediated reality and authenticity that defines traumatic memory. As Shirley says, language does "normalize" the trauma and makes it "safe", in the sense that by naming

it the victim gets the false pretence that the traumatic memory is under control, when, in fact, the inclusion of the traumatic memory into the symbolic order (narrative memory) only corrupts such memory.

The play is replete with acronyms, euphemisms and linguistic strategies by which reality is classified according to the criteria of the ruling voices (mostly male voices) and thus, falsified (*BH* 12, 20, 21, 24, 27). The extent to which language corrupts and taints each individual's perspective of the Real is exemplified by the account of the story of a young woman whose clinical profile is studied and considered as a potential new inmate in St. Dympha's. As the executive committee meet to decide the names of the new inmates, the audience get to see how extremely biased we are by the naming processes that classify reality into different categories and by the leading voices regulating storytelling. This is the case of scene two, where the characters study profiles and read brief descriptions about each inmate, thus allowing for a stark classification of medical profiles and forgetting that behind those scientific documents and bare names (medical euphemisms and acronyms) there are real human beings whose traumas where truly experienced, despite the fact that they are now just reduced to a two-lines description on a medical profile.[17] That is the case with the profile of one of the tentative inmates, Dawn:

> **Greg** …Dawn is twenty-two. She has a very severe hearing loss. Her speech is indistinct often incoherent. She relies heavily on lipreading and doesn´t mix with deaf people who use sign language. Because of her lack of communication skills she finds it difficult to make friends and is very isolated. Five years ago, her child then aged three months was taken into care…
> …
> **Roy** …she has a personality disorder that seems to evade definition…
> …

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[17] Sarah Kane's *4:48 Psychosis* (2000) is also representative of such attempt to condemn *biopower* and the patriarchal subjugating mechanisms oppressing women's ill bodies. James McDonald's original production divided the performed action into three different sections to be performed by three different actors, one of them impersonating the doctor/perpetrator. McDonald's view was inspired by Kane's line in this same play: "Victim, perpetrator, bystander" (Kane 2001:231), as noted by Ken Urban (316).

> **Greg** ...Dawn ran away from home when she got pregnant. Got a flat and was living alone with the baby. She went out leaving the baby alone. The police got involved when the baby was admitted to hospital with bad burns. Dawn was put on probation and the baby was taken into care. (*BH* 21-23)

The fact that Dawn's personality disorder "seems to evade definition" is but a reminder of the falsifying procedures that reality is exposed to when suppressed by the attempt to scrutinize the Real by means of the (insufficient) instruments offered by the symbolic order. Dawn's medical profile, which is conclusive for her ineligibility as an inmate in St. Dympha's, leaves behind much of the truth and thus dooms her not to be elected:

> **Roy** …She didn't help matters much by physically attacking her probation officer. Doesn't like men. Apparently she was messed about with as a child…To be fair, I think it was more that the probation officer had a profusion of a beard and was quite impossible to lipread. Although, it is suspected that the father of the child could have been her own father. (*BH* 23)

Despite Roy's interpretation on the medical notes about Dawn's case, her application is dismissed and the committee agrees on accepting Dave's. This situation is represented on the play as an example of the extent to which each individual's perception of the Real is biased and tainted by language and words, unable to contain the veracity of, in this case, Dawn's trauma. Additionally, the authoritative voice imposing such corrupted views is a male voice, as is put forward several times throughout the play: **Roy** I have a foolproof method Evelyn for spotting depression, in women at least. If it gets past four o'clock in the afternoon on the day they're admitted and they still haven't asked for a cup of coffee- they are depressed. (*BH* 22)

Daniels's critical overtones concerning the male-biased nature of storytelling were already established at the Prelude of the play, where the non-realistic strategies activate the audience's critical mechanisms in a Brechtian fashion. In the Prelude, the four biblical female characters are given the chance to re-tell their own personal experiences which had been mis-interpreted by centuries, due to the predominant patriarchal voice conducting symbolic representation. Howe and Appleton Aguiar remind us that

> [m]an's control and domination of the written language has trapped women inside a male truth which she no longer wants to unquestioningly accept, and feminist criticisms, although sometimes factious, basically agree that revision is empowering, whether it be to take control of (other)wise man's language or to create a separate feminine discourse. (11)

Daniels's theatrical strategies in *Beside Herself* position the audience at a critical distance that is adequate for the development of a will to react. The establishment of the action in the Prelude as detached from a naturalistic representation of the Real warns the audience from the very beginning about the critical content and guides them to an interpretation of the action from a more distanced perspective, thus liberated from the taken for granted patriarchal standards dominating the symbolic order and which are challenged in the play. Fernández-Morales et al. remind us of the dominant role of the male voice in story-telling and go a step further to condemn how patriarchal culture diminishes and degrades the female body by reducing it to the level of a non-sentient object (2012:24). This is the case, they argue, in fields as disparate as war (where women's bodies, raped, tortured and kidnapped, are used as weapons for extortion), the home (as is the case in *Beside Herself*), the working place, and many other contexts where women's position is demeaned by male dominant establishments, thus perpetuating the hegemonic patriarchal order. These authors introduce a further realm where "women's bodies have been demeaned, diminished, and reduced to the object of experimentation" (2012:24). They recall Michel Foucault's *The Birth of the Clinic* (1963) and his stance that the eighteenth century saw the professionalization of medicine and the development of the clinic as a "vertical, gaze-dominated environment" (2012:24).

From there, Fernández-Morales et al. develop this idea from a feminist point of view and contend that it is the male gaze what occupies the top of this vertical environment. They study the violent relationship between the male dominating doctor

figure and the female body, and conclude that there is a patriarchal tendency to dominate, control and dehumanize the aching and agonizing female body, and that is a consequence of prevailing cultural stereotypes such as women's weakness, victimized and wailing nature. The professionalization of the clinic, drawn towards an elitist approach to medical treatment in which the patient is regarded as an object of study rather than a sentient being, was labeled by Foucault as *biopower*, and its scope is now thus expanded by authors such as Margaret McClaren, Lois McNay, Jana Sawicki and Fernández-Morales et al. so as to include the chauvinistic regulation of medical analysis and treatment. In *Beside Herself*, the dismissal of Dawn as a potential inmate to be treated in St. Dympha's would be an example of the dominating male voice appropriating the symbolic nature of the clinical universe. Defamiliarizing strategies such as the presence of a grown-up actor in children's clothes playing the role of dissociated ego, or the introduction of the theatrical action by means of a number of characters existing in a kind of surrealistic universe set up the spectator's reading mechanisms so as to receive in a critical way (and thus so as to react actively) the action performed on stage.

This critical approach to the vertical and gender-biased relationship between doctor and patient has been further explored in contemporary plays such as the already mentioned *4.48 Psychosis* (2000) and also in Margaret Edson's *Wit* (1995), where a renowned university professor who is terminally ill narrates her journey towards the last minutes of her life. The audience witnesses her struggle to be treated with dignity while on her deathbed, as her body is scrutinized and inspected by doctors looking upon her as if they were dealing with a non-sentient object of study. In a similar way, Marina Carr's *Woman and Scarecrow* (2006) also offers an approach to a woman's deathbed and her struggle to end her life with dignity and sticking to the truth of her life experiences, thus

denying any external voices attempting to falsify and corrupt her life memories (mostly her husband's but also her own inner voice, as she fights with her own split self, who appears in the shape of a ghostly scarecrow). *Woman and Scarecrow* (2006) thus perpetuates this tradition to analyze the power relationship between women and men in the context of the deathbed, where the female voice struggles to gain authority by defeating the so far dominating male presence in storytelling. Carr continues to explore the issue of the split self (Klein's paranoid-schizoid position) employing strategies that remind us of the ones so far analyzed: the use of a mirror on the stage as an instrument for the main character to verify the integrity of the self, or the use of a double that is only recognized and accepted in the main character's inner reality.

Marina Carr's *Woman and Scarecrow.*

"As I stand there, I see myself here,"[18] Scarecrow as Fantasmic Lens to Trauma.

The diagnosis of illness where the means of assessment mostly rely on psychological factors has been defined as psychologisation (Goudsmit and Gadd 1991). Diagnosis by psychologisation takes place when there are little medical resources granting a more thorough reading of a patient's symptoms, or when there is a lack of knowledge on the part of the medical professional, who may be additionally biased by the patient's intrinsic or psychosomatic traits such as age, sexual orientation or what ,Goudsmit argues, is behind the majority of misdiagnosis by psychologisation, gender (Goudsmit 1994:8). The stereotypical portrait of women as weak, whining, hysteric and unstable, has in numerous occasions led to the misinterpretation of a number of symptoms that, if properly and clinically considered, would have been apprehended as

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[18] *WS* 200.

signals for the medically documented disorders that actually occasioned their appearance. The symbolic code revolving around the field of the clinic has traditionally been characterized by the predominant and influential male medical gaze, as exemplified in the misdiagnosis of Dawn's case in Daniels' *Beside Herself.*

The conventional and formulaic portrait of female weakness has led to a generalized disregard of illness and death struggle as experienced by women. In Marina Carr's *Woman and Scarecrow*, Woman's role as a dying wife assumes the above mentioned traits to the point that they are taken for granted and received with spite and animosity by her husband, who only blames her for not being able to take care of the children herself, and for not being able to finally die once and for all:

> **Him** …The children aren't talking to me because I won't let them go clubbing. They haven't been to school in weeks. We're all waiting! We're all waiting! Die if you are going to. If not. Get up!
>
> …
>
> *Woman just stares at him.*
>
> You drive me to the limit every time so I say things that shouldn't be said…Look, take this stuff…it's revenge enough you are going. Must I watch you go howling? (*WS* 187)

Illness as suffered by women and regarded by the male (whether it is the medical or a familiar) gaze has, in such a way, been reduced to a number of stereotypes that are difficult to overcome. As mentioned above, in *The Birth of the Clinic* (1963), Foucault claims that it was in the nineteenth century that the medical and clinic specialization of illness took place. However, he argues that there are (and there had always been before that medical classification of disease came into existence) other possibilities in the distribution of illness:

> The space of *configuration* of the disease and the space of *localization* of the illness in the body have been superimposed, in medical experience, for only a

relatively short period of time--the period that coincides with nineteenth-century medicine. This is the period that marks the suzerainty of the gaze. (1973:4)

This unison of the clinical and the pragmatic gaze towards the ill body brought about the classification of symptoms, bodily afflictions, and the gender-stereotypical labels above mentioned. In *Woman and Scarecrow*, Carr creates a number of defamiliarizing techniques by which this unison is broken, and the audience is allowed a fragmented, geometrical view of the ill body's atlas. In *Woman and Scarecrow*, Woman's own stance is fractured by means of the alter ego-figure who accompanies her on her last journey before death. This journey will take Woman to re-visit and regard her past experiences with new eyes that remain untainted by the symbolic attempt to make sense of the Real. The splitting experience is accordingly explored on a twofold basis, as Woman's split procedures somehow parallel the audience's double experience of both empathy and concomitant detachment towards the action on the stage, achieved by the theatrical effects to be here further analyzed.

In the play, Woman's own split perspective illustrates the Kleinian transition from depressive to paranoid-schizoid positions, as she is doomed to retrace her lifelong steps in (symbolic) identity formation as she approaches death. According to Emilia Steuerman, one of Klein's great contributions to the study of the psychic formation of the individual is "the dynamic aspect of the interaction between our internal world of object-relations and the external world of intersubjective relations." (67) Klein's work recognizes the flexible nature of psychic regressions and positions which defines the ways in which we deal with new life challenges such as loss or, as is the case in *Woman and Scarecrow*, the preparation for one's own death. Thus, Klein's psychic positions indicate that a human being's psychic life is defined by the inter-play of particular psychological defense mechanisms. In *Woman and Scarecrow* Woman's psychological

armor debilitates as she gradually approaches death, her mental state becoming weaker. The audience is allowed to witness the deterioration of her psychic life and her retrocession in terms of the positions and stages in identity formation as established by Klein and Lacan.[19] The play may then be regarded as a journey exploring Woman's steps back in identity formation, as the different social roles she acquired throughout her life are revisited in her retrospective examination of her life with the help of a spectral figure: Scarecrow. The presence of the Scarecrow figure works as guidance in Woman's revision of both her multiple symbolic identities and her social frame (such as her body, which is analyzed into pieces as if a non-sentient carcass) on the one hand, and her memories and inner life, on the other. Woman and Scarecrow both revisit together Woman's past through a revision of her roles as mother, wife, lover and daughter thus offering a retrospective view of Woman's self as she goes through a gradual process of existential disintegration (**Woman** "It is wonderful to have such a critical spectator on all one's most intimate journeys" *WS* 167). The minimalist setting of the play aims at conducting our attention to the perpetual dispute between Woman and Scarecrow about past decisions and experiences (their authenticity as retold by one or the other) and the upcoming steps to be soon taken.

Described as "[c]laustrophobic, distressing and stomach twisting." (Sierz 2010:48), the play is more in contact with Carr's initial absurdist style (*Low in the Dark* 1989), and it could be considered as an opening for a new writing development to some extent distanced from her more macabre ghost stories explored in chapter one in this thesis. It appeals for a very visceral kind of humor which relies on a woman's despair not to be robbed of her memories and her identity roles (as mother, wife, lover and

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[19] Klein's contributions in terms of the establishment of a series of psychic positions will be the main critical focus here, but an analysis of Woman's psychic retrocession considering the return to her psychic identity before going through the Lacanian mirror stage will also be explored.

daughter), her place in the only (symbolic) reality she knows, as she approaches her own death.

The play begins with Woman's request to return to where she came from ("**Woman** I started out west. I'd like to finish there" *WS* 153), a request which is denied by Scarecrow, although it paradoxically becomes suggestive for the journey undertaken from that moment onwards in the play. As Woman's life approaches its end, we witness a shift in her discerning mechanisms that comes hand in hand with the struggle she fights against her own unconscious or alterego, Scarecrow. Woman grows increasingly detached from the symbolic order and the holistic (and yet imperfect) representation of the Real there prevailing, so as to acquire a fragmentary perception of the Real in her revision of her past life. From a Kleinian perspective, Woman's psychological defense mechanisms shift as he approaches her symbolic disintegration, as she moves from the depressive to the paranoid-schizoid positions in her attempt to preserve her memories (the only legacy that she is left with these very last moments) and so as to protect her integrity, or her symbolic identity, from foreign threatening attempts to distort it (her aunt's, her husband's and even at some points Scarecrow's own portrayals of Woman's past, which contradict Woman's views).

> **Scarecrow** I know you made it up. That baloney about the red coat. It never happened.
>
> **Woman** Now you're going to hijack my memories. Don't you start!
>
> **Scarecrow** Why would you lie like that?
>
> **Woman** Are you telling me there was no moment with my mother on the day she died?
>
> **Scarecrow** There was a moment all right, but that wasn't it.
>
> **Woman** That was a defining moment and now you want to take it from me. (*WS* 199)

This inner self struggle concerning the authenticity of a very fugacious recollection leads to a fantasmic re-visitation of that very moment when Woman's mother was herself struggling against death. This re-visitation is meant for Woman to re-experience that very moment with the help of Scarecrow, whose function is to bring her closer to a noumenal understanding of her life, and to grant her the chance to regard her life from a lens unbiased by symbolic restrictions.[20] The more Woman approximates her death, the more distanced she becomes to the symbolic code filtering her view of the reality surrounding her and, hence, from her restrictive 'fantasmic coordinates of meaning' (as put by Žižek), or her symbolic understanding of the Real:

> **Woman** Details are all I have. The larger canvas has eluded me. Leave me the details.
>
> **Scarecrow** I'll leave you the details that are true.
>
> **Woman** Then tell me what I'm wearing. What did I look like? I can't see myself.
>
> **Scarecrow** Can you see her?
>
> *A pause…a long pause.*
>
> **Woman** Yes…I can see her.
>
> **Scarecrow** And what is she doing?
>
> **Woman** She's sleeping.
>
> **Scarecrow** What else?
>
> **Woman** Nothing else. She's sleeping. Her mouth is open. Her tongue is moving as if she's sucking on something…I've never seen her asleep before. She's on her side. The sheets are hard and white. Her mouth is open, her tongue is moving. Her hair is flat across the pillow as if someone had ironed it and nailed it there…And that's all…surely that can't be all. (*WS* 200)

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[20] Although a pristine definition of the Real is deemed impossible to achieve (John Mullarkey 2009, Žižek 2005) there are mechanisms that manifestly acknowledge the faulty representation of the Real through symbolic means. These eventualities, traumatic aftereffects, provoke a breach in that very symbolic order, thus proving its inconsistency. In *Woman and Scarecrow*, Scarecrow personifies that very breach in the symbolic system (by, for instance, refuting the veracity of Woman's past memories), thus proving (although yet being unable to reach) the authenticity of the Real.

Scarecrow's function in the play is therefore that of Woman's alter ego (Sierz 2010:48), and also that of Woman's prosthetic self which can be removed from all symbolic processes so as to approach (despite it being unattainable) a perception of the Real in itself. Woman's detachment of the symbolic comes thus hand in hand with her psychic retrocession as she approaches her death. She gradually falls back to retrace the steps taken in identity formation to the point that she recovers a prospect of reality less tainted by the self-inclosed, consistent symbolic order, as is characteristic of the earlier stages of psychic formation, when the subject's view of reality is fragmented. In this way, and as seen in the quotation above, Woman is able to follow the traits of the Real as she gains access to a more pristine picture of her past, now rid of the supremacy of the symbolic order. A subject's symbolic standpoint is inevitably breached by remnants of the Real that disrupt the stability of the symbolic realm. The symbolic, therefore, "is disturbed by the remainder of the Real, a traumatic left-over which resists being integrated into the symbolic and thus disturbs its balance, rendering it 'barred', introducing into it a gap, flaw or antagonism; in short, inconsistency…" (Žižek 2012:661). Scarecrow becomes, in this sense, an impersonation of Woman's traumatic memories, such as her mother's death, her husband's many adulterous affairs or the death of one of her children. All of them, unconscious unassimilated traumas, such traumatic left-overs come back to Woman's consciousness during her last minutes of life through the figure of Scarecrow, who is there to grant her access to the uncorrupted true episodes now evoked to her. Scarecrow meets the Lacanian definition for the unconscious, according to which the locus of the unconscious is the "reflexive 'giving account', the inscription of what a subject does in the symbolic texture" (Žižek 2012:553). Scarecrow's role is in fact that of 'giving account' to Woman's past, and that of translating all of those experiences still incomprehensible to her. Thus, Woman's

stance becomes illustrative of the Freudian divided subject, that who needs a translator to understand him or herself (Žižek 2012:554), in this case personified in the figure of Scarecrow, who becomes thus not only Woman's alter ego but also her 'analyst' and guidance:

> *And exit Him.*
>
> **Scarecrow** He's almost tolerable when he stands up for himself.
>
> **Woman** I'm out of control. I won't be happy till I've ground him into the dirt.
>
> **Scarecrow** Validation of oneself sometimes involves that.
>
> **Woman** Right now nothing will satisfy but to bring him down with me. Oh Scarecrow, I'm so afraid.
>
> …
>
> **Woman** I see tombs in shadow, mossy, weather-scarred tombs and all the dead squashed in and me with them wondering if there is starlight above. I'm being buried alive. I am my own ghost.
>
> **Scarecrow** Hush for a while till we try and articulate it right. (*WS* 190)

Woman becomes a subject more in touch with her inner self or alter ego, and the stance towards the Real there housed, thus moving away from her former multiple symbolic identities (as mother, wife, lover, daughter…) granted throughout her life. It is now when she has acquired the detached perspective that is necessary to revisit anew her past and her performance in the different traumatic events now invoked.

A given subject is divided into his social (symbolic) self and his inner ego as a consequence of the void of its cogito, a void caused by the non-assimilation of a given traumatic event into the symbolic order. Symbolic features become a referent so as to identify a subject, as was already explored in the previous section with the analysis of Evelyn's multiple social (symbolic) faces, conflicting with her inner self's (Eve's) needs in *Beside Herself*. A subject's psychic life is inevitably determined by this void: by the consequent clash thereby occasioned between that subject's symbolic identity(es)

and by his/her inner take on that very particular traumatic breach (this void understood as a remnant of the Real that has not been assimilated and translated into the symbolic code). The clash between Woman and Scarecrow is precisely brought to the stage as a confrontation between the symbolic sphere and the Lacanian Real. A given subject's own multiple faces are, therefore, more difficult to be identified and assimilated by oneself than that of any other alien or external reality.

As Žižek illustrates by his analysis of a well-known dramatization of World War II Europe's fantasmic processes of symbolic identification, the subject has as many faces as it is required by a given social stance, thus the difficulties involved in terms of distinguishing the many symbolic features which identify a subject in the social reality, and the connection these many faces have with the subject's inner world or Real signified:

> In Agnieszka Holland's *Europa Europa*, the hero (a young German Jew who passes as an Aryan and fights in the Wehrmacht in Russia) asks a fellow soldier who had been an actor prior to the war: 'Is it hard to play someone else?' The actor answers: 'It's much easier than playing oneself" We encounter this otherness at its purest when we experience the other as a neighbor: as the impenetrable abyss beyond any symbolic identity." (2012:555)

This game of perspectives that becomes central in a subject's inner world finds in theatrical performance an excellent articulation by which this struggle is spotted out and formulated. The theater is the one medium where performative iconicity might be fractured so as to manifest the multi-layered nature of a single subject's symbolic performance. This is especially so when considering Brechtian representative strategies, as there the audience is invited to look beyond what is put on the stage by the author. In Brechtian performance, mimetic properties such as the principle of iconicity are infringed for the purposes of social criticism (Diamond 1997:45). The intention here is precisely that of raising awareness about symbolic restrictions, prejudices raised by a

given symbolic reading and consequential social unfairness. The theater is the only artistic medium where the reader (the members of the audience) is granted the freedom to choose where to focus his attention. Thus, the spectator may be following the main line of action as performed by the main characters, but he/she may as well be focusing his/her attention on secondary roles such as the supporting actors who remain in the background, prop elements, or the very duality of the actors' role by focusing on a given performer's traits as an actor (as a subject removed from the actuality of his performing role), hence momentarily ignoring his role as a character in the play and thus breaking the sense of iconicity above mentioned. This phenomenon by which the spectator's psychic mechanisms are granted the freedom to choose out of a range of information units where to focus his attention is registered and labeled as psychic polyphony (Carlson 1990:100).

Woman and Scarecrow takes advantage of the theatrical medium so as to offer a multifold view on perspective and subjectivity by bringing to the foreground Woman's split self through a number of strategies only possibly articulated on the theatrical stage. Woman's double and alter ego, Scarecrow, becomes her guidance in this journey where she is granted access to her many different selves and the manifold symbolic roles she has performed throughout her life, which now haunt her at her very own deathbed and which are personified in the shape of this spectral figure. Woman's inner struggle to ascertain which of her memories are true materializes in her confrontations with Scarecrow, who offers a perspective to her past which contradicts her own version. Woman's thus doubled gaze is accordingly paralleled by the framing and verification processes the members of the audience go through. "Objects and action in performance are neither totally 'real' nor totally 'illusory,' but share aspects of each." (Carlson 2004:49) This double gaze experienced by both the audience and the main character in

Woman and Scarecrow approximates the spectator to Woman's stance and psychic struggle:

> **Woman** Yes…else…as I stand there…a terrible realization comes flashing through…a picture from the future… as I stand there I see myself here. Now. I see my own death day…and now she wakes and looks at me. I swim in her eye, she in mine, we're spellbound, unsmiling, conspirators too wise to fight what has been decreed on high, long, long ago. (*WS* 200)

Similarly, the action in the play also makes emphasis on this rupture of the self by means of other visual theatrical strategies by which the audience is invited to witness Woman's last journey and her last attempt towards a "validation of oneself" (*WS* 190) on the very minutes before her death. A mirror becomes the prop to materialize this struggle between the Real and the symbolic by which the subject is granted a fantasmic double perspective of the self ("as I stand there, I see myself here." *WS* 200) and by which the audience's empathic understanding of this noumenal split is fostered. Theatrical representation is able to thus offer a perceptual experience that in this case comes close to Woman's inner struggle. Considerations such as Carlson's psychic polyphony (by which he conceptualizes the spectator's freedom to focus at any time on any aspect, prop, or element brought to the stage) shed some light on the ways the audience's empathy mechanisms are activated. The spectator's multiple possibilities to develop a particular gaze or perspective as partaking of the performed action meets thus Woman's ultimate journey back to her past and the overlapping of object/subject gaze.[21] As if in a sort of fractalized operation that reproduces the same structures in different dimensions, the play itself becomes another kind of mirror for the audience as it reflects the parallel process there evoked: the collapse of Woman's symbolic identity as she approaches death (and her consequential approximation to the Real with Scarecrow's

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[21] Put in Žižek's terms, the gaze of the object is by definition the intrusion of the Real into the symbolic (in this case by means of Scarecrow's voice). Woman's gaze is inevitably tainted by the Big Other/symbolic and by subjective experience.

guidance) and the spectator's journey towards the very world of the overlapping gaze, his/her gaze as participating witness to Woman's symbolic disappearance and his/her gaze as alienated, non-participant member of an agreed social fiction/falsity which is regarded from a Brechtian distance (a gaze characterized by the development of given phenomena such as psychic poliphony).

If compared with theatrical representation, the cinematic point of view is restricted by the static nature of the shot, and resorts to an interplay of subjective and objective shots, the objective shot establishing some diegetic reality upon which a character's subjective shot relies (Žižek 2002:33). *Woman and Scarecrow* similarly explores this cinematic confrontation of perspectives translated into the theatrical spot in the attempt to comprise the complex game of perspectives in the play that allows Woman to watch her own deathly deterioration at the same time that she is granted a retrospective view of her life. By means of strategies such as the use of a double alter ego-figure granting a more distanced perspective to her own situation and by the employment of props such as a mirror, the 'missing gaze' (the fantasmic gaze of the object, the Big Other) is returned (Žižek 2002:34). Henceforth, what Post-Theorists traditionally label as the 'missing gaze' (the gaze that the object returns in reply to the subject's perspective of the symbolic real) is made explicit and acquires agentivity in *Woman and Scarecrow* through the strategies already mentioned. That is to say, the 'missing gaze,' traditionally an abstract entity that is never to be found in the subject's experience, might become visible through the performative strategies here explored. Žižek refers to Hitchcock's characteristic use of cinematic shots so as to illustrate how the exchange of object-subject gaze may be made visible or rather felt to be present by means of uncanny filmic mechanisms:

Is this notion of the Gaze not perfectly rendered by the exemplary Hitchcockian scene in which the subject is approaching some uncanny, threatening object, usually a house? In this scene, the objective shot of the person approaching the uncanny Thing (rendering the subject *not* in a direct frontal view, i.e. from the point of view of the Thing itself, but from aside) alternates with the point-of-view of the person fascinated by the Thing…So we are not dealing here with the simple reversal of a subjective into an objective shot, but in constructing a place of impossible subjectivity, a subjectivity which taints the very objectivity with a flavor of unspeakable, monstrous evil. (Žižek 2012:34-6)

In a similar fashion, *Woman and Scarecrow* provides an alike fantasmic sense of a multifaceted perspective and a sense of being watched by an external object that somehow acquires subjectivity, as the spectator is made to feel the presence of the uncanny object where this gaze originates.[22] Notwithstanding, the object and subject gaze evolve towards a chaotic blend making it difficult to distinguish its primary agency (whether objective or subjective) as a consequence of Woman's fragility. Thereupon, Woman's subjectivity is questioned (and her very lucidity as well) by bringing to the stage a dialectic of kneaded fantasmic gazes as Woman's own voice starts to decline in her deathly recession: "I am my own ghost" (*WS* 200). Given such a sense of gradual fragmentation, Woman resorts to a mirror thus confirming that there is still a reflection of her outer self on it as the proof that her symbolic frame is still there despite the ghostly sense of disintegration that invades her stance:

Woman …Maybe my destiny is to be baffled by happiness. You're right, let's not go on like this. Let's end it all. Bring me the mirror please.

Scarecrow What do you want the mirror for?

Woman To watch myself die. I want to see how I am. I always look in mirrors to find out what's happening to me. Please bring it to me. I want to see if I'm still here.

…

Scarecrow (*brings Woman the mirror*) Not much left to feed your vanity now. Look at you. Your bones are pushing through your skin.

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[22] This uncanny feeling of being observed is implemented throughout the play by means of the constant threat articulated by a third ghostly figure, The Thing in the Wardrobe, which barely materializes (it only appears once), but whose constant fantasmic and menacing presence is time and again reminded.

Woman Are they? Show? At last. That's wonderful. There's not much about this century I'd go on bended knee to, but to its ideal of beauty I will. Both of them. Bones, teeth, hair, the age adores. Well I always had good teeth and despite everything my hair is still magnificent. And now finally I have achieved bones. My dear, I have transformed myself into the ideal. Look at me! I am graveyard chic, angular, lupine, dangerous.

Woman raises an arm, turns it, runs mirror down a leg, admires it.

Look at these arms, these legs, the contours of these limbs. I am slowly carving myself into a Greek statue. All those slices of bread and jam. All those pots of spuds and butter. All that apple tart and cream. All, all fallen away. Admire me for once in my skeletal queenality. (*WS* 165-69)

The myth of the queen looking for reassurance in the reflection appearing on a mirror is broadly recognized by a Western audience such as the one which this particular piece aims at. Similarly, a contemporary audience would be (probably unconsciously and yet consistently) accustomed to associate the evil spirit in the Queen's mirror with a masculine spirit, as has been the case with all representations of this same story (van den Berg-Cook 10). According to Jungean psychoanalyst Nancy van den Beg-Cook, the queen relies on a masculine Other so as to assess her image, thus showing her weakness and her damaged sense of self. In *Woman and Scarecrow*, Woman's insecurities are thus provided by her submissive position in a given symbolic community which accepts and perpetuates a view of the Real filtered by the patriarchal gaze. As Jack Zipes argues in *The Enchanted Screen: The Unknown History of Fairy-Tale Films*,

[t]he queen's actions are determined by the mirror's representations of her as exemplifying beauty and evil, or associating evil and vanity with beauty, and these mirror representations are taken as the truth by the queen. Had she perhaps doubted and cracked the mirror, cracked the meaning of the mirror, she might still be alive today (115).

In a similar fashion, Woman seeks to confirm her outward carcass and whether her reflection in the mirror remains intact, as she becomes gradually aware of the inner rupture her ego is experiencing, and so starts to distrust her own psychic (memory) capabilities. She yields and succumbs to the double figure, Scarecrow, who seems to be

gaining control over her senses. From a Kleinian stance, Woman's split-self and her consequent double view of reality appear as an illustration of the initial paranoid-schizoid position gone through in early subject formation. Woman's growingly fragmentary perception of the symbolic real becomes, in this way, an exemplification of her retrocession in terms of (symbolic) identity formation. Her fixation with ascertaining her own reflection on a mirror points, in this way, to an attempt to confirm her integrity as a lucid subject. It is a final attempt to ascertain her status as an adult, social subject still complying with the symbolic order, as she has become aware about her psychic retrocession towards a point of no return, about her deterioration and the retracing of all of the steps accomplished in her symbolically meaningful life.

The mirror appears, in this sense, as an instrument materializing Woman's psychological defense mechanisms and yet also reflecting her Kleinian retrocession to the earlier position already gone through as a child and that she is now bound to repeat as she retraces the steps taken. Just as she once went through Lacan's mirror stage, process by which she acquired a holistic and symbolically meaningful view of reality, now, on a desperate attempt to grab the life and reality she knows, Woman wants to ascertain that her physicality (what entitles her as a member of the symbolic community) is still intact. Nevertheless, and despite confirming her own identity as reflected in the mirror, Woman acknowledges her physical decay, and begins to realize that she is in fact retracing her own steps and acquiring a perspective of reality that is gradually more and more detached from the established symbolic order. She is getting closer to a traumatic, fragmentary, scatological and imperfect (and thus closer to the Real) view of her outer case, her bodily features. Woman's retrocession in identity formation as she regards her gradual decomposition appeals to Julia Kristeva's ideas about the coordinate of intersubjective desires that she labeled as the *abject*. Kristeva's

abject concerns all that disturbs our sense of identity, of order and of systemic existence. In *The Powers of Horror* (1982), Kristeva associates the abject with the subject's incursion in the symbolic order. It is situated, she explains, right before the moment when we develop a symbolic conscience of the Real and before the mirror stage, by which we acquire a narcissistic view of that which surrounds us; it is at the core of the distinction between subject and object (between human, for example, and animal). Hence, a dead corpse blurs the line separating the subject from the object, which is so crucial for the establishment of identity and for the development of a perspective regulated by the symbolic. A subject's reaction against a corpse's excessive (scatological) materiality becomes the uppermost instance of the functioning of the abject and the symbolic mechanisms by which the sense of belonging or the sense of oneself as a subject, in opposition to object, is developed: "The corpse, seen without God and outside of science, is the utmost of abjection. It is death infecting life. Abject" (1982:4). Additionally, for Kristeva, literature is an excellent exponent of the functioning of the abject in the subject's psychic construction of reality and of how the eruption of the abject disturbs such ordered and systemic view of what surrounds us, as in literature all boundaries and distinctions collapse. In *Woman and Scarecrow*, Carr appeals to such breach in a subject's ordered structuring of the Real by representing the irremediable reality Woman has to face: she is experiencing herself the process by which her subjectivity disintegrates so as to turn into a putrefied and decomposed dead corpse:

> **Scarecrow** Then with their claws they will scoop out the meat of your brain
> **Woman** Then the ears.
> **Scarecrow** The lips.
> **Woman** The tongue.

Scarecrow They will part your stomach like wet paper and reach for the heart, the breasts, the intestine.

Woman The kidneys, the womb, the ovaries, they will wrap themselves around my lungs and suck out the tripe of my spine… (*WS* 182)

and

Woman …She led me to a mirror. Now look at yourself, she said, just look at you. But it is her I see now, her girth disappearing in dusty shadow, old before her time and still radiant, the white teeth flashing, the russet gold of her hair and the expression in her eyes. I, in my new red coat and hat, gave her pleasure, pleasure beyond describing. For one brief moment, a mirror glance, I was that thing she had yearned for and found. (*WS* 185)

Thus in a Beckettian fashion, Carr appeals to a search for one's identity, meaning and existential rationality that is never to be resolved as it meets a progressive dissipation of the self in which only one's memories remain, and not even those are to be trusted anymore.[23] Woman's gradual physical disintegration and her growingly fragmentary view of reality go hand in hand with her psychic retrocession. She seems to have gone back to her childhood years in the foolish and naïve way she faces denial and the non-fulfillment of small and superficial whims.

Woman Put on the music. I'm asking you nicely…If you don't put him on, I'll…I'll…I'll…

Looks around desperately.

Scarecrow You'll what? What will you do?

Woman I'll stop breathing! This second!

Scarecrow Go on! Stop! Let me see you stop breathing! Remember him in there. Go on! Stop!

Woman I'm not playing with you. I'm going to count to three. If by three I don't hear "My Friend the Wind" blashing off the CD. I'm going to put an end to it all. (Counts ominously). One…Two…Three…

---

[23] Beckett's *Krapp's Last Tape* (1958), *Play* (1963), *Not I* (1972), and *That Time* (1976), among others, brings to the stage characters who retrospectively examine the meaning of their lives and question the veracity of past memories. Existentialism in Beckett's plays many times foregrounds the predominant role of a subject's memory (which yet remains a questionable lens towards reality) in the exploration of the self at the verge of disintegration (Rabey 47-52). In this sense, *Happy Days* (1961) stages the literal dissipation of its protagonist, Winnie, who is gradually swallowed by the floor as the intangible and memory-based action develops.

Scarecrow stands there defiantly.

Right! That's it! Goodbye, you vicious parasite that's led me a crazy dance. Barking orders to kingdom come. All that unnecessary guilt. All those sly commands. All that wrong advice! All that metaphysical claptrap. Goodbye and good riddance, you stinking old turkey box!

Woman refuses to breathe. Things are calm for a while as they eyeball one another. Then both start to go red in the face. Then woman starts Thrashing around. Scarecrow clutches her throat, doubled over. They both fight it a while, both refusing to give in. Eventually Scarecrow clutches her throat, doubled over. They both fight it a while, both refusing to give in. Eventually Scarecrow reels towards CD player and struggles to put on Demis Roussos. Woman is not catatonic, oblivious until she hears 'My Friend the Wind' or 'Forever and Ever' blasting out. She inhales violently as soon as she hears music. Smiles triumphantly. Croons softly as Scarecrow falls on floor panting. Woman raises a fragile hand and conducts the music. (*WS* 156-7)

and

Scarecrow If that's what you really want.

Woman I'll stop breathing so.

Puts cover over her head.

It'll be easier this way.

From under the covers.

Right, on the count of three.

Scarecrow No final soliloquies?

Woman (*head out*) What?

Scarecrow No farewell speech?

Woman None. (*Back under the covers.*) Okay. One. Two. Three. Goodbye, Scarecrow.

Scarecrow Yeah.

Hold a minute. Scarecrow begins to suffer. Doesn't fall this time. Enter Auntie Ah.

Auntie Ah (*takes covers off Woman's head*) So it has come to this. (*WS* 179)

Woman's body is presented as a more trustworthy record of past traumas than her own memory machine, now haunted by Scarecrow and the indeterminacy of the extent to which what she took for 'real' actually corresponds to the Real of the

eventuality in each of her past experiences. Scarecrow's stance offers a gaze more in touch with the Lacanian Real, if yet its representation is deemed as impossible due to the inextricably falsifying procedures any eventuality will go through when filtered through the symbolic. And, in the midst of her symbolic decay, Woman seems to start to realize about the futility of words and symbolic representational mechanisms:

> **Woman** And poets backwards is stop.
>
> **Scarecrow** Stop backwards is pots.
>
> **Woman** Pots is even better.
>
> **Scarecrow** Yeats was a great pot.
>
> **Woman** A wonderful pot.
>
> **Scarecrow** A pot born. (*WS* 182)

Language, thus, and Woman's own memories (inevitably tainted by it and, thus, by the symbolic) are now dismissed, and it is Scarecrow's truth which seems to subside:

> **Woman** And I was wearing my new red coat and my new red hat.
>
> **Scarecrow** (*shakes Woman*) You were not.
>
> **Woman** Okay. Okay. Let me think. I wasn't wearing my new red coat and new red hat. I'd left them in the wardrobe on account of the heat.
>
> **Scarecrow** No wardrobe. No coat. No hat.
>
> **Woman** Then what was I wearing? (*WS* 149)

In this manner, Woman's body is presented as a more trustworthy record of past traumas than her own memory machine, now haunted by Scarecrow and the indeterminacy of the extent to which what she took for 'real' actually corresponds to the Real of the eventuality in each of her past experiences. Scarecrow's stance offers a gaze more in touch with the Real, if yet the representation of it is deemed as impossible due to the inextricably falsifying procedures any eventuality will go through when filtered through the symbolic. Language and Woman's own memories (inevitably tainted by it

and, thus, by the symbolic) are now dismissed and it is Scarecrow's truth which seems to subside.

Scarecrow is, along these lines, the ghost of Woman's many traumatic eventualities that were never assimilated, thus provoking a breach in her symbolic understanding of the Real. This breach which comes back now to haunt her seems to gain more and more authority as Woman approaches her death (and thus the disintegration of her symbolic self). Paradoxically enough, it seems to be Woman's decaying body that offers a more reliable testimony of her past traumas, as even Scarecrow itself, a token of the world of the Real, cannot but resort to words so as to guide Woman in her last journey, as there are no other means by which it could do so ("**Scarecrow** Slush for a while until we try and articulate it right" *WS* 190). Despite the certainty that the Real will never be attained by means of symbolic mechanisms such as verbal language, Scarecrow cannot resort to any other means so as to approach and support Woman in her way to symbolic disintegration. And it is for this very reason that her rotten bodily features are a more trustworthy formulation of her past traumas. Woman's body "has caved in" (*WS* 160) after a long and painful life, and it is there, in its very fragmentariness, that the trauma is inscribed ("**Woman** I fought the good fight if you didn't. I have the scars to prove it" 175 *WS)*. The gaze from which this deadly-ruined body is regarded will determine, however, the recognition of those trauma-wounds.[24] When approached by Him, Woman is regarded as no more than a whining and selfish sick woman, as seen in the quotation opening my discussion of this play. Just as this prevailing patriarchal gaze renders women's illness as less reliable than male affliction (I rely here on the definition of psychologisation provided earlier on), the

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[24] Chapter four of this thesis, and my analysis of Lynn Nottage's *Ruined* in particular, will provide an in depth analysis of the representation of female abject physicality as alternative map towards traumatic representation.

symbolic role assigned to women in contemporary society is regarded from a similarly biased perspective.

Self Defense or, Death of Some Salesmen, by American playwright Carson Kreitzer also explores the way in which patriarchal mechanisms distort a subject's apprehension of reality. First performed in 2001, it tells about the murders of seven men between the years 1989 and 1990 at the hands of Jolene Palmer (character manifestly representing real-life Aileen Wuornos) and the consecutive trial and sentence passed on Jo.[25] The play is an analysis of the different social and symbolic gazes scrutinizing Jo's acts, esteemed as righteous self-defense by some collectives, and yet condemned by others as irrational outbursts moved by transitory derangement or just by lesbian man-hatred. It similarly explores, therefore, the functioning of patriarchal power mechanisms, this time focusing on the field of crime and law so as to articulate a straightforward criticism of the absolutely influential role of the male Gaze in the formulation of the symbolic order. As argued by Ozieblo, "In *Self Defense*, power is more openly signaled as being in the hands of the patriarchal institutions constituted by the police and the judicial system." (2012:157) Additionally, and thus resembling *Woman and Scarecrow*, *Self Defense* brings to the stage the last moments of a woman's life, who, just as Carr's heroine, is aware of her upcoming physical and existential disintegration. Just as was the case in Carr's play, *Self Defense* also resorts to anti-naturalistic mechanisms in the attempt to formulate the traumatic chaos characterizing its main character's inner life. There is continuity in the use of grotesque and fantasmic means aimed at the articulation of the main character's memory, as will be explored in the analysis of the angel-like figures visiting Jo and offering support and understanding in her last moments (thus equating the role of Scarecrow analyzed above).

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[25] The action in the play recalls the real life events that have also been reflected in other mediatic attempts to denounce the sentence of death penalty against Aileen Wuornos, which took effect on October 9, 2002.

However, Kreitzer's major contribution to the formulation of a subject's trauma resides in the use of an intricate narrative mode capable of transporting the audience to the experiencing of the chaos characterizing traumatic memory, thus translating the traumatic stages undergone by Jo into a performative action to be shared with an audience. The paradox of the traumatic experience resides in the attempt to rationalize it and understand its very occurrence at the same time that the memory of the very event is avoided in the attempt to lead a normal life. Similarly, the narrative strategies employed by Kreitzer lead the audience to a process equally characterized by the fact that it grants the opportunity to read and share Jo's traumatic life from childhood to her present days, at the same time that it fosters a critical distancing to it by means of the Brechtian defamiliarizing effects aimed at during the performance. The last section of this chapter will comprise an exploration of the technical procedures established by Kreitzer in the attempt to offer a view of Jo's inner struggle before her death. Non-narrative means such as the overlap of voices leading to confusing and non-linear talk, the use of a stage divided into different spaces that split the action into parallel coetaneous eventualities, same actors performing different roles, or the construction of a temporally inconsistent corporeality on stage.[26] As mentioned above, such strategies both approach the audience to the experiencing of Jo's trauma at the same time that they foster their detachment to the action thus sharpening their critical gaze. Henceforth, the play's main aim is twofold: to have the audience go through as similar an experience as Jo's inner torments before her death, and yet to maintain a critical distance so as to address and condemn the symbolic establishments allowing for and perpetuating such one-sided readings of reality.

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[26] My reading of *Self-Defense* interprets the action on stage as a re-visitation of the different events as experienced by Jo. It is Jo's gaze that we are offered here and that is proved by the fact, for instance, that Bucket keeps being identified throughout the play as 'Bucket' the whole time despite the fact that he mentions his real name (but Jo prefers to keep calling him Bucket).

Self Defense or Death of Some Salesmen.

"There is no need for arms":[27] Women's Battle against the Patriarchal Symbolic Gaze.

Self Defense takes the audience to Jo's journey towards death relying on non-narrative strategies that try to articulate the experience of a subject's psychological life when it is about to end. Jo's death row is thus visited and her nightmarish wait reproduced by means of a number of devices depending on technical elements such as lighting and sound effects, the division of the stage into different performative spaces, and then also on literary elements such as the overlap of characters' voices and the sequencing of the action on stage in a confusing a-chronological order, which resembles the functioning of a subject's traumatic, as opposed to rational, social and narrative, memory. Hence, just as was the case with Carr's *Woman and Scarecrow*, *Self Defense or Death of Some Salesmen* explores a woman's journey through her last moments as a symbolic being, and represents the struggle gone through so as to make sense of her traumatic past. While Woman counted on the help of Scarecrow in her fight against other imposing views on her past, and just as Evelyn was sheltered by the uninterrupted presence of Eve throughout her inner battle to assimilate her traumatic past, Jo also

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[27] "There is no need for arms, physical violence, material constraints. Just a gaze. An inspecting gaze, a gaze which each individual under its weight will end by interiorizing to the point that he is his own overseer, each individual thus exercising this surveillance over, and against himself." (Foucault 1980:155) In *Power/Knowledge* (1972) Foucault described the formula predominant in Europe's nineteenth century body politics with the intent to achieve a status of power exercise where it justly becomes detached from the idea of a single individual (or institution) holding the power so as to give way to a system by which power is equally controlled by those who exercise power and by those to whom power is exercised. The secret for the functioning of this power machinery is each individual's self-surveillance. However, *Self Defense or Death of Some Salesmen* reminds of the relative fragility of this interior gaze idea (which is at the same time based on the Kantian Categorical Imperative). The multiplicity of scrutinizing gazes there explored and the analysis of each of the different social/symbolic stances from which Jo's case is inspected corroborates Žižek's unequivocal distinction between the Big Other's gaze, and the Real, or Hegel's Absolute (2005). The constellation of perspectives provided by each individual's attempt to assimilate the Real becomes an overall hindrance for the achievement of a common interior inspecting gaze.

demands the support of an alike figure who would understand and bear with her the load of her inner traumatic fragmentation.

> **JO.** (*Amazed:*) You know, I musta…I musta prayed for this. 'Cos I remember. When I knew all this shit was goin' down. I remember saying, inside my head, Please, God. Send me somebody to help me through this…Please, God, send me somebody who can help me get through this thing. Somebody who could- just once. Just once before I check outta here.
>
> Someone who could actually love me. (*SD* 54)

Jo's loneliness is emphasized by the fact that she is scrutinized and labeled by the judicial male-biased gaze and consequently treated as if she were a non-sentient being. Just as was denounced by Fernández-Morales et al. (2012:24) in the field of the medical, and as already explored in *Beside Herself* in terms of the misdiagnosis of Dawn, one of the potential inmates to be treated in St. Dympha's, *Self Defense* also reprobates the de-humanization of women when analyzed by the predominantly patriarchal judicial and police gaze. Thus, the almost mechanical procedures by which the corpses of prostitutes are dissected and the insensitive carelessness with which those cases are handled and dismissed are reflected in Kreitzer's play by means of a scatological representation of criminal facts (aimed at shocking the audience by the vivid images there evoked) and by the overtly excessive use of a language over-loaded with euphemistic terminology (with the intention to critically foreground the misuse of a terminology intending to falsify, in this case, these women's traumatic truth). Just as Daniels denounced the normalization of acronyms in the field of the clinic in *Beside Herself*, *Self Defense* exposes the misuse and overuse of technical vocabulary and acronyms so as to cover those very criminal acts committed against a woman's docile body. Hence, in one of the many addresses to the audience carried out by different characters throughout the play (thus breaking the suspension of disbelief effect in a Brechtian fashion), the fictional action on the stage is frozen so that one of the

prostitutes who is interrogated by the police can translate to the audience the incomprehensible (and thus, meaning-overriding) terminology used to as to define a reality close to her:

> **DAYTONA**: NHI.
>
> Is a police term.
>
> Prostitutes. Biker girls. If no family comes forward to put the heat on. Or the family is powerless. Poor. Non English speaking.
>
> Goes in a file marked NHI.
>
> No Humans Involved. (*SD* 56)

It is thus that the play exposes the hypocritical attitude of a society that time and again covers such painful reality (the unpunished violation and ensuing removal of a prostitute's body), and denounces the fact that such patriarchal dominating moves are ignored and thus perpetuated by the judicial and police powers. As already mentioned before, Foucault acknowledged the influential role of the clinic for the formulation of a power ethics that materializes differently in different communities or symbolic realities. In his search to ascertain the particular institutions establishing *the raison d'être* behind a given symbolic order, he contends:

> Who or what is it that co-ordinates the activities of agents of the political body?
>
> This is an extremely complex system of relations which leads one finally to wonder how, given that no one person can have conceived it in its entirety, it can be so subtle in its distribution, its mechanisms, reciprocal controls and adjustments. It's a highly intricate mosaic. During certain periods there appear agents of liaison. Take the example of philanthropy in the early nineteenth century: people appear who make it their business to involve themselves in other people's lives, health, nutrition, housing; then, out of this confused set of functions there emerge certain personages, institutions, forms of knowledge: public hygiene, inspectors, social workers, psychologists. And we are now seeing a whole proliferation of different categories of social work.
>
> Naturally it's medicine which has played the basic role as common denominator. Its discourse circulated from one instance to the next. It was in the name of medicine both that people came to inspect the layout of houses and, equally, that they classified individuals as insane, criminal, or sick. But there also emerged,

> out of the confused matrix of philanthropy, a highly diverse mosaic comprising all these "social workers"…
>
> The interesting thing is to ascertain, not what overall project presides over all these developments, but, how, in terms of strategy, the different pieces were set in place. (Foucault 1980:62)

In *Self Defense* the role played by the judicial or police institutions within this existential "highly intricate mosaic" aims at a symbolic validation of a prevailing definition for Jo's circumstances. Despite there being isolated collectives in the play performing weak attempts to provide their own reading of Jo's reality, "a polyphony of voices from various social perspectives" (Ozieblo 2012:166), the predominant voice is that of the men-controlled police and judicial powers. Jo's reality is in this sense dissected by a number of institutional gazes where the male judicial voice predominates in the construction of an idea of Jo, how she is and why she behaves as she does, thus trying to give account for this unprecedented reality now confronted and trying to assimilate the appearance of 'the first female serial killer.'

> **SHRINK 2** Her repeated courtroom outbursts illustrate my point quite succinctly. She has no concept, not only of what would constitute appropriate behavior, but also that these repeated outbursts are not in her best interest as a defendant-
>
> **JO** …if you're just gonna go around talking in your fucking made-up language, your fuckin' lawyer talk, shrink talk, what am I doing here? Exhibit Fucking A? (*SD* 53)

The predominance of the patriarchal gaze in the interpretation of Jo's reality is unsuccessfully challenged by other symbolic attempts to make sense of it. These other social voices try to appropriate Jo's circumstances so as to verify and perpetuate the logic of their different symbolic orders. From an "overexcited" (*SD* 51) feminist scholar, to the sensational press discourse, or a zealous "born-again woman" (characters' description), different social collectives try to appropriate (in the latter case, literally adopting Jo as a daughter) Jo's life circumstances so as to justify and build up the symbolic rationality grounding their social realm:

CASSIE. I flew down here at my own expense to help.

JO. Yeah, how're *you* gonna help?

CASSIE. Jo, *I know why you did what you did*…I'll be called as an Expert Witness-

JO. What makes you an Expert?

CASSIE. Well-

JO. You'd think by now I'd be the Expert.

CASSIE. Of course.

My testimony will serve to contextualize-

(*She hesitates, switches tactics*)- back you up. Explain how something like this could have happened. (SD 50-1)

and

JO. They're making me look like an idiot in there.

JEAN. That's not true. It's a matter of the legal language-

JO. I may not know the fucking language, but I know when people are making me look like an idiot. Or fuckin' crazy. Why don't *you* call some shrinks, on *my* side?

JEAN. They were on your side…Ms. Chase [CASSIE.] is set to testify tomorrow. Battered Woman Syndrome, leading to diminished capacity- it's very compelling stuff.

(*Beat.* JO *turns to* CASSIE, *stunned.*)

JO. (*Soft:*) You fuckin' bitch… She's gonna tell them I'm crazy?

JEAN. Diminished Capacity. It's a legal term.

JO. Comin' in here all nice like you're my friend, sayin' you understand-

CASSIE. Jo, I do understand. This is my area of expertise. My testimony on Battered Woman Syndrome will help the jury understand why your story of abuse might lead you to both under perceive and over-react to later instances of abuse.

JO. I ain't no fuckin' syndrome. This is just shit that happened. To me. And now all I wanna do is tell the people what happened, get right with Jesus, and get outta here. (*SD* 56-7)

Thus, Jo keeps hearing promising voices coming from different groups, all assuring her that they share her pain ("Jo, I do understand", "I love her more than I've

loved anyone in my life, including my husband" *SD* 54-6) when their actual drive is to label her following the ethics they are trying to impose (whether it is a feminist reading of her life, or a religious or sensationalist one) so that it justifies and thus perpetuates the rationale behind each of their symbolic constructions and interpretations of the Real. Each of these readings seems to be offering Jo a way out and salvation from her loneliness and agony.[28] And yet, each gaze aims in the end at the construction of a reading of Jo's situation that would only validate their symbolic order ("**JO.** All these people got nothin' on their minds but taking advantage of me" *SD* 78). From "man-hating-lesbian" (*SD* 63) to "First Female Serial Killer" (*SD* 62) or an angelic figure, symbolic of God's forgiveness on earth (*SD* 54), she is labeled differently by each of these different voices trying to articulate Jo's reality and the rationale behind it, and they all similarly claim to understand, or to know exactly (as "Expert Witness[es]" *SD* 51) what Jo has gone through, and the reason why things happened the way they did.

The figure of Jo represents, therefore, the non-symbolizable, what cannot be represented or made sense of through symbolic means so as to fit the social space surrounding it, or the homo saucer, if read from a philosophical point of view relying on Giorgio Agamben's contributions.[29] The non-symbolized Real comes back time and again in the shape of spectral apparitions, as something that cannot be assimilated in symbolic terms and thus keeps haunting the inhabitants of a given symbolic reality. Jo appears as a distortion of any preconceived label defined by the society where her situation develops. She does not fit any symbolic definition as devised by any of the social institutions that now scrutinize her past and her reality. These institutions (the

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[28] "I am offering you life everlasting" is chanted on unison by two of the characters representing two different views on symbolic reality, the Jesus-Christ enlightened LEE ANN and the sensationalistic reporter ANNIE. (*SD* 59)

[29] The figure of the 'homo sacer' addressed by Giorgio Agamben as the one excluded from a given community and thus exposed to unpunished violence on accounts of symbolic/systemic disobedience, and its representation by means of the aesthetics of the specter will be further explored in chapter four of this thesis in my analysis of contemporary war plays.

judicial, religious and feminist gazes finding representation in the play) try to resolve the many antagonisms to be found in the figure of Jo when attempting to dissect her under the lens of the established social order predominant in the context where everything takes place (Florida in the late 1990's). She seems to elude all social designations and represents the spectral and irrepresentable portion of the Real that keeps haunting the symbolic order, the "non-symbolizable traumatic kernel that finds expression in the very distortions of reality." (Žižek 2005:243) In Lacanian terms, Jo represents that which remains uninterpreted, unassimilated; what constitutes a traumatic gap in the public symbolic understanding and that which, the more the public gaze tries to define, the more it eludes definition on accounts of its unsymbolizable and unfanthomable status. In other words, these different social institutions try to define Jo's case in the attempt to control what seems to be unclassifiable, and thus, threatening the prevailing symbolic order. However, and as is bound to happen when the symbolic gaze tries to subdue what eludes symbolic codification, "the more [Jo's] actual, social, public existence is cut short, the more threatening becomes [her] elusive fantasmic ex-sistence" (Žižek 2005:239). Jo's otherness resides in the impossibility to associate her with a social category. Among the attributes deeming Jo as a non-symbolizable spectral remain are her sexual orientation (still not incorporated in the symbolic universe condemning Jo) and the traditional masculine role she adopts in her love relationship with Lu, which violently waves from a manly impulse to protect and spoil her in a paternal way ("**JO.** Sure, baby. Anything you want" *SD* 27), to aggressive and vigorous outbursts reproaching her partner's uselessness:

> **JO.** (*Comes right up against her* [Lu].)
>
> WHAT AM I DOIN' ALL DAY? HUH?
>
> TO PAY FOR A ROOF OVER YOUR HEAD AN' FOOD ON THE TABLE? YOU CAN´T EVEN IMAGINE WHAT I'M DOIN' ALL FUCKING DAY. TO

COME HOME TO A FILTHY HOUSE AN' YOU SASSIN' OFF TA ME? (*SD* 26)

Jo is thus closer to male stereotypes, as she is not as much codified or identified as a feminine subject, but as a vestige or a social residue reminiscent of a crippled soldier coming home after fighting in the battlefield finding no place for him, confused, disoriented, alienated from the new social reality surrounding him and haunted by an ineludible sense of shame:

> **JO.** I try to remember a time when I was not ashamed.
>
> I gotta go pretty far back.
>
> I don't even know…I just can't remember back that far or it there never was one. (*SD* 11)
>
> …
>
> But the Gulf War shit, that was taking alla my regular customers away. Hadda move on. Hadda get in cars with strangers that I didn't know very well. And subsequently, on several occasions, I was called upon to defend myself. (*SD* 18)
>
> **CASSIE**. We are at war here, Jo. Women like you are the front-line casualties.
>
> **JO.** Shit, yeah. It's a war zone, it's crazy, man. (*SD* 51)

In this same vein, Jo's occupation is another trait adding to her fantasmic unclassifiable nature. Having an occupation that is socially condemned and not regarded as such diminishes and depreciates her to the extent that the crimes that were in fact committed against her own integrity are not even considered in the trial (she was assaulted, tortured and raped).

All of these traits contribute to the construction of a subject that does not seem to easily fit into the moral standards at the grounds of the social and symbolic order surrounding her. She is regarded as an alien figure, as was also highlighted by the title of the film directed by Patty Jenkins, starring Charlize Theron in the leading role, telling about the same true events and also based upon the trial and execution of Aileen Wuornos, *Monster* (2003). As such alien other, Jo in *Self Defense or Death of Some*

Salesmen receives no real sympathy from any of the different collectives scrutinizing her reality:

> **DAYTONA** An' I'll tell you why they're not buying that Self-Defense.
>
> What self?
>
> Plan an' simple.
>
> Ask any of 'em. They don't see a self there to defend. (SD 71)

"[T]he specter gives body to that which escapes (the symbolically structured) reality" (Žižek 2005:241) and Jo is herself a personification of that fantasmic other, or that traumatic remnant obstructing the balanced flow and development of the accepted symbolic order. There follows the impossibility to classify her in symbolic terms. She cannot be symbolically assimilated and the different characters in the play analyzing her situation try to use her so as to corroborate their own symbolic perception of reality: feminist, zealous Christian, policemen... All of them use her selfishly so as to make sense of and thus justify their symbolic reality.

As a consequence of such incomprehension, Jo's only claim before dying is to find anyone to share her sorrows with who would not try to falsify the reality she has experienced with the selfish intention to validate one's own symbolic understanding of the Real. On these terms, while Jo initially believed LeeAnn to be this person who would altruistically love her and sympathize with her, she proves to be only moved by her obsession to verify her religious believes ("'Cos LeeAnn is really a horse a the same color. Tellin' me she loves me, an' Jesus loves me. I think she was lyin' for both of them. Love somebody who's not me" *SD* 78). It is Bucket, the same policeman who initially captured and judged her, who eventually regards her from an altruistic position unbiased by the different corrupted gazes represented in the play. "The healing process is located in the acts of storytelling, and of listening to stories" (Tal 1996:205) and of

finding further sympathetic stances willing to listen and to share the burden of the victim's load (that is what Jo finds in Bucket: a sympathetic gaze that by sharing her views confirms her subjective reality). Jo needs her own voice to be given credit and legitimacy, which is only achieved by means of the approval gaze of an Other (Bucket). Such unexpected support is presaged when LeeAnn claims that her relationship with Jo resembles that of Jonathan and David ("We're like Jonathan and David in the Bible" *SD* 54), when it is actually Jo and David who seem to make a transcendental connection (immediately after LeeAnn's reference to the story of Jonathan and David there develops a scene where Bucket reveals his true name to be David. *SD* 53-4). It is thus David (Bucket) who offers Jo sincere support, as he honestly tries to understand Jo's views instead of imposing his own Gaze on her accounts. He puts his reputation in the police corps at risk by siding with her

> **BUCKET.** I've been going through the unsolved prostitute murders-
> **CAPTAIN.** The NHI files?
> **BUCKET.** (*Beat:*) Yes.
> Sir, she's right. There are significantly fewer prostitute murders this year.
> **CAPTAIN.** You're not saying you believe her? (*SD* 65)

And he ends up by having to leave the department where he works because his "opinions have become rather unpopular around here." (*SD* 78). It is thus that Jo finds the support that she needed so as to make factual sense of her own life by finding some external gaze who would share her views.

Additionally, Jo's need to find transcendental or spiritual guide when she is certain to be approaching her end is also met by the appearance of two celestial angel-like figures, Goodness and Mercy, who comfort her at a more essential level, that of

everybody's need for affection and kind compassion, which is above the logical certainty and understanding granted by Bucket's rational support.

> **MERCY.** Please, we're here for you. To help you sleep. To bring you…comfort.
>
> **JO.** Where were you when I was prayin' my goddam head of?
>
> **MERCY.** (*Honestly:*) I don't know.
>
> **JO.** Or during my trial? Huh? How come a whole mess a you didn't blow the roof off that place. Tell them I was tellin the truth. Tell them to get their freakin' hands off me 'cos I'm a child of God. (*Looks between them.*) Yeah, I know the rap. Mysterious ways. Him had them fuckin mysterious ways.
>
> **GOODNESS.** I'm sorry we woke you.
>
> **MERCY.** Yes, come lie down. I could sing to you. Did your mother sing to you when you were a little girl?
>
> **JO.** No.
>
> **MERCY.** (*Appalled:*) She didn't.
>
> **JO.** My grandmother did sometimes. But that was only if we'd got beat. So I don't like it very much.
>
> **MERCY.** Come. Lay your head in my lap.
>
> ...
>
> There, now.
>
> (*She strokes Jo's hair.*)
>
> Sleep. Sleep my child. Yes. (*SD* 83)

In a similar way to the Scarecrow figure in Carr's *Woman and Scarecrow*, Mercy and Goodness offer Jo the support and guidance she needs when facing the last moments of her life and which she did not find in any of the other who promised her their help and understanding.

Self Defense pursuits the representation on the stage of Jo's distress as she consciously approaches her own death and it aims at making Jo's inner traumatic journey extensive to an audience that are called to sympathize with Jo's struggle at the same time that they are kept at a critical distance by means of several theatrical

strategies. The following section will focus on the analysis of such devices by which the audience's critical eye is activated.

In the production notes for the play, Kreitzer gives the instruction that *Self Defense* "should feel like a ninety-minute play." (*SD* 7). There is no intermission and the seven acts that make up the action of the play are to be distinguished by the indications on two television sets on each side of the main stage.[30] There is, therefore, a great multiplicity of action, often developed simultaneously on different parts of the stage, to be performed on a non-stop basis and by a number of actors that are to perform more than one role throughout the play. The resulting overall effect is unquestionably overwhelming, especially at the beginning of the play when the audience is still getting accustomed to the frenetic rhythm, the overlapping dialogues, confusing light and sound effects, the non-stop rhythm of the play and the sudden change of central focus in the action:

> (*She* [Jo] *lights a cigarette. Lights up on* BUCKET, *testifying in court*)
>
> **BUCKET.** Well sir, bodies in the swamp off I-95 are not too un-usual. So it took us quite a while to make the connection, between the five counties involved, that there could be a serial killer at work.
>
> (*Seven shots. BANG. BANG. BANG. BANG. BANG. BANG. BANG. Simultaneously with the last three shots, lights up on three coroners, all female. Lab coats, glasses, hair up. High heels.*)
>
> **JO.** You know, tonight is the beginning of a war?
>
> **CORONER 1.** The remains are those of a nude, Caucasian male. (*SD* 13)

Additionally, the two television sets on either side of the main stage are not only intended to show the scene titles at the beginning of each new section in the play, but they are also devised so as to occasionally show news reports, interviews and video

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[30] The main stage is at the same time divided into four spaces: the upper area where the interventions supplementing the main action take place, the center of the downstairs stage (Jo's jail cell), stage right (where the parts of Jo's recollections taking place at the apartment or in hotel rooms take place) and stage left (the police station).

recordings containing the testimony of several side-characters.[31] Hence, the focus of the audience's attention is time and again shifted from the very action taking place on the different stages (many times simultaneously) to the testimonies and interviews being shown on the screens. Such alternating and unsteady mode of perception reproduces Jo's internal experiencing of her traumatic reality so that the audience is allowed to explore the functioning of Jo's memory, how certain glimpses are evoked, and how particular sounds (the shooting, for example), images and words are reproduced in Jo's mind to the point that the play becomes a journey to Jo's traumatic memory. For instance, the evocation of LeeAnn descending to Jo's cell as a celestial figure on her first appearance materializes the way in which Jo experienced LeeAnn's first approach through a letter sent to her. Just as the fact that several lines appear initially disconnected from any conversational context so as to be repeated later on, this time being part of a plausible conversational situation:

> **LEEANN.** Dear Jolene:
>
> You're gonna think I'm crazy, but Jesus told me to write to you.
>
> (*Spots up on* CASSIE, *watching the footage, and* ANNIE, *on the phone*) [And the action continues to develop moving towards a different direction] (*SD* 47).

And then that evocation is contextualized some minutes afterwards, so that the previous de-contextualized line appears as an anticipation of Jo's memory mechanism.[32] All of

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[31] Such as the testimony of two women, relatives of two of the men killed by Jo (*SD* 73-75).

[32] The same strategy to take a line out of its contexts so as to locate it later in the conversation where it belongs appears also on pages 18 and 27 ("**JO.** YOU STUPID BITCH. THAT'S A DEAD MAN'S CAR YOU JUST WRECKED"), 42 and 44 ("**CORONER.** I've seen a lot of dead hookers. In my line of work"). They function as premature flashbacks that foretell the upcoming reproduction of a particular bit of Jo's memory. It is also significant the fact that some of these foreshadowing lines are not reproduced in its exactness at their later formulation but, as is the case with the coroner's statement they are slightly altered once they appear in their corresponding context ("I've seen a lot of hookers. In my line of work", which is to be contextualized later on as "I've seen a lot of prostitutes, in my line of work"). Such slight alteration supports the idea that these evocations are inexact traumatic reproductions of the true event as it took place and thus shows that the action developed throughout the play passes through the filter of Jo's traumatic memory machine.

these are strategies to recreate Jo's inner psychic life while facing and accepting her upcoming death.

The use of a "Thanatos/Eros Chorus of sorts" in the play (*SD* 7) is also directed at the faithful reconstruction of events by Jo's chaotic memory machine, and it produces a similar echo-effect that confounds the audience due to the quick-paced and overlapping mode of speech there achieved. Similarly, the three actresses from the cast performing the roles of Chastity, Daytona and Pandora are also required to perform all of the feminine roles (but for the roles of Jo and Lu) as indicated in the stage directions: Reporter/Jean/Coroner 3, Coroner 2/Cassandra Chase and Waldren's girl/LeeAnn/Coroner 1/Woman 2 respectively. Such performing requisite establishes a chorus-like effect whose function is, as mentioned above, that of helping reconstruct Jo's memory on the stage, but especially they act as guidance to the audience in terms of the reading and understanding of Jo's reality as revisited on the stage. The introduction of a Greek chorus entails a fracture in the play's iconicity effect, effect by which there is unison of performative signifier (actors, props, etc.) and the action signified.[33] One of the main functions of the Greek chorus is that of breaking the "Fourth Wall" effect by addressing the audience, and that is particularly accomplished in *Self Defense* by the occasional clarifications brought about and the formulation of opinion by some of the members of the female chorus which thus help shape the audience's train of thought as they keep track of the action on the stage:

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[33] Iconicity, or "the conventional resemblance between the performer's body and the object, or character, to which it refers" (Diamond 1997:44) is the major theatrical element to be challenged by Brechtian defamiliarizing strategies such as the ones explored in this chapter. As opposed to the practices of naturalist theater, in *Self Defense* the audience is time and again reminded of the fictional character of the action they are watching, and many theatrical elements are self-consciously addressed so as to emphasize the representation's non-realistic nature, such as having different characters address the audience, or such as the instruction to have same actors performing different roles. Thus the theatrical signifier (the actor and the different elements working for the consecution of the audience's suspension into the fictive action) does not coincide with the signifier (the fictive action to which they refer, thus taking the audience away from their reality a perfect sense of suspension of disbelief), hence disrupting the iconicity effect.

> **CHASTITY.** (*Appears in spot:*) I know nobody's asking me, but I think it's about time we had a female serial killer. (*SD* 21)

and then

> **CORONER**. It is in fact a misnomer to label Jolene Palmer the first female serial killer.
>
> There have been others. Some place the number at thirty-five or so. But Jolene Palmer differed from these cases because she was closer to male partners or serial killing. She used a gun. She killed strangers.
>
> Most women killed members of their families, with poison. (*SD* 25)

The fact that there is the explicit indication that the multiple roles assigned to these three actresses must not be hidden, but overtly signaled and demonstrated, reminds of the actresses' role as performers and of the double dimension created on the stage (where fiction confronts reality, and the character confronts the actor).

> (*Blackout.*
>
> JO. *in her cell. Asleep on the narrow cot. Two angels float above her. They clearly have* CHASTITY *and* DAYTONA's *stripper outfits beneath flowing diaphanous layers of white. And, of course, wings.* [DAYTONA *is Goodness*, CHASTITY *is Mercy*.]). (*SD* 79)

Similarly, dance and music were also part of the choral apparitions of ancient drama, as it was then considered as "part of the way that the choral odes are marked out from the scenic action" (Goldhill 67). Thus, the choreographed apparition of the chorus in scene 3. BULLSHIT WEAPON CHARGE, where they assume the role of phantom-like mimes at the background from the main action, also serves as a Brechtian strategy that invalidates the iconicity effect in the play, as it over-emphasizes non-realistic elements of the performance, such as the actor's condition as such.[34] More importantly, the chorus' traditional function was that of being an aid guiding the audience in their

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[34] (*Blackout.*
Lights up on JO, *staring at payphone. Phone rings once, twice. She picks up. Lights up on* LU, *in upper area, surrounded by cops on headphones:* BUCKET *and* DRUMS *plus* CHASTITY, DAYTONA *and* PANDORA *dressed as cops. With each blackout, they assume different "surveillance" positions. Empty coffee cups and cigarettes proliferate.*) (*SD* 38)

reading of the theatrical action being experienced, and thus directing the spectator's understanding and reception of the intended effect. The chorus comments on things happening inside the performed reality and it points towards the forward action, thus playing with audience's expectations and siding with the role of the spectator inside the theatrical apparatus. "[T]he chorus mobilizes the *voice of the community*" (Goldhill 50). It sides with the perspective of the audience's collective identity as a social group or community coming from a similar reality, and it guides them in their reading of the events performed.[35] The fact that the members of the chorus are identified with an undoubtedly minority group (women prostitutes) also connects with the Greek tradition to use slaves or women as the members constituting the chorus that would situate the unfolding action. Thus, the three prostitutes, DAYTONA, CHASTITY and PANDORA (who simultaneously adopt some other roles throughout the play) call the audience's attention concerning a particular reality, and they do so also by overtly moralizing interventions intended to provoke an active response:

> **CORONER (PANDORA).** I've seen a lot of dead prostitutes, in my line of work. A lot. And it's not supposed to be something you get upset about. I am a doctor, after all. A doctor of the dead. And it's like cancer or something, as a doctor you're not supposed to get upset about it. Curse God or- You're supposed to speak in calm, rational terms. Not alarm the patient. Comfort the family.
>
> A coroner's main job is to listen.
>
> Find out how this thing happened. Make the call.
>
> Natural causes. Suicide. Homicide.
>
> And these girls who come in, ripped up some of 'em in ways that speak of a hatred I can barely begin to comprehend.
>
> I've been listening to their bodies. For years. Listening to stories of desecration of the human body not to mention the spirit that I can only call evil. Although I never had much of a dialogue with God or any sort of metaphysical thing. Suddenly I am forced to have this conception of evil. This knowledge.

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[35] *Self Defense* was written so as to be performed for an audience already aware of the Aileen Palmer's case, so a minimum of sensitivity was expected concerning the injustices committed and allowed for in terms of gender discrimination during the late 90's in the United States.

The listening- adds up. Sometimes I feel it is eroding me, like a high whistling wind over sandstone. I am becoming…mute, and rough and rounded.

I didn't come to this job with any fancy ideas about justice. The…orderliness appealed to me. The ability to find truths. Add detail upon detail, layering to conclusion.

Without too many people cluttering things up, if you want to know the truth. I…have a little trouble dealing with people. Figured I could do my job, do it well, have a large degree of privacy in my life. These things are important to me.

The ideas about justice- started springing up at me. After the bodies had been piling up. For a while. Girls, women, who should not have been on my table. Sure, I get some OD's, suicides, but it's the others. The ones who shouldn't have been on my table for another forty years. Who should never have gone through what they went through to get to my table. And they're whispering to me-

Unsolved. unsolved. unsolved. unsolved.

(*Spot out. We return to confession*). (*SD* 44)

and

DAYTONA. …So now it's my turn not to be surprised. Just like people are not surprised when one of my kind turns up dead. Cops, people. Not unless it's College Students, oh a Nice Girls got her fuckin' head cut off, then everybody's surprised. Everybody's up in arms, doing shit. Mobilizing special police task forces. Yeah, maybe if I was a college co-ed somebody'd give a shit it I wound up dead. Somebody's try and figure out how it happened.

But I ain't no fuckin' College Girl. My body winds up in a ditch, they're not gonna waste too much of a day on it. And whoever it was that decided I didn't count and no-one would give a shit if he dumped me out by the side of I-95, whoever it was driving the last car I got into, he's hangin' around going to the grocery store, playing with his fuckin' kids maybe, watching the five-second blip about it on the evening news and probably none the worse for wear.

He had, that Waldren guy I'm talking about now, had what you call bad impulse control. She usedta throwin' around money, acting like the big man. I mean, this is the kind of guy wants what he wants. If he doesn't have the three hundred in cash, he'll go open up his repair shop and give you somebody's TV and VCR they're probably waiting to have fixed. Tell them there's been a break-in or some shit, I don't know. I mean, he never hurt me, but those things are tricky. You never know what's gonna set somebody off.

So yeah, I'm not surprised Mr. Waldren met with an untimely death. I feel bad for the guy, but I'm not surprised. (*SD* 70)

Self defense represents Jo's ontological precariousness as she approaches her

death, and it further questions the authenticity and reality of the lenses by which others

approach her situation and the introduction of mediatized interpretations of the figure of Jo. These parallel readings attempt to both *simulate* (by means of light and sound effects, actors' non-iconical performance and TV screens) and *show* (by means of TV sets, for example) Jo's hyper-reality.[36] Thus, while devices such as the chorus, the overlap of voices and the confusing play of lights aim at the audience's experiencing of Jo's ontological disorientation, the use of TV sets on the stage (one at each side of the central stage) directly shows the broadcasting of JO's case and the public opinion that ensued from there. The overlap of testimonies concerning Jo's reality reaches the point of superseding the code of the actor on the stage and the code of TV-talk by superimposing the onstage performance of one of the members of the chorus with the projection of a video recording where a reporter (performed by the same actress impersonating CHASTITY) provides her critical views on police intervention (*SD* 83). Questioning our means of perception and our certainty about what we call reality is one of the major concerns of contemporary theater and drama (Mohr 11). What we consider to be real, the safe and fallaciously stable context that we take for granted, is but built collectively and artificially by the dominating institutions thus controlling our symbolic community. *Self Defense or Death of Some Salesmen* is a superb attempt to deconstruct such given reality (in this case the reality predominant in the late 90's in the United States) so as to interrogate it and the ethical grounds on which it relies. The non-realistic code pursued in *Self Defense* aims to go beyond the simulation intrinsically attached to theatrical performance so as to awake the audience's critical eye. The inevitable allusion to a referent (the reality off the stage) becomes more explicit in *Self Defense* as a consequence of its being based on a real life event. However, Kreitzer takes advantage of different devices so as to deconstruct the action on the stage (and thus, by extension,

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[36] For more on contemporary theater's central concern in the exploration of the precariousness of authenticity and the questioning of the Real go to Annette Pankratz's "Signifying Nothing and Everything: The Extention of the Code and Hyperreal Simulation" (2004).

the real-life event upon which it is based) so as to question our very rarely interrogated reality and the symbolic (unconsciously imposed) principles upon which it is based. The many Brechtian strategies here analyzed, from the rupture of the play's iconicity effect by the role developed by the actors, their direct address to the audience, the creation of a Greek chorus, and the support granted to such non-realistic devices by means of technical strategies such as bewildering lighting and sound effects, all of them contribute to Kreitzer's drive to question the patriarchal gaze behind the construction of an unjust and yet unquestioned reality: the execution of Aileen Wuornos for the sake of her instinctive and spontaneous reaction to protect her own life. The gradual progression towards the execution of Jo, Aileen's fictional alter-ego, is thus performed, in the attempt to represent, make known, and denounce the disintegration of a subject whose existence was little, if at all, valued in a symbolic order unable to 'classify' or 'label' (whether as a man-hating lesbian, a victim of child abuse or the first woman serial killer) Jolene.[37] Her last moments are thus visited and reconstructed as in the fashion of a dream, just as if Jolene's reality, her perspective and voice, had already died and she had as yet started to live a dream where her existence is just simulated (or artificially reconstructed by the many gazes attempting to make sense of the trashed puzzle making up Jolene's now precarious life).

Henceforth, mechanisms which activate the spectator's identification and empathy with the action performed on stage coexist with this defamiliarizing aspect in theatrical performance that evokes other realizations of one same act, thus consolidating an already known genre and pointing to the fictional nature of the action on stage. In other words, the ghosting effect that Carlson mentions very briefly at the introduction of

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[37] The exclusion of a subject from the symbolic community where it participated will be further explored in the last chapter of this thesis from the perspective of Giorgio Agamben's contributions concerning the *homo sacer* theory.

his book puts forward drama's likeliness to establish a personal and individual bond with each of the members of the audience who, I argue, are in this way transported to the actual first person experiencing of the traumatic event represented on the stage, thus becoming able to understand its intrinsic paradoxical nature: the urge to understand the traumatic event, at the same time that the victim's psychological defense mechanisms attempt to deny it so as to normalize the victim's everyday life.

In *Worlds of Hurt*, Tal explains how

> [t]he journey of the survivor is from fragmentation to wholeness, but the whole is marked by the struggle. The survivor works to integrate her experiences and her beliefs, to create a space in the world where her truths can be heard, to see rather than to merely look…[the victim]'s triumph is the amalgamation of her shattered selves, the achievement of unity. (1996:222)

In *Beside Herself*, Daniels presents Evelyn's struggle from fragmentation (thus her alter-ego, Eve, and the use of several strategies suggesting that inner breach, such as the broken mirror) to the conciliatory integration of her inner and social/symbolic self; a successful journey which contrasts with what we witness in Carr's *Woman and Scarecrow* and Kreitzer's *Self Defense*. Here, the subject's journey is not towards integration but towards the complete dissipation of the inner and outer self, as both characters confront the last moments of their lives. Thus, as argued above, in a Beckettian fashion, Woman and Jo experience the gradual fragmentation of both their symbolic and inner selves, and they retrace the steps taken by which their identities were once shaped. Both plays explore the ontological precariousness of a subject as she (in this case, Woman and Jo) faces her gradual disintegration, and how, as a consequence, the fading subject "seems to evade definition" (*BH* 21), as she does not fit anymore any of the given social/symbolic labels constructed and reinforced in their corresponding communities. Other contemporary plays explore the manifold faces of the fallacious view of reality, which is however socially accepted and assimilated by the

individual as an integrated and ontologically meaningful symbolic order.[38] And yet the plays here analyzed provide a microscopic-detailed examination of the steps to be taken, or to be retraced, in the construction or disintegration of a subject's symbolic lens. *Woman and Scarecrow* visits Woman's anguish at her gradual realization that she is losing the power to access and control her own memory mechanisms and how she starts to distrust her own symbolic gaze. *Self Defense* is an attempt to reconstruct Jo's (real life Aileen Wuorno's) reality and to criticize how the predominant social view of her figure is tainted by Others' hegemonic gaze. Both explore, thus contrasting with the study of the integration of the symbolic and inner selves in *Beside Herself*, how the heroines of these existential journeys approach their complete disintegration. The sense of unfolding time is consequently paralyzed, and the audience is left in doubt about the reality status of what is going on up on the stage. Brechtian strategies such as the use of a chorus, TV-sets, characters that double the protagonists of each of these plays, disconcerting sound and light effects, disrupt the theatrical iconicity effect thus detaching the audience's experience from the action while simultaneously and inevitably developing a sense of empathy towards the main characters. Such balanced combination grants the audience the possibility of sharing the protagonist's traumatic stance.

The two following chapters of this thesis similarly explore the aesthetic balance searched in Contemporary Drama between emotional identification and empathy on the one hand, and Brechtian Epic defamiliarizing strategies (by which the audience's critical mechanisms are awakened) on the other. While the initial empathic move grants the audience's emotional implication with the action performed on stage, the ensuing

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[38] Patrick Marber's *Closer* (1997), Abi Morgan's *Tender* (2001), or Mark Ravenhill's *Faust* (1997), among others, also appeal to the construction of the social self as partaking of a community and as interpreted by a given symbolic order.

estrangement materialized by means of ghostly effects such as choral visitations (as was the case in Kreitzer's *Self Defense*), light effects, or musical numbers altering the narrative pace (as will be now explored, for example, in my analysis of Lynn Nottage's *Ruined* in the next chapter); these strategies, among others to be further analyzed in the next chapter, distance the spectator/reader from the chronological narrative thread by estranging the action and thus questioning its very nature. The re-visitation of already known stories so as to thus interrogate the audience's given cultural memory, and then reconstruct it from a new perspective and with a new lens will the central task of my analysis of the plays suggested for critical scrutiny in the following chapter.

CHAPTER THREE.

"I think I've had this conversation before:"[1]

(de)Mythologizing and the A-effect in Contemporary Feminist Rewriting

In "Imitation and Gender Insubordination" (1990), Judith Butler develops her widely known ideas on gender as a social performative role, instead of a biologically and sexually determined identity trait. She claims here that the identification of a subject as homosexual follows from the already established social dictum stipulating what are the positive traits defining heterosexuality. Hence, any subject 'deviating' from such granted social imposition will be articulated as fitting the homosexual pattern, by opposition to heterosexuality, which is formulated as the norm. The definition of homosexuality by exclusion principles entails an unavoidably biased construction of the homosexual subject. That is to say, if it is normative heterosexuality what is socially approved as the rule to either follow or oppose (the latter originating homosexuality), the traits politically and ethically accepted so as to unconsciously define homosexuality will inevitably be tainted with the mark of 'deviating subject.' What are the predominant identity traits, then, to be chosen so as to define gay and lesbian performance escaping such ontological bias? Butler appeals to the dangers of generating a renewed and yet still inexact definition of homosexuality precisely in the attempt to elude homophobic formulations. How can we pick the very precise traits identifying lesbianism, traits that are supposed to be met by the multiplicity of lesbian subjects? "Which version of lesbian or gay ought to be rendered visible, and which internal exclusions will that rendering visible institute?" (1990:19). She will keep working on the idea of a subject's vulnerability and precariousness in terms of his/her exposition to

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[1] *CD* 269.

the social dictum in her book *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence* (2004) where, relying on Levinasian thought, Butler claims that it is precisely the call of an 'Other' what initiates subjectivity, or a subject's existence as such in the social realm. Thus, "we come to exist, as it were, in the moment of being addressed, and something about our existence proves precarious when that address fails" (2004:130). That was in fact the underlying idea sustaining the last play analyzed in the previous chapter, *Self Defense or Death of Some Salesmen*. In *Self Defense*, Jo is a subject that escapes definition and any possible form of articulation as granted by the social community where her existence is grounded. She struggles to find an 'other' to put a name to her reality that would indicate understanding and inclusion, instead of a formulation pointing to censure and exclusion (such as "man-hating lesbian").[2] In the attempt to fight such discriminating codification of reality, literary rewritings have gained strength as a defense mechanism by which women, as a minority group, challenge the predominantly patriarchal symbolic order. The already mentioned collection of essays by Mica Howe and Sarah Appleton Aguiar *He said, She says: an RSVP to the Male Text* (2001) consolidated as a referent for studies on feminist rewriting and covers multiple fields that have been object of such kind of re-inscriptions (the classics, religious writings, and political speech, among others). There, Howe and Appleton Aguiar denounce the unquestionable acceptance of the male truth, which has been since times immemorial the normative referent and cornerstone of ontological

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[2] The very title of the filmic version revisiting Aileen Wuornos' story, *Monster* (2003), points to this idea about the need of the individual to be accepted and recognized by his/her community as a normative subject. Wuornos' social exclusion is thus reflected in the label by which she is referred to, which foregrounds her otherness and non-normativity when regarded by the symbolic lens governing the reality she tries to be part of. Monstrosity is not just a label generated by a community's ethical foundations (the sympathy and regret to have proceeded according to the symbolic laws shown by the very policeman who captured her is a proof to this). It is representative of that very community's inability to represent the traumatized Other, as she appears as incongruent to the community's normative order and escapes symbolization. That very irrepresentability is what becomes witness to the truthfulness of Aileen's trauma.

formulations. They acknowledge female rewriting as a highly relevant mode of defense against the pervading and domineering male gaze. Liedeke Plate's more recent book, *Transforming Memories in Contemporary Women's Rewriting* (2011), however, challenges all previous establishments and granted assumptions concerning feminist revisions of stories that have shaped contemporary culture's memory mechanisms, or, in Žižek's terms, "fantasmic coordinates of meaning" (2009:xiii). Plate incorporates the concept of 'mythologizing' which, according to her, is a rewriting process that very much fits contemporary liquid times.[3] She claims that the discourse of memory has experienced a major change in terms of its orientation and its aspirations, and distinguishes between, what according to her came to be the major re-inscription procedures of the 1970's and onwards, from the turn-of-the-century rewriting mode, which is described more as a conversation with, rather than a radical re-formulation of, the original text, and relied on mythologizing procedures. In other words, while former feminist rewriting attempts moved towards closure, as they aimed at the establishment of a new gaze that, relying on a female voice, would replace the former prevalent male version (and that is the approach taken by Howe and Appleton Aguiar), the new re-inscriptions formulated by women writers are meant as an active and alive conversation with the 'original' that is on a constant spiral of change and renewal. Former feminist approaches to male-based texts, therefore, aimed at a demythologization (the finding of the long silenced female truth so as to give it voice, thus shattering the patriarchal myth); new feminist re-inscriptions, however, do not try to impose the female gaze but are rather open to dialogue and foster a never-ending cultural and memory broadening that Plate describes as a "mythical retelling" (31). This aesthetic transition in terms of

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[3] Term which she borrows from Zygmunt Bauman's *Liquid Modernity* (1991) and which was coined in the attempt to situate late twentieth century economic and social development from a broader and distanced perspective that would allow contemporary critical appreciation and analysis. According to Bauman, if post-modernity implied the experience of our reality without illusions, contemporary times are characterized by the subject's acceptance of it with a relentless sense of uncertainty and insecurity.

the construction of cultural memory moved, therefore "from memory as inscription and feminist remembering as re-inscription to cultural memory as dynamic process of amnesia and anamnesis, of forgetting, recovery, and reconstruction." (Plate 31)

Feminist rewriting hence emerged as a defense mechanism reacting against the precariousness of the female subject. Just as Butler warned about the dangers of symbolically identifying a social group ("How to use the sign, and avoid its temporal contingency at once?"),[4] feminists worked at a formulation of femininity by contesting highly respected male voices whose authority was so far unquestionable. The rewriting of the classics provided a terrain upon which silenced women could be given voice, and where the predominant symbolic and biased construction of femininity in contemporary culture could be challenged and brought to an end. This sense of closure aimed at by earlier feminist rewritings and the attempt to impose a new feminist view, inscribing a new story in society's cultural memory, is effected in one of the plays to be analyzed in this chapter, *The Love of the Nightingale* (1988), by Timberlake Wertenbaker. Wertenbaker's play has been chosen for analysis in this chapter as it is representative of the feminist drive not only to challenge patriarchal establishments but to impose the feminist gaze. Contrarily, Marina Carr's re-visitation of Shakespeare's *King Lear* in *The Cordelia Dream* (2008) fits Plate's description of the new wave of feminist rewriting and change of perspective in the re-inscription of earlier works, now reformulated as a procedure contemplating the "fluid encounter" (Plate 32) between an already assimilated past (Shakespeare's culturally glorified myth) and the rise of a new individual voice awaking from previous silencing. According to Plate, we live in a "culture of memory" (5) that constantly looks back moved by a drive to identify and

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[4] Butler (1991:19).

ascertain the essence of what makes us human, and which contemplates and establishes a dialogue with the elusive and uncertain nature at the core of the construction of cultural memory. Thus, in the attempt to ascertain the essence of the human, what defines our human gaze, we look back searching for expressions of the human reality that have already been assimilated and consequently became part of our cultural memory. And one prominent instance of that is the predominance of feminist rewritings by which women's truth, the traits configuring female identity, is aimed at. Women's look back is inevitably tainted by centuries of misrepresentation and feminist re-inscription negates the feminine masquerade there symbolized. Instead, feminist re-writing attempts to reconstruct a new and realistic female figure, thus falling in the quandary already pointed out by Butler: what are the traits to be here highlighted and that would stand for a righteous identification with femininity (in this case), thus avoiding and erasing the patriarchal long-established views? And it is precisely the precariousness of that representability that defines the very feminine (human, as Butler points out) nature. As Mohr explains,

> The crisis that came with the decline of the model of nature towards the end of the nineteenth century led to a reconsideration of the human mind and its faculties, with the result of a focus on human perception…In our ('post-modern') epoch it is common knowledge that what we call reality has been created and continues to be created through a social process of collective construction: By means of its faculties of perception, differentiation and inventive implementation humankind has managed, in the course of its history, to surround itself with the sphere we take for 'reality'…For the drama and the theatre this poses the problem not only how to thematise such complex as well as incoherent experience but also how to represent it at all…" (11).
> There is, in this sense, the quandary in the field of the humanities to define what

comes to be symbolized as human, or our experiencing of reality as human beings. And it seems to be precisely the precariousness of that symbolic attempt to formulate what defines us as human (to find the exact label identifying femininity as a social category, for example) that constitutes the very essence of our human nature. "For representation

to convey the human, then, representation must not only fail, but it must show its failure. There is something unrepresentable that we nevertheless seek to represent, and that paradox must be retained in the representation we give" (Butler 2004:144). So the very essence of humanity resides in this traumatic contradiction establishing our drive to symbolize the unsymbolizable. This impossibility to capture the human face in its entirety is what defines us as human subjects. And that is reflected in the plays to be analyzed in this chapter, where multiple theatrical strategies underline the irrepresentability of what is intended to be formulated (something that is not bound to symbolic articulation). This traumatic impossibility to articulate (despite the attempt to do so) is where the essence of what makes us humans resides. Thus, in the attempt to ascertain the human gaze, we look back to revise the product of our past, and one prominent instance of that is the predominance of feminist rewritings by which women's 'truth' (women's face and identity) is aimed at. This look backwards is characterized by the ghostly nature of the elusive memory mechanisms by which we aim to attain what defines us as human (or what defines the female face in this case). And such ghostly mechanisms are addressed at the plays to be explored in this chapter by means of a variety of devices such as the construction of a reality where memory and real life seem to collide and time and reality boundaries intermingle (*The Cordelia Dream*), the use of a Greek chorus (*The Love of the Nightingale*), or the use of music and voice-effects as Brechtian strategies hauntingly leading the audience to the harsh reality being presented on the stage (*Ruined*).

Feminist rewriting becomes, in this sense, one further attempt to explore the potential (ir)representability of femininity as a social category relegated to the unreliable testimony constructed by the patriarchal discourse. As stated above, *The Love of the Nightingale* and *The Cordelia Dream* are formulated as two attempts to articulate

the female truth of two stories well grounded and installed in our cultural memories. And yet, at the same time, the resources there employed and their ultimate drives are asunder. *The Love of the Nightingale*, falling on Plate's first category of feminist re-inscriptions, attempts to challenge patriarchal standards by re-inscribing from a female perspective an already known story where the leading voice was so far a masculine voice. Contrarily, Carr's *The Cordelia Dream* does not seek to question or to rebuff Lear's reality as told in Shakespeare's well known account. Instead, Woman (Cordelia's alter-ego in Carr's account) comes back from the underworld in the attempt to establish a dialogue with her father, thus similarly seeking to provide her perspective and to articulate her gaze, but with no pretension to deny her father's reality. The result is a fluid conversation where past, present and future collide in the fashion of classical mythology, characterized by its openendedness and the flexibility associated with oral accounts. Nonetheless, both re-inscriptions are similarly characterized by the ghostly elusiveness of its characters' precarious existences, which relies more on the fragmented memory of a no more certain past than on the integrity of their actual experiences.

Lynn Nottage's *Ruined* (2007) offers a different approach to the contemporary subject's precarious status and rather focuses on the uncertainty and unreliability surrounding the idea of a possible future. The main characters in *Ruined*, women prostitutes in a brothel set somewhere in Congo during the revolution, are articulated as sensitive pieces in the broader war scheme, as they are indistinctively (ab)used by soldiers and rebels, who stop by Mama Nadi's so as to momentarily evade their nightmarish realities. Nottage exploits the physicality of these women's traumatized and tortured bodies so as to evoke the ever haunting ghost of war trauma, which seems to adhere better to the victim's body, functioning thus as a living record, than being filtered through words and the symbolic hierarchy. The dehumanization of the female

body by describing it in its most abject form or the representation of it as a trophy, treasure or land to be conquered by either soldiers or rebels becomes a major strategy to appeal to the audience's indignation.

In her book *Unmaking Mimesis* (1997) Diamond elaborates on Butler's ideas about the social gendering procedures and the process of being symbolically classified as part of a gender group. According to Diamond, the theatrical field is the most fruitful terrain to explore the symbolic construction of gender, as it offers the possibility, by means of the Brechtian A-effect, to analyze the articulation of social identity. The Brechtian *Verfremdungseffekt* defamiliarizes the action performed on stage so that the audience can watch it anew, thus voiding it of its usual symbolic frame of reference, such as social and gender classification. Diamond thus talks about exposing the mechanisms of gender construction by means of a kind of theater that relies on the Brechtian A-effect. In this type of performance, the actors do not impersonate any characters, but rather just show and demonstrate a character's motivations. And if the actors detach themselves from the persona they are thus revealing, the members of the audience react accordingly by acknowledging the fictive level of action, thus gaining a distanced perspective of the action on the stage. An instance of such defamiliarizing mechanisms was already seen in Kreitzer's *Self Defense* when the members of the female chorus, performing momentarily the role of scientific police-men, still showed beneath their lab coats the clothing they wear to perform the role of prostitutes in other scenes of the play, thus accentuating the theatrical fallacy. Similarly, in *The Love of the Nightingale*, the use of a Greek chorus that continually addresses the audience, or the use of the meta-theatrical effect to perform a play within a play, having the main characters comment on the semiotic procedures that involve action and audience; such strategies are some of the ones to be analyzed in this chapter in their attempt to defy, as

Diamond argues, the stereotypical symbolization of women in male-based theatre (thus coinciding with Howe and Aguiar's treatment of female rewritings and with Gömceli's definition of radical feminist theater.[5] Therefore, feminist rewriting and its accomplishment by the use of the Brechtian A-effect (in particular, the appeal to non-naturalistic figures pointing to an aesthetics of spectrality) constitute the two focal points of this chapter. It analyzes the use of these strategies as theatrical instruments that expose the human drive to explore the symbolic processes of identity construction that inevitably shape our ontological view of tangible reality. Feminist rewriting, being one of the major exponents of the increasing trend to explore stories from our past, enacts the human yearning to ascertain the nature and essence of the human gaze by turning to past frames of reference. And Brecht's *Verfremdungseffekt* emerges as the appropriate tool to proceed to such inspection, as it offers the possibility to deconstruct a subject's integrity as a social self. In particular, Diamond's proposal results in what she calls 'Gestic feminist theater', which she defines as a practice that "would 'alienate' or foreground those moments in a playtext when social attitudes about gender and sexuality conceal or disrupt patriarchal ideology. It would refuse to naturalize and valorize female dramatists, but would focus on historical material constraints in the production of images." (1997:54)

Both performative strategies, (de)mythologization and the Brechtian A-effect, thus explore the construction of subjectivity (female subjectivity in this case) and prove to be fair exponents of the impossibility to reach a definite and tangible portrait that would comprise the complexity of the human face, or that would be able to avoid temporal contingencies and the symbolic bias. Both devices materialize Butler's claim

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[5] In contrast to liberal feminist theater and materialist feminist theater, radical feminist theater "aims at an all women's theater directed at women audiences only, there is the idea of creating a female counter-canon which promotes female values and experiences and which emphasizes the superiority of female attributes" (Gömceli 51). Radical feminist theater thus endeavors to challenge the predominant patriarchal voice codifying our view of reality (Aston 1995:127).

about the impossibility to represent and to convey the human, and the fact that it is this very irrepresentability that makes the object to be an exponent of the human. The decomposition of theatrical elements such as the iconicity effect (which are meant to encourage the fictive fallacy of a play) thus exposes the performative lie of theatrical illusion and displays the mechanisms putting together the action on the stage.[6] From the exposure of the body of actors as such (thus leaving character impersonation behind) to the exploration of meta-theatre (thus pointing to the very semiotic processes to which the audience is subjected) and the construction of the theatrical reality upon an already well known and acknowledged fiction (by means of the different rewriting styles above mentioned); all of these strategies are brought together in the three plays to be analyzed in this chapter in the attempt to untangle and elucidate the functioning of the human drive to identify the real. It is precisely through such emphasis on the very fictionality and unreliability of these accounts that the impossibility to frame or to tame the human nature under the control of signifying mechanisms is demonstrated.

The use of the anti-narrative mode becomes, in this way, essential for the articulation of the irrepresentability characterizing the human. All three plays to be analyzed make similar use of the grotesque and that which is marked as 'not normal' or 'not normative' so as to signal deviation from the symbolic norm and thus emphasize the patriarchal exclusionist nature of our symbolic reality. "A grotesque body that is incomplete or deformed forces us to question what it means to be human: these queries sometimes arise out of the literal combination of human and animal traits or, at other times, through the conceptual questions about what it means to deviate from the norm" (Edwards 3). With the intention to keep exploring this further instrument pointing at the insufficiency of our symbolic mechanisms in the task to ascertain the human gaze, I will

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[6] As mentioned in chapter two, I follow Diamond's definition of theatrical iconicity as "the conventional resemblance between the performer's body and the object, or character, to which it refers." (1997:45)

also consider in this chapter Julia Kristeva's contributions in her identification and definition of the 'abject' as opposed to both, the rational and scrutinizing subject and the symbolized object. As Justin D. Edwards argues, "the grotesque illustrates how the normal is defined in relation to the abnormal" (8), and 'normal' can be identified as what is approved and adopted by a given symbolic community. The grotesque, and as such, the scatological, repulsive and that which is expelled and rejected from symbolic classification, becomes, thus, a means of expression for the unutterability of the trauma and the human gaze. In *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* (1982), Julia Kristeva defines the process of abjection "as a form of expulsion and rejection of the Other, which she ties to the historical exclusion of women" (Edwards 33). Therefore, the abject is neither identified with the subject, nor with the object, but rather constitutes a category where "meaning collapses" (Edwards 33) and which is only formulated by means of the scatological, the grotesque and irrational language and imagery. This chapter will thus concentrate on an analysis of such aesthetic devices in the three plays above mentioned, in the attempt to explore the contemporary human need to make sense of the inevitably unutterable and non-symbolizable real.

"You will be beside the myth":[7] Feminist Demythologization in Timberlake Wertenbaker's *The Love of the Nightingale*

On November 25th 1999 *The Guardian* published an interview with Timberlake Wertenbaker conducted by theater critic Michael Billington where Wertenbaker talked about her predilection for the Greek culture, as she esteems Greek art to be oriented at the attempt to define "what a human being is about" (Wertenbaker 1999). Her writing then relies to a great extent in her admiration towards the Greeks and similarly aims at the exploration of the contradictory elements defining the human nature, trusting on the

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[7] *LN* 316.

possibility of the betterment of humanity. The unquestionable richness of Wertenbaker's cultural background makes of hers an adequate voice to formulate the complexity behind the foundations establishing a community's symbolic order. Daughter to an American mother (Lael Tucker Wertenbaker) and an English father (Charles Christian Wertenbaker), she was born in New York in 1944 but raised in the French Basque Country by a Basque woman, as her parents were foreign and war newspaper correspondents and were travelling frequently. She also lived and worked in Greece as an English and French teacher, and finally decided to settle in London during the 1970's, where she still lives nowadays. Her rich multicultural background thus entitles her to attain such a demanding task as the exploration of the human nature and the attempt to define it, considering its multiple faces as they materialize in different cultural communities. In this sense, many of Wertenbaker's works appeal to the misunderstanding between different subjects of several nationalities as a consequence of the cultural clash experienced by members of different and clashing social communities (*Three Birds Alighting on a Field*, 1992, or *The Love of the Nightingale* itself, where two cultures, the Greek and the Thracian, collide). Similarly, she also tends to raise the question about the formation of a subject's identity and the extent to which the community where our education is based determines the decisions we take throughout our lives (*After Darwin*, 1998 and *Credible Witness*, 2001). Her work has furthermore been time and again classified as a part of the contemporary radical feminist branch in drama studies.[8]

In particular, the play to be analyzed in this chapter provides the chance to revisit a story that has left its trace in our patriarchal cultural memory, that of the sisters Procne and Philomele, this time hearing and prioritizing the voice of the two sisters in

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[8] For more on Wertenbaker's work and its classification as radical feminist theatre consult *Timberlake Wertenbaker and Contemporary British Feminist Drama* by Nursen Gömceli (2010).

the attempt to uncover the female truth behind the so far predominantly male account. *The Love of the Nightingale* (1988) hence challenges the long established sovereignty of the masculine voice and, in contrast to the very mythological origins of the story, it paradoxically de-mythologizes many of the socially embedded beliefs about masculinity that sustain our symbolic interpretation of the reality inside our community. The author takes advantage, in this sense, of Philomele's innocence and inexperience so as to take a close look at the indoctrination processes women are subjected to as members of a masculinized community:

> **Philomele** I envy you sister, you'll know everything then. What are they like? Men?
>
> **Procne** Look: they fight.
>
> **Philomele** What are they like: naked?
>
> **Procne** Spongy.
>
> **Philomele** What?
>
> **Procne** I haven't seen one yet, but that's what they told me to prepare me. They have sponges.
>
> **Philomele** Where?
>
> **Procne** Here. Getting bigger and smaller and moving up and down. I didn't listen very carefully, I'll know soon enough… (*LN* 293)

And then, so as to point at the fact that such symbolic representation does not correspond with the real but is rather an example of the work of an ideology dominated by patriarchal establishments, Wertenbaker explicitly and faithfully articulates the very moment when such illusion caused by ideological disguise is shattered by the very violent presence of the uninterpreted reality of a man's (Tereus') body:

> **Philomele** What did you tell your wife, my sister, Procne, what did you tell her? Did you tell her you violated her sister, the sister she gave into your trust? Did you tell her what a coward you are and that you could not, cannot bear to look at me? Did you tell her that despite my fear, your violence, when I saw you in your nakedness I couldn't help laughing because you were so shriveled, so ridiculous and it is not the way it is on the statues? Did you tell her you cut me because you yourself had no strength? Did you tell her I pitied her for having in her bed a

man who could screech such quick and ugly pleasure, a man of jelly beneath his hard skin, did you tell her that?

…

Philomele There's nothing inside you. You're only full when you're filled with violence. And they obey you? Look up to you? Have the men and women of Thrace seen you naked? Shall I tell them? Yes, I will talk.

Tereus Quite, woman.

Philomele You call this man your king, men and women of Thrace, this scarecrow dribbling embarrassed lust, that is what I will say to them, you revere him but have you looked at him? No? you're too awed, he wears his cloak of might and virility with such ease you won't look beneath…(*LN* 335-6)

Wertenbaker's approach to gender thus brings Diamond's theories about 'Gestic Feminism' into theatrical action. Diamond understands gender as ideology, as "a system of beliefs and behavior mapped across the bodies of women or men which reinforces our status quo- …" (1997:47). In other words, gender becomes an expression of ideology nurtured by the social communities where we live. As an author concerned about cultural clash, the development of ideology and of the human subject as a social self, Wertenbaker ingeniously materializes Diamond's claims about the theatrical experience according to which the theatrical stage becomes a highly adequate terrain appealing to and analyzing the procedures that are part of the construction of ideology. Thus, Philomele's traumatic discovery that "[a man's body] is not the way it is on the statues" points to Diamond's ideas about the theatrical potential for the deconstruction of the gendered body on the stage, thus demythologizing the gender-biased ideology cultivated in the symbolic order. Similarly, Wertenbaker resorts to the play-within-a-play device so as to demonstrate the extent to which the representation of ideals is tainted by (and, at the same time, fosters) a given ideology, thus perpetuated in a cyclic fashion in a particular community. Theatrical representation not only participates, but becomes a key instrument in terms of the indoctrination of the subject and the symbolization of reality. In scene five, Tereus is invited to accompany King Pandion,

the Queen and Philomele, to a performance of the myth of Phaedra so as to discuss whether they will proceed to satisfy Procne's request to have Tereus bring her sister all the way to Thrace so that she can stay with her and make her company.[9] This scene shows the extent to which Philomele's fantasies and expectations about men and love have been shaped by the ideology materialized in artistic works such as the play they now watch:

> **King Pandion** Do you know this play, Tereus?
>
> **Tereus** No.
>
> **King Pandion** I find plays help me think. You catch a phrase, recognize a character. Perhaps this play will help us come to a decision
>
> …
>
> **Phaedra** Hold me, hold me, hold up my head. The strength of my limbs is melting away.
>
> **Philomele** How beautiful to love like that! The strength of my limbs is melting away. Is that what you feel for Procne, Tereus?
>
> …
>
> **Queen** Hippolytus has just heard in what way Phaedra loves him. He's furious.
>
> **Hippolytus** Woman, counterfeit coin, why did the gods put you in the world? If we must have sons, let us buy them the temples and bypass the concourse of these noxious women. I hate you women, hate, hate and hate you.
>
> **Philomele** This is horrible. It is not Phaedra's fault she loves him.
>
> **Tereus** She could keep silent about it.
>
> **Philomele** When you love you want to imprison the one you love in your words, in your tenderness.
>
> **Tereus** How do you know all of this, Philomele? (*LN* 302-5)

It is precisely because of the womb-like effects involved in the watching of Dramatic theater that Philomele misrecognizes herself in the characters of the many plays she has seen, thus appropriating a character's feelings (love, in this case) when she has actually

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[9] Phaedra, married to King Theseus, falls in love with her stepson, Hippolytus, which to some extent echoes the illegitimate love dragging Tereus to her wife's sister, Philomele.

never experienced so in real life. The performance of this play as part of the intrigue in *The Love of the Nightingale* cleverly evolves to the point where the action within this secondary play there performed blends with the very fictionality of the actual play we are witnessing. The chorus inside the Phaedra play hence participates as if commenting the action at the audience hall, where King Pandion and the others are debating whether it would be wise to let Philomele accompany Tereus on his way back to Thrace so as to visit her sister. And Hippolytus' lines similarly adapt to the lively conversation held by our characters. In this fashion, Philomele, King Pandion, the Queen and Tereus gradually (and unnoticeably) abandon their role as spectators within the Hippolytus and Phaedra play so as to recover their righteous role as characters, thus revealing the theatrical mechanism and the procedures that are expected to be experienced by the very audience watching this fiction, us:

> **King Pandion** The play's coming to an end and I still haven't reached a decision. Queen…
>
> …
>
> **Queen** Hippolytus has come back to Athens to die. He's wounded. The head.
>
> **Female Chorus** Poor Hippolytus. I weep at your pitiful fate. And I rage against the gods who sent you far away, out of your father's lands to meet with such disaster from the sea-god's wave.
>
> **King Pandion** That's the phrase. Philomele you must not leave your father's lands. You'll stay here.
>
> …
>
> **Hippolytus** Weep for me, weep for me, destroyed, mangled, trampled underfoot by man and god both unjust, weep, weep for my death.
>
> **Philomele** Ah.
>
> **Tereus** You're crying Philomele.
>
> ...
>
> **Male Chorus** Fate is irresistible.
>
> **Female Chorus** And there is no escape.

King Pandion And now we must applaud the actors. [end of scene] (*LN* 306-7)

The factual representation of the performing act in itself, along with the 'fictional' spectators' analysis decomposing the fallacious nature of the representation by commenting on its technical features helps us, the 'real' audience on the theater hall, reveal the very tactics by which fiction works on our emotional receptive mechanisms and how it does shape our ideological background.[10] In *Unmaking Mimesis* (1997) Diamond compares Brecht's Epic theater with mainstream Dramatic theater (and also with the cinematic experience). Films and mainstream theater provoke in the audience an effect of regression that Diamond compares with Lacan's mirror stage (which has already been explored in this thesis). Just as the Lacanian mirror stage regulates the moment when the infant subject acquires a whole view of his/her own persona (as opposed to the previous fragmented perspective of reality and self), the cinematic experience also provides the subject with a coherent persona, an imaginary ideal, with which the spectator identifies.[11] Thus, Diamond describes the cinematic experience as an artificial regression to the maternal womb, as it "confuse[s] boundaries and send[s] the subject back to earlier stages of psychic development [the Lacanian mirror stage]" (1997:51). This experience, grounded in the complete darkness of the movie theater (or the theater venue in traditional performance), unquestionably facilitates the audience's assimilation of the set of ideals promoted by the particular community from which the play/film emerges.

In contrast to this, Brecht's epic theater does not intend to take the audience to a state of unconscious fantasy but, instead, aims at awakening the spectator's critical gaze

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[10] "**Queen** Phaedra's fallen in love with Hippolytus. **Tereus** Her own stepson! That's wrong. **King Pandion** That's what makes it a tragedy. When you love the right person it's a comedy" *LN* 302.

[11] This is precisely the same identifying experience Philomele was going through in her role as a spectator witnessing Phaedra's love catastrophe (see quotation earlier on in this chapter).

and to have him/her react and later act in response to what has been witnessed on the stage. The second instance of the play-within-a-play mechanism in *The Love of the Nightingale* exemplifies the functioning of and consequent reaction to such theatrical practices. After years of reclusion in which Philomele spent much of her time sewing and painting huge dolls, Niobe decides to take her to the Bacchae celebrations where women are allowed to dance and drink unobserved by men, taking Philomele for a harmless and damaged victim who has already lost her mind. There, Philomele conducts the performance of her traumatic encounter with her sister's husband (now already five years ago), which, in this case, does not provoke in the audience the same enchantment or the platonic sense of identification of the previous theatrical representation brought about in the play. Instead of blurring the boundaries between the fictive and the real so as to provoke in the audience a temporary state of fallacious transportation into the performed action, Philomele's performance rather manages to open the audience's eyes (her own sister's, Procne, as she is a member of her audience), demystifying her husband's stories, now proved to be false, and momentarily drawing the curtains of deceitful stereotypes woven by male-based ideology:

> *The Acrobats perform. Finish. As they melt back into the crowd, the empty space remains and Philomele throws the dolls into the circle. Niobe grabs one of them and tries to grab Philomele, but she is behind the second doll. Since the dolls are huge, the struggle seems to be between the two dolls. One is male, one is female and the male one has a king's crown.*

> **Niobe** A mad girl, a mad girl. Help me.

> *But the crowd still applauds, makes a wider circle and waits in silence. The rape scene is re-enacted in a gross and comic way, partly because of Niobe's resistance and attempt to catch Philomele. Philomele does most of the work with both dolls. The crowd laughs. Philomele then stages a very brutal illustration of the cutting of the female doll's tongue. Blood cloth on the floor. The crowd is very silent. Niobe still. Then the Servant comes inside the circle, holding a third doll, a queen. At that moment, Procne also appears in the front of the crowd's circle. She has been watching. The Procne doll weeps. The two female dolls embrace. Procne approaches Philomele, looks at her and takes her away. The dolls are picked up by the crowd and they move off. A bare stage for a second.*

> *Then Procne and Philomele appear, Procne holding on to Philomele, almost dragging her. Then she lets go. Philomele stands still. Procne circles her, touches her. Sound of music very distant. Then a long silence. The sisters look at each other.* (*LN* 342)

Through this double approach to the play-within-a-play device Wertenbaker thus points at the capacity of theatrical performance to deconstruct social stereotypes such as idyllic love and passion. It is the second performance where we find elements identified with Brechtian practice: actors –or figures in this case- that remind of the illusionistic nature of performance, or the appeal to the grotesque such as Philomele's violent emulation of the rape scene, which aims at a naturalistic representation, rather than a conceited and false emulation of the real. But the first example of the play-within-a-play device already recurred to strategies such as the direct appeal to the audience so as to avoid their falling on a state of psychic drowsiness and captivation by the imaginary 'real' on the stage: "**Queen.** Listen to the chorus. The playwright always speaks through the chorus" (*LN* 304) or "**King Pandion.** And now we must applaud the actors" (*LN* 306-7).

Brecht's *Versfremdungseffekt* always works to defamiliarize and distort what ideology has identified with the normal and ideal. In this case, it is the construction of gender stereotypes (men's honorability or women's submissive nature) that is being challenged by this rupture with the theatrical fourth wall by means of the strategies above mentioned such as the crude reference to grotesque sexual details that do not usually form part of idyllic representations of the real, or the direct appeal to the audience. Concerning the latter, Wertenbaker takes advantage of the classical setting of the story so as to resort to the very liable Brechtian device of the Greek chorus. The functions of a Greek chorus perfectly fit the aspirations of Brechtian practices, as the chorus, a defamiliarizing element in itself, breaks the iconicity effect achieved by theatrical representation. As already mentioned in the previous chapter, in *How to Stage*

Greek Tragedy Today (2007) Simon Goldhill talks about two possible functions of the Greek chorus as formulated by contemporary critics. One of these generally agreed functions is to voice the ideas of the author (an attribution that Goldhill himself esteems as superficial and plain), while the second widespread view on the Greek chorus regards it as the impersonation on stage of the idealized spectator. In this sense, Wertenbaker's chorus works as a guide for the spectator to read the signs that are constructed on the stage and to formulate the questions that are left open for the audience to answer once the theatrical action has reached an end. Therefore, the Greek chorus materializes the major aspiration and drive instigating Brechtian theater: that of awakening the audience's critical gaze. And it does so by an aesthetic and artistic form that matches Brecht's prerogatives concerning the attainment of the revolutionary purposes his theater aimed at. According to Brecht, a piece of art aimed at provoking the reaction of the working class concerning social struggle should be explicit, and intelligible, appealing to the proletariat's *Verstand* ('reason') and thus at the same time being *Verstänlich* ('comprehensible') (Meg Mumford 149). Thus, Brecht's gestic theater searched aesthetic representations which facilitated the reception of the unequivocal social issue being denounced, leaving no doubt about its meaning and avoiding vague or ambivalent readings. It is because of this same reason that Wertenbaker resorts to the use of the chorus as a key clarifying element ingeniously leading the audience towards the desired interpretation (the explicit denounce of the silencing of women's voices), at the same time that she does not answer any of the controversial questions asked by this same female chorus, thus also raising the audience's conscience:[12]

> **Iris** There are some questions that have no answers. We might ask you now: why does the Vulture eat Prometheus' liver? He brought men intelligence.

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[12] Brecht similarly regarded the classics as a source from which he could borrow elements clarifying the political or social agenda being denounced on stage. The use of masks in his play *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* (1948) is an illustration of this.

Echo Why did God want them stupid?

Iris We can ask: Why did Medea Kill her children?

June Why do countries make war?

Helen Why are races exterminated?

Hero Why do people cut off the words of blacks?

Iris Why do people disappear? The ultimate silence.

Echo Not even death recorded.

Helen Why are little girls raped and murdered in the car parks of dark cities?

Iris What makes the torturer smile?

Hero We can ask. World will grope and probably not find. But if you silence the question.

Iris Imprison the mind that asks.

Echo Cut out its tongue.

Hero You will have this.

June We show you a myth.

Echo Image. Echo.

Helen A child is the future… (*LN* 349)

The strategies addressed in this case match the ambitions of Brechtian gestic theater defined by Mumford as "the artistic practice of selecting, defamiliarizing and showing significant *Haltungen* [attitude] in order to create a vivid embodiment of social casualty" (146). And that is precisely to be found in this particular fragment. Through the multiple voices of the female chorus, Wertenbaker first spots the issue upon which she tries to raise the audience's concern, namely, sexual difference: "Why did god want *them* stupid" (*LN* 348, emphasis mine), thus taking advantage of the double-entendre of the word 'men' (meaning both 'male sex' and 'mankind'). Then, gradually, Wertenbaker breaks with the theatrical illusion on which the play relied until now and moves away from the classical Greek context where the action is set so as to recall to the audience's mind their off-theater everyday realities. Wertenbaker thus brilliantly

leads the audience through a process of conscience raising in which, despite partaking of the action on stage, their critical mechanisms are kept attentive ("**Helen** Why are little girls raped and murdered in the car parks of dark cities?" *LN* 349). Furthermore, and thus fulfilling its original classical function, by directly addressing the audience the chorus creates an alienation effect by which the spectator cannot but help feel interrogated (in this case this is added by the drastic change from the classical towards our contemporary background) and to some extent involved in the accusations being formulated by the chorus, now leaving behind their classical 'mask' and directly facing the audience.

The function of the Greek chorus in Wertenbaker hence resembles Brecht's strategy to use masks on the stage so as to establish a realist gestic effect of the performed action.[13] The function of masks in Brecht's theater does not conceal, but rather demonstrates and unmasks the intentions of a given character, thus moving towards the articulation of the social truth being denounced (Mumford 158). The masks are a constant reminder of the fictive nature characterizing the make-believe processes developing on the stage, just as the chorus in Wertenbaker is licensed to comment (thus guiding the audience's interpretation) on the fabricated action from a detached and not-involved perspective, thus identically reminding of the illusive fictional component.

Nonetheless, while the use of masks in Brecht speaks for class struggle and social stratification, Wertenbaker's chorus signals sex differentiation. As mentioned before, there are two types of choruses working on *The Love of the Nightingale* for the consecution of the desired *Verfremdungseffekt*: the Female Chorus and the Masculine Chorus. Just as Gömceli points out in her monographical work on Timberlake

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[13] Mumford defines Brecht's Gestus as "an aesthetic referent to an artistic display of social behavior" (145) entailing both aesthetic representation of the social real and the construction of ideology and a reactive attitude on the audience.

Wertenbaker, the Female Chorus addresses the crucial questions that are formulated throughout the play by means of a multiplicity of voices, while the Male Chorus, acting as one single voice, formulates side comments to the main action that are nevertheless essential in terms of activating the audience's analytical mechanisms:

The Male Chorus.

Male Chorus What is a myth? The oblique image of an unwanted truth, reverberating through time.

Male Chorus And yet, the first, the Greek meaning of myth, is simply what is delivered by word of mouth, a myth is speech, public speech.

Male Chorus And myth also means the matter itself, the content of the speech.

Male Chorus We might ask, has the content become increasingly unacceptable and therefore the speech more indirect? How has the meaning of myth been transformed from public speech to an unlikely story? It also meant counsel, command. Now it is a remote tale.

Male Chorus Let that be, there is no content without its myth. Fathers and sons, rebellion, collaboration, the state, every gold and twist of passion, we have uttered them all. This one, you will say, watching Philomele watching Tereus watching Philomele, must be about men and women, yes, you think, a myth for our times, we understand.

Male Chorus You will be beside the myth. If you think of anything, think of countries, silence, but we cannot rephrase it for you. If we could, why would we trouble to show you the myth?

We row Philomele north. Does she notice the widening cracks in that fragile edifice, happiness? And what about Procne, the cause perhaps, in any case the motor of a myth that leaves her mostly absent? (*LN* 315-6)

One of Gömceli's main arguments in her work points to a classification of Wertenbaker's work as representative of the radical feminist theatrical trend (Gömceli 199). In a play that discusses the silencing of women by such explicit images such as the cutting of Philomele's tongue, the fact that members of the Female Chorus are privileged to speak out as independent voices and also being allowed to take part of the action as Procne's Thracean court ladies (thus departing from the strictly Classical function of the Greek chorus) cannot go unnoticed. And yet, it is precisely that vocal multiplicity granted to the female chorus that weakens Gömceli's otherwise solid

classification, situating *The Love of the Nightingale* as a radical feminist piece. Radical Feminist theater thus tends to focus on the worries of middle class white women and neglects the question that concerns women elsewhere. This kind of theater practice was criticized by socialist feminists, who argued thereof that radical feminism tended to emphasize the differences separating women from men but ignored the racial, economic and social differences separating women amongst themselves. Wertenbaker's play, while being predominantly radical in terms of the feminist principles upon which it relies, is nevertheless distanced from feminist radical standards in that it does offer an overreaching view of the silencing of women from a varied array of perspectives. The variety of voices that constitute the Female Chorus, as mentioned above, the consideration of the perspective of minor characters who represent the marginal Greek society (the old servant, Niobe) and also including lines contemplating issues such as racial hatred ("**Helen** Why are races exterminated?" *LN* 349), Wertenbaker's play does not limit its exploration of the female voice to questions of gender, but includes other categories of analysis (race, class, nationality) to her critical paradigm. Thus contemplating a wide number of perspectives and by resorting to the performative devices here analyzed, Wertenbaker manages to deconstruct what ideology and the symbolic order label as 'normative femininity'. As Justin D. Edwards argues concerning the representation of the female body,

> "If the 'perfect' woman's body is a product of the male gaze and its related power dynamics, then the affirmation and display of material bodies in all their diversity (shapes contours, sizes, dimensions) and bodily functions (ingestions, excretions, menstruation, pregnancy, aging, sickness) have the potential to subvert patriarchal gender codes related to corporeality. Grotesque bodies can, in other words, resist absorption into the objectifying gaze that seeks to contain them." (Edwards 32)

In such a fashion, *The Love of the Nightingale* manages to distort the fallacious representation of sexuality as made normative by the predominant patriarchal voice

shaping our symbolic gaze. And it does so by providing a grotesque and at the same time realistic image of it which is both performed and narrated (retold by the characters) in the play. In particular, the structure of the play does not grant the audience access to the scene where Tereus rapes Philomele and, instead, that perpetration is revisited by means of distancing and defamiliarizing theatrical devices: the rape is retold by Philomele, who appeals in her narration to the most grotesque images of the violation, and then it is performed in the scene already analyzed in this chapter where Philomele resorts to the grotesque imitation of the rape by means of dolls. The same traumatic act is thus explored twice from two contrasting perspectives, one relying on narration, the other on grotesque, Brechtian performance.[14] And this inevitably brings to the fore the question whether it is explicit performance or stirring narration that best projects in the audience's receptive and memory mechanisms the abject image of Philomele's rape, thus fulfilling the major goal of Brechtian performance: not to leave a single member of the audience indifferent.

In his work *Violence* (2008), Žižek explores this same quandary about how to represent the traumatic event in its very inarticulacy. He argues that it is this very impossibility (in terms of its ineffability) of the traumatic event that should be at the core of any attempt to approximate its veracity. And this is only possible through "a description which creates, as the background of the phenomena it describes, an inexistent (virtual) space of its own, so that what appears in it is not an appearance sustained by the depth of reality behind it, but a decontextualised appearance, an appearance which fully coincides with real being" (2008:6). In other words, he appeals again to the elusiveness and fantasmic nature of what is at stake, or what is the object of

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[14] "**Philomele** My body bleeding, my spirit ripped open…Procne, what did you tell her? Did you tell her you cut me because you yourself had no strength?" *LN* 334-6, and "*Philomele then stages a very brutal illustration of the cutting of the female doll's tongue. Blood cloth on the floor. The crowd is very silent.*" *LN* 342.

scrutiny by our symbolic gaze. This kind of representation must, in this sense, rely on means other than verbal communication, as the object of analysis must be taken away from "the depth of reality behind it" (the symbolic lens by which we tend to examine it) so that it can thus coincide "with real being". An aesthetic piece needs to extract the very evocation of the traumatic event so as to approach to the extent possible that very unutterable experience. As an example of this aesthetic phenomenon by which the speechlessness of the traumatic may be approached, Žižek talks about the potential of musical compositions to evoke the terror of the trauma, thus preventing its loss in the macrocosm of memory, as it "comes in when words fail" (2008:5).

The Male Chorus in *The Love of the Nightingale* sets forth the process by which language tries to hide what does not seem to fit the normativity regulated by the symbolic order ("We might ask, has the content become increasingly unacceptable and therefore the speech more indirect?" *LN* 315) and the cutting of Philomele's tongue itself explicitly reminds of the ontological limits of the symbolic real (i.e. its inability to comprise whatever is not regulated by its rules, in this case the traumatic act).[15] Language is the fundamental instrument laying the foundations of our symbolic reality and, as such, is not capable to appeal to the reality that in all circumstances falls out of the normativity upon which the symbolic relies. In other words, if the patriarchal voice narrating and thus shaping the reality we live in stipulates that the naked male body be muscular and "spongy" (*LN* 293), such symbolic construction clashes with Philomele's attempt to uncover the absolute real of her experience with Tereus ("you were so shriveled, so ridiculous" *LN* 336), which is why such attempt meets the brutal cutting of

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[15] The exact same move was also performed in Sarah Kane's *Cleansed* when Tinker cuts the tongue of one of Carl in the attempt to prevent him from expressing his love for his partner, Rod. And in a similar way as is the case in Wertenbaker's work, the cutting of the tongue reminds of the inaccuracy and insufficiency of language to express what is not regarded as normative (see chapter one of this thesis for my analysis of Kane's *Cleansed*).

her tongue. Such real, the abject and grotesque description of the sexual aggression that Philomele tried to articulate and which she afterwards performs with the help of the dolls she has been sewing for years, falls out of any possible symbolic formulation, as it opposes our normative understanding of sex. And it is precisely this moment when the subject is no longer able to identify with what is established as normal by his/her community, that he/she experiences the 'abject', or the recognition that one's own experience touches the abnormal and grotesque when regarded from the normative lens imposed by our social community. As Julia Kristeva puts it, the abject "is experienced at the peak of its strength when that subject, weary of fruitless attempts to identify with something on the outside, finds the impossible within; when it finds that the impossible constitutes its very being" (1982:5). And it is the experiencing of the abject, of such rupture with the norm and the accepted, that Wertenbaker aims to offer her audience by approaching Philomele's rape from a double perspective, one relying on the telling of a truth that is at one point confounded with myth,[16] and the other relying on Brechtian performance. Both strategies, however, share the same tactic to provoke an alienating effect by means of abjection. "[A]bjection is elaborated through a failure to recognize its kin; nothing is familiar, not even the shadow of a memory" (Kristeva 1982:5). And in that sense both the retelling and the showing of the rape scene revisit this failure to conform to what is stipulated by the symbolic order. While Philomele's retelling makes use of metaphorical but also suggestive and crude language so as to recall the brutality of the scene ("My body bleeding, my spirit ripped open" *LN* 335, or "such quick and ugly pleasure…a man of jelly beneath his hard skin" *LN* 336), the performance of the actual scene emphasizes the alienating effect experienced by those who witness such non-normative act, and their inability to react to such grotesque view, moving from

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[16]After Philomele has reproduced the scene of the rape in the Bacchae, her own sister, Procne, questions her version as she is still under the strong influence of the patriarchal mechanisms controlling her symbolic gaze: "**Procne** How can I know that was the truth?" (*LN* 343).

laughter to absolute speechlessness (*LN* 342). Both the retelling and the showing, therefore, attempt to provoke in the audience the same alienating effect as a consequence of the clash against their symbolic expectations. And yet, it is only when the performative fourth wall is trespassed and the audience's security and sense of protection is shattered that such alienating effect reaches its extreme. The sense of protection in the darkness of the audience hall and the passivity characterizing the spectator's theatrical experience must be threatened so as to break that reassuring effect and thus appeal to the spectator's critical mechanisms and affective responsiveness. The audience's involvement is therefore activated when its members are explicitly addressed, and when they are able to experience by themselves as close an understanding as possible to the character's trauma and suffering.

The process by which Philomele's experiencing of the abject and the aberrant is transferred to the audience is carried out in the scene above commented, where the actors on the stage performing the role of members of the audience exemplify the speechlessness characteristic of the subject's encounter with what is non-symbolizable (Philomele's aberrant experience). Philomele's account of the traumatic scene inevitably dispossesses it of its truth as a consequence of its very narrativisation. By narrativising the very traumatic event, trying to give verbal account of it, its very eventuality is filtered through symbolic mechanisms unable to contain its veracity. The symbolic instruments Philomele has so as to formulate and denounce the violation are not able to encompass the very obscenity of the traumatic scene, as they contravene and come into conflict with the normative substrata of the world of signs where she subsists. Just as Lacan's reflections on the couple 'voice/writing' determine that "the voice as such in its uncanny presence…establishes itself as the ideal medium of self transparency" (Žižek 2005:194-5), in an analogous move, performance erects itself as

the medium by which the otherwise inexorable traumatic event can approximate a truthful reenactment. In other words, "voice is that which, in the signifier, resists meaning: it stands for the opaque inertia which cannot be recuperated by meaning: It is only the dimension of writing which accounts for the stability of meaning" (Žižek 2005:195). And, agreeing to this argument that opposes voice to writing, performance, as opposed to an exclusively verbal narration, shares its elusiveness and ghostliness with Lacan's voice. Performance and voice allow us to get a glimpse of "impossible self-identity" (Žižek 2005:195), or the essence of what makes us human.[17] "Voice establishes itself as the ideal medium of self-transparency" due to its elusive and uncertain status of "spectral apparition" (Žižek 2005:195) and, in a similar vein, performance provides the materialization of that uncanny remainder of the real which has not been processed by the rational symbolic (as opposed to narration, dominated by sign and word, instruments that lay the foundations of the symbolic realm).

The two choruses in *The Love of the Nightingale* represent such uncanny and fantasmic presence as the one evoked by voice and performance, which oppose the scrutinizing symbolic and narrative lens (the word). It is thus that Wertenbaker manages to transmit the aberrant and grotesque encounter with the abject as experienced by Philomele. Philomele's impossibility to formulate the disgust and repugnance generated by her traumatic experience is represented by the cutting of her tongue, which at the same time works as a reference to the silencing that the female voice has been subjected to throughout centuries of female misrepresentation by the sovereignty of male-centered storytelling. The ascension of the female voice, as mentioned above, resists meaning and the "reliable masculine word" (Žižek 2005:198) characteristic of the reign of the symbolic law. In such attempt to represent what is esteemed as opposing symbolic

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[17] What, according to Butler in *Precarious Life*, is literature's main aim: capturing the very ineffability of our human essence.

normativity, Wertenbaker's rewriting of the myth of Philomele resorts to such ghostly mechanisms as voice and performance, in contrast to narrated action, and multiple other devices (the chorus, the lines appealing to the audience, the play-within-a-play and meta-theatrical devices above analyzed) thus breaking the suspension of disbelief-effect so characteristic of traditional theatrical practices. The female voice in early feminist rewritings emerges in its attempt to impose its truth, "to redress and reform wrongful representations so that out of the revised past new futures can emerge" (Plate 30). Therefore, as suggested by the name of one of the members of the female chorus, Echo, the voice that Wertenbaker erects in *The Love of the Nightingale* is intended to provoke an effect that would resound and reverberate on upcoming generations.

However, Wertenbaker's intention to articulate an alternative account of a well known story that would empower the female gaze as opposed to the so far predominant masculinist view stands out as representative of an earlier generation of feminist writers whose work was directed at the unerring refusal of such masculinist gaze pervading contemporary symbolic reality. Emerging and gaining strength (by means of readers and public interest) during the 1970's and onwards, such radical feminist branch aimed at challenging stereotypical constructions of the female world as devised by the patriarchal order.[18] Our cultural memory evolves as it interacts with new aesthetic works and cultural/artistic pieces shaped by our contemporary view of reality. Such dialogic relationship with history deems our gaze to expand and contract in unexpected ways which art and aesthetic trends try to capture precisely for the sake of cultural memory.

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[18] Works produced during this period, such as *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966), by Jean Rhys or *Ahab's Wife* (1999) by Sena Jeter Naslund, aimed at the actualization of classical stories and drastically changed our cultural memory and our approach to the original male-constructed stories.

Accordingly, recent feminist rewritings reflect how our cultural memory interacts differently with our past as a consequence of our distinct gaze towards our present issues. We find relief in a different kind of aesthetics and so we have developed a divergent way of coping with our past:

> The acceleration of time signifies the temporal collapse of past, present, and future into a permanently fluid and changing present. As the titles of Bauman's recent books suggest- *Liquid Modernity* (2000), *Liquid Love* (2003), *Liquid Life* (2005), *Liquid Fear* (2006) and *Liquid Times* (2007)- the consuming present is characterized by 'liquidity'… liquid modernity signifies both changing subjectivities and senses of self and altered relations to virtually everything, ranging from others to politics to narrative…What I am arguing, then, is that just as the world becomes a myriad of possibilities, so does the past. (Plate 19)

Consequently, our current view of the world and the way in which we relate to our past has changed, and so have the instruments by which we try to define our fluid and malleable modern existences. In modern liquid times feminist rewritings no longer aim at redressing the wrongful and for centuries biased representation of women's reality as reflected by the dominant male gaze (Plate 30). Now, the context of rewriting has gained a scope by which instead of amending a poor representation of the feminine real, the new literary work opens a flexible and constructive dialogue with the original text. In other words, the former aspiration of the radical feminist school to re-inscribe and rectify a past account tainted by the contaminating patriarchal filter has gradually transitioned to a more contemporary need to understand where we come from (which is translated in the need to cultivate a literary and aesthetic dialogue with our past) and the aspiration to represent and capture by aesthetic means the uncertainty of the future we are precariously heading to.

As put by Žižek, "the fact that there is no longer a Destiny preordaining the contours of my guilt in no way allows me to enjoy the innocence of the autonomous subject delivered from any externally imposed standard of guilt…the freedom of the

modern subject is 'false'." (Žižek 2005:207). Consequently, as an answer to the new need to articulate both the precariousness and the lack of destiny of the new social subject, newer feminist rewritings gradually replaced the former radical feminist attempt to silence a patriarchal view of the Real so as to offer an alternative prospect vindicating a more realistic portrait of female reality. As Plate argues, the former feminist trend attempted to demythologize the patriarchal view of the Real by denaturalizing and deconstructing the so far unquestioned patriarchal gaze and subsequently re-inscribing the female truth upon the patriarchal myth. Wertenbaker's *Love of the Nightingale* appropriately exemplifies such radical trend to write upon and thus deny the male "truth".[19] Contrarily, new feminist rewritings progressively departed from such vindicatory overtones so as to embrace the modern struggle to represent the malleable nature of our contemporary reality. As Bauman contends, "modernity is the impossibility of staying put. To be modern means to be on the move" (1997:77), and yet, the subject moves in the inertia started by the bigger community (s)he is part of. Modernity is the time when we come to realize about our precarious social status as "human waste" (Beilharz 57), being tiny segments out of a bigger community that prompts such uncertain and aimless movement that Bauman tries to define. Contemporary feminist rewritings aim at representing such ontological uncertainty, the unappeasable, and yet aimless, communal movement which we join out of that very inertia instigated by the always moving and transforming community.[20] "Certainly the

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[19] As I intended to show with my text-analysis of Wertenbaker's play, the theatrical strategies sustaining *The Love of the Nightingale* rely on the Brechtian maxim to shock so as to provoke a reaction in the audience about a particular issue being denounced. In this case, the silencing women have been subjected to for centuries is explicitly condemned by the almost in-yer-face brutal performance of the cutting of Philomele's tongue.

[20] This same line of thought will be continued in the next chapter and applied to a study on the representation of the subject's social vulnerability and precariousness as a consequence of collective trauma. In a similar way to the theatrical strategies found in the works dealing with individual trauma so far analyzed, chapter four of this thesis will aim at demonstrating that the figure of the ghost and the recourse to the grotesque stands out as the face representing the uncanny and unrelenting traumatic memory.

rate of change seems to be accelerating, and the purpose of liquidity is to capture this mercurial quality of flux, inasmuch as it is open to capture it all" (Beilharz 87). Contemporary times are based on a view of time which no longer relies in linear time structures due to the uncertain future. Feminist rewritings lack the ontological confidence necessary so as to re-inscribe and to impose a closed view of a culturally elevated work arisen from a patriarchal scope. Instead, contemporary feminist rewritings endeavor to open a dialogue with such classical accounts with the intention to construct a stronger cultural memory on which to rely due to the weak and dubious destiny ahead. Such rewritings are "oriented towards the future as opened up by the promise of further retellings" (Plate 31). They do not aim at substituting one patriarchal and restrictive account for a feminist-oriented closed view of that same story, but rather intend to open a nurturing dialogue with the past that would aspire to liquid (as in 'flexible' or 'fluid') construction of the still uncertain and precarious future. On such grounds, just as *The Love of the Nightingale* aimed at demythologizing (depriving of its 'mythical', and thus untruthful yet self-legitimized content) male-biased account of Philomele's story, Marina Carr's *The Cordelia Dream* (2008) comes forth as a piece of contemporary feminist rewriting which, with mythic overtones, blends past and present, reality and dream, through the fluid exchange of a daughter and a father's impressions about their life relationship.

"Yes, it's bigger isn't it? This battle between us? Ancient. Eternal":

Marina Carr's *The Cordelia Dream*.

The line chosen to open my analysis of *The Cordelia Dream* reflects the salient aspects making of this play an outstanding illustration of the aesthetic turn affecting feminist rewritings which was discussed above. "Ancient", of indeterminate origin, and

"Eternal", never-ending and condemned to ignore ontological boundaries such as real and imaginary, death and life, the confrontation man-woman (father and daughter in this case) thus matches the cyclical structure that characterizes mythical storytelling: the story is destined to be told and retold, and re-experienced over again. In this regard, in his aforementioned study on cultural retelling and women's rewriting, Plate alludes to the potential of the aesthetics of the myth to capture the fluid character of contemporary times: "myth brings the past into the present in a movement that remains open to a future in becoming" (29). The uncertainty and sense of precariousness characterizing today's existential restlessness makes of the myth an outstanding instrument so as to represent contemporary worries of the social subject. Žižek's description of the Lacanian concept of 'voice' (as opposed to premeditated writing) appeals to the same idea of flexibility and also elusiveness that contemporary aesthetics address in their attempt to represent the existential anxieties in contemporary times: "As such, voice is neither dead nor alive: its status is, rather, that of a 'living dead', of a spectral apparition which somehow survives its own death, i.e., the eclipse of meaning." (Žižek 2005:195). It is such sense of elusiveness and spectrality and its translation into the field of theatrical performance that this thesis contemplates as the major aesthetic means by which the contemporary subject's traumatized self materializes.

The Cordelia Dream's opening already highlights the fluid and moving nature of the story about to begin, at the same time that it points to its distant and imprecise origins. The confrontation between a decaying neglecting father and his psychologically tortured daughter could not begin in a different way than by reproach, which denotes a hatred-loaded common past which the characters unsuccessfully intend to clarify throughout the play:

Man You

Woman Yes. me.

Man Well.

Woman It wasn't easy…seeking you out.

Man Wasn't it?

Woman I stayed away as long as I could.

Man You think I'm going to die soon?

Woman Maybe.

Man You want to kiss and make up before that event?

Woman Some people visit each other all the time.

Man I'm not some people. You of all people should know that (*CD* 233).

The reference to an ample and yet uncertain past whose richness we, the audience, are not able to grasp already points to the mythical overtones pervading this everlasting father and daughter epic struggle. Carr's re-visitation of the inter-generational conflict called upon by Shakespeare in *King Lear* is a story of a haunting traumatic past ever coming back to blend with the present, thus making of the future an unreliable place. The reality experienced by the two characters of the stage hence blends dimensions of opaque boundaries. The very reason for this peculiar family reunion is a dream had by Woman and which in Act II proves to have come true. On these grounds, the audience remains perplexed and distrustful, on a constant state of suspension, and suspicious of characters haunting and yet repudiating one another as they are alive, and offering help and understanding once they are dead. In Act II Woman thus appears in the shape of a ghost (a fact which remains hidden from the audience and from Man himself until the very end of the play) once she has accomplished what was announced to her in the form of an augural dream (which she told about in Act I). After committing suicide by hanging herself (thus echoing Cordelia's death), Woman comes back five years after her death to visit her father and to find out whether, once she was out of the musical panorama, he had been able to flourish again as a talented pianist, this being the reason

behind their eternal confrontation. However, what she finds is an old and forgetful old man, unaware of her own daughter's death due to his mental deterioration, and who is at the gates of death himself. Once Woman reveals her own spectral condition, she confesses to have brought him a present to this, the last of their terrestrial encounters: "*a beautiful, haunting sonata*" (*CD* 278) that Man himself plays as the grandest way to finish his days.

In a fashion that very much situates this work among her previous productions, Marina Carr's *The Cordelia Dream* pushes ontological boundaries to their limits. The uncertainty shared by the two characters on the stage about their memories is now joined by the unreliability of their future. Both of them being renowned musicians, some of the topics around which their uncontainable struggle revolves resonate as a reflection of such sense of fear and precariousness concerning their future careers and their fear to have lost their gift (and thus their whole *raison d'être*). Some of the topics they accordingly discuss are the gods and their whimsical playfulness as providers of gift and artistic talent, a true artist's incapability to finish a master piece (which thus remains open and bound to the change and malleability brought about by upcoming times, as in mythological accounts) and *King Lear*'s fifth act, where Cordelia's corpse is found by Lear. The central action of Act V in *King Lear* occupied the dream Woman had shortly before visiting her father, and it is precisely her restlessness concerning such dream that compels her to pay his father the visit integrating the action of Act I. Woman's dream about Act V in *King Lear*, where she identifies with Cordelia and associates her father with the figure of Lear, ironically points to the further development of the play in Act II. Even though Shakespeare's Lear states out loud his ability to "know when one is dead and when one lives" (Shakespeare 2487), Man in our play not only misses his daughter's concealed intention that she, like Cordelia, will not outlive

her father, but selfishly brings the discussion to the field of artistic competition and

mistrusts her daughter, accusing her of attempting to steal his gift:

> **Man** But what is it you want?
>
> **Woman** I want us both to live and flourish.
>
> **Man** You want your gift back!
>
> **Woman** Yes! Give it back!
>
> …
>
> I think that the only thing would make you happy is me removed from the Earth.
>
> **Man** Yes. Yes. Remove yourself. Go. Do it now. Do it here if you wish. You vicious ingrate!
>
> …
>
> **Woman** We can't part like this.
>
> **Man** Oh yes, we can! You have come into my lair and savaged me again. You have come sauntering in with Lear on your lips and the pretence of reconciliation, when really you have come like the cuckoo to foul my nest, to clock and make sure I have not risen above the place you have allotted me. Well, you can see I have not, though I am trying.
>
> **Woman** I wish you great success in your work. I know you don't believe that. But I do. (*CD* 249-52)

Thus moved by his arrogant drive to win this battle against his own daughter and

dialectically demonstrate he has artistically outdone her, he does not realize that the

crucial question "are you dying?" remains unanswered throughout Act I:

> **Man** What am I planning?
>
> **Woman** Your death. You're going to die and I'm going to be left with the fallout. I refuse to deal with your ghost. That's why I'm here. I want to sort you out while you are alive. While there's breath in my body.
>
> **Man** Are you dying?
>
> **Woman** Can I smoke?
>
> **Man** Yes. Yes. Smoke. Smoke. (*CD* 239)

It is in such a way how, even when it comes to discussing their deaths, father and daughter try to compete and triumph over each other. They keep constantly evoking the gods and either blessing or cursing their favor or lack of it ("**Man** The gods have favoured you" *CD* 241 and then again 251), which reinforces the idea that new feminist rewritings find in mythology the adequate overtones so as to transmit the sense of openness and flexibility aimed at for an interpretation of liquid modern times. The use of myth as a prominent instrument so as to convey these two character's insecurities arises again when the two characters try to formulate their past together, and their distorted view of the past seems so distant and unrealistic as if it had all been a dream, especially now that they are both facing the end of their lives:

> **Man** My wife and I had a goat-faced child. Goat-faced, dog-hearted with the soul of a snake. We buried her under the blue swing in the field of beech trees. But out she came, ate the coffin, clay in her eyes, and we took her in. My wife said, we'll pay for this. I said no, I had such faith in the heart of God. This is what she sounded like.
>
> *He plays a few notes on the piano.*
>
> My mother warned me about women like these. They come in on the night and bite the legs off lambs and suckle infant monsters, these mermadonna with their thousand breasts and their slithering eel-like tails. Jewelled serpents with the appetite of wild dog. And I promised Mother I would avoid such creatures and I did till I gave birth to you. They will carry you away, she said, away to their nightmare palaces of obsidian and painted coral… (*CD* 261)

In a fashion similar to mythical retellings, Man's recollections about his past reach a point where they seem to contradict each other, such as his claim to have outlived all of his children

> **Man** They died. It was in the papers. They died eating cream buns, choked or something. Somebody said I did it. (*CD* 257)

and

> **Woman** Jimmy comes to see you everyday. He wants you to live with him.
>
> **…**

> **Man** No, my sons were drowned on a white ship, oh, a thousand years ago. All of them. And my daughters…To neglect an old man like this is inexhaustible. (*CD* 257, 264)

Woman assures that they not only exist, but are the ones to take care of their father "(**Woman** You see them everyday. They're the ones bring you champagne and stack your ironed clothes in the piano" *CD* 268). It is also implied as a vague recollection that he was actually walked by them at Woman's funeral:

> **Woman** Didn't the siblings tell you? I imagine you were at my funeral.
>
> **Man** I was at a gathering recently. Was that your funeral?
>
> **Woman** It may have been.
>
> **Man** there was lots of wine after and familiar faces and people kept shaking my hand. I thought I was at a concert. I think I may have made a speech. I'm sorry I didn't realize it was you. (*CD* 273)

Man's attempt to keep an orderly record of his past by means of a diary proves also to be as useless as his own failing memory mechanisms. His entry to his diary speaks of the weather, and of *King Lear*'s fifth act (which might have been an evocation arrived at as a consequence of her daughter's death by hanging). But no record of her daughter's death is found in his diary whatsoever, and it did not appear to make an impact in Man's memory either, which seems to be more and more damaged as he approaches his death. Timelessness, becomes in this way one of the major themes in the play and mythical retelling, characterized by its unreliability and cyclical nature, a prominent mechanism articulating such ambiguous and obscure understanding of reality. Hence, the reconstruction of the past in the play is based on oral account and the voice of a ghost, Woman, Man's own daughter, and not on Man's symbolic attempt to keep an orderly written record of his daily life. Man's sensation to be repeating the same conversation time and again also reminds of the cyclical motion defining classical mythology and the non-linear mode of understanding liquid times that contemporary rewritings aim at (Plate 29):

> **Man** They identified the drowned Shelley by a volume of Keat's poems which was found in his breast pocket, with the spine bent back. He must have been reading Keats when the squall came up. I think I've had this conversation before. (*CD* 269)

Plate's argument about the suitability of the mythic structure as an instrument to convey the nature of contemporary liquid times proves to be true for Marina Carr's *The Cordelia Dream*, as Carr's play puts forward the development of a new kind of re-writing mode no longer aiming at re-inscription but rather directed at constructing an open dialogue with our past. All boundaries seem to collapse here, as the characters gradually lose all certainty concerning their past, which starts to sound more like a distant myth, and accordingly, their stance towards the future becomes increasingly precarious. As the action progresses, their ability to discern their past starts to fail, just as their capability to tell the real apart from the dream:

> **Man** …I thought you looked a little woebegone when you came in. I never dreamt of this…
>
> …
>
> **Man** And do you miss the Earth?
>
> **Woman** I miss it. I know how to live now.
>
> **Man** I'd like you to leave.
>
> **Woman** I'm here to give you a gift.
>
> **Man** A gift?
>
> **Woman** Yes. A parting gift. Sit at the piano. Please.
>
> She takes his hand. Leads him to the piano.
>
> **Man** You won't harm me?
>
> **Woman** Why would I harm you?
>
> **Man** Because I have harmed you.
>
> **Woman** If only you had admitted that when I was here.
>
> **Man** It was too soon.
>
> **Woman** And now?

Man Yes, too late.

Woman Come, sit and play for me.

Man Am I dying?

Woman Yes, you are.

Man You are going to take me out?

Woman It was you who said once that we won't survive one another.

Man That was just talk for dramatic effect.

Woman And this is real? (*CD* 272, 276-7)

The fact that Woman's initial visit was caused by a dream she had about her father and herself in the position of Lear and Cordelia, and this added to the fact that Act II confirms the materialization of such dream (Woman did commit suicide by hanging herself, as foreshadowed by her dream), increases Man's existential quandary in Act II. His approximation to his final hour in Act II further complicates his existential quest, as his discerning capabilities seem to gradually degenerate. In this sense, and as has already been explored in the analysis of Carr's *Woman and Scarecrow*, the subject experiences the fragmentation of his own persona and a retrocession of the steps gone through in his process of identity formation as death comes nearer. In other words, Man is retracing the steps he had gone through so as to achieve his adult persona, as made manifest by his childish moves which add a dose of absurd nonsense and comicality:

Man …You're not the dog-hearted one are you?

Woman Who is the dog-hearted one?

Man The dog-hearted one that lives under the piano. You're not the vicious ingrate, are you? The vicious snake-eyed ingrate?

Woman I think maybe I am.

Man Then I'll get some twine and stitch your lips. I'll crucify your feet with wooden pegs. Oh my mother, my mother. Forgive me, my dear, all the long day I've been fighting off my mother.

…

Man Do you even have children?

Woman Oh yes, there are children.

Man Well, that's something, isn't it? I had the most beautiful children once, sons, daughter romping in the garden. I forget how many, blond-haired, dark-haired, blue-eyed, brown, and some in between. The girls had long hair and giggled every time they saw me. Yes, I had beautiful children and then they were gone. What's the point of that?

Woman They don't come to see you?

Man They died, it was in the papers. They died eating cream buns, chocked or something. Somebody said I did it.

Woman Well, one of them is here now.

Man Where? Oh you mean the dog-hearted one, the vicious ingrate. Yes, she lives in the piano. Between her and the witch on the broomstick I have no peace. I even bought a gun and shot them. Still they whisper together in the dark. If you listen you'll hear them. Give me my hat.

She finds his hat, a woman's straw bonnet with flowers. He puts it on.

This hat frightens them. See. They are quite now. They look at this hat with their mouths open. (*Opens his mouth.*) This was my wife's hat.

…

(*Whispers.*) Oh my God. It's you. It's you.

Woman Yes. It's me.

Man The dog-hearted ingrate.

Woman I'm not.

Man Disguised as a woman.

He leap up, runs behind the piano.

No. No. No. Keep away from me. Keep away. I thought I killed you.

He waves his hat.

My hat. My hat. Doesn't my hat frighten you?

Woman No, it doesn't.

Man (*runs to the window, shouts out*) Help! Help! Help! She's here! Someone please help me. She's here with her army.

Woman Stop. Stop. Stop this.

Man (*terrified*) Now look what you've done. I've wet my trousers and my mother will go mad. (*CD* 255-9)

Man is thus gradually abandoning the world of the sign, the symbolic order, and approaching eternity being led by the ghost of her daughter. Such move is further represented in the play by the symbolic deconstruction that words are victim of. In a similar way to the meta-linguistic discussions that occupied the characters in *Woman and Scarecrow*, Woman and Man's discussion concentrates at one point on the construction of particular words. Instead of focusing on the revelation that Woman is actually dead, both characters seem to share an absurd obsession to get words right:

> **Man** You hung yourself.
>
> **Woman** How do you know that?
>
> **Man** I'm guessing.
>
> **Woman** An accurate guess.
>
> **Man** Cordelia hung herself.
>
> **Woman** Cordelia was hung.
>
> **Man** same thing. It was what I always wished for you.
>
> **Woman** Death by hanging?
>
> **Man** Just a fantasy. Not in my wildest dreams did I ever imagine.
>
> **Woman** Is it hung or hanged?
>
> **Man** I think the correct usage is hanged. You say I hung a picture. I hanged a daughter. Personally I prefer hung.
>
> **Woman** So do I… (*CD* 274)

Man is gradually closer to the ghostly figure visiting him now and the world that she represents, than to the symbolic order where he was until now grounded. Consequently, the detached perspective from which Man regards language now puts forward the random and fortuitous nature of signification and symbolic construction. This allows him to play with words in a similar way to the way in which the main character in *Woman and Scarecrow*, also confronting her death under the guidance of a

ghostly figure, does ("**Man** Keep off! Keep off, witch crab! Keep off" *CD* 260).[21] Such detached approach to the construction and functioning of words implies a derogation of the sign and the symbolic as random means of representation of the Real. Therefore, words come forth now more than ever as incomplete, inaccurate and not fit to comprise the commensurability of the experience Man is going through. And yet we witness Man's struggle against silence, which would mean the end of his days as a musician. Music materializes therefore as a valid instrument to fill the space left by nonsensical speech and as better suited to describe the Real than words, which are instruments to construct the symbolic order. According to Žižek, "[m]usic is located at the very crossroads of Nature and Culture. It seizes us, as it were, 'in the real', far more directly than the meaning of words" (2005:198). Accordingly, in *The Cordelia Dream* we find Man conducting imaginary music at the opening of Act II (*CD* 254) and ending his life under the enchantment of the gift brought back to him by the ghost of his daughter: "*Man plays a beautiful, haunting sonata. Lights fade*" (*CD* 278). Silence is thus identified in the play as equivalent to defeat and failure to interpret the Real (a Real which is no more measureable by the power of the sign). Throughout the play, we witness Man's merciless celebration of her daughter's musical fail:

> **Man** This is it, baby. This is it. Your silence, my garrulity. I have the field again, my gift soaring, you a fledgling in the ditch. Will you join me?
>
> **Woman** Drink to my own demise? Why not?
>
> …
>
> *They drink.*
>
> I'm curious. When did this silencing occur?

---

[21] **Woman** And poets backwards is stop.
Scarecrow Stop backwards is pots.
Woman Pots is even better.
Scarecrow Yeats was a great pot.
Woman A wonderful pot.
Scarecrow A pot born. (*WS* 182)

…

Man I'm glad you're alive. You are my daughter after all.

Woman Oh, but I'm not alive.

Man What are you saying?

Woman I thought you knew. I'm dead.

…

Man With you gone the space is immense. I feel I could do anything now. (*CD* 277)

The eternal confrontation bringing Man and Woman (father and daughter's) apart, and yet bringing them together at the same time, reminds that, even though *The Cordelia Dream* is distanced from the feminist radical ambition to subdue the masculine voice so as to impose women's reality, yet, it retains the same feminist intention to denounce the centuries of silencing the female voice has been victim of. Above anything else, *The Cordelia Dream* manages to bring to the surface the anxieties of a long silenced female voice, which at the same time functions as platform to denounce such silencing procedures imposed on women by prevailing patriarchal ways:

> **Woman** Women's hatred, at least mine, goes inward. It's directed at myself. Never underestimate how badly women feel about themselves. And how could we feel otherwise when you look around you? It's not a good time to be a woman right now. It's not a good time to be a woman right now. It hasn't been a good time to be a woman since the Bronze Age
>
> **…**
>
> You take your superiority for granted. You think it's God-given. It isn't. This time will pass and with it all you dinosaurs. How dare you call me mediocre? You who haven't finished anything for years.
>
> **Man** I am an old man who shouldn't have opened the door to you.
>
> **Woman** Don't give me that helpless old man spiel. You're a vicious piece of work.
>
> **Man** I don't want you dead. I just want you to go silent. Leave me the field for a while. I don't have much longer.
>
> **Woman** You want me alive and silent? What is that but a sentimental form of murder? Why not have the courage to nail the lid on? (*CD* 246)

Music is put forward in the play as a magnificent instrument empowering Woman to maintain her status and to avoid being silenced by Man's competitive voice. Just as is the case with much of her previous work, Carr's female characters are doomed to confront the threat of being eternally silenced despite their musical talent, as they are unfailingly oppressed as women and as artists by a probably less talented and unfairly praised male figure that has succeeded in silencing her musical voice.[22] Žižek's definition of music as seizing us in the real (2005:198) validates this view of music as a fitting instrument prevailing over words and the symbol in our present task to approximate the irrepresentable Lacanian Real. As already mentioned in this chapter, Žižek's Lacanian interpretation of the 'voice' defines it as "that which, in the signifier, resists meaning" (2005:195). The voice, in its uncanny presence, contains part of the Real that is not contained or that is left behind by writing and thus resists meaning and symbolization. Voice is "the remainder of the signifying operation" (Žižek 2005:195), as mentioned somewhere else in this chapter, a haunting echo of the symbolic procedures which subjugate us to the world of signs which, in its elusiveness, brings us closer to the Real.

Music and the captivating singing voice of the leading character are two dominant strategies by which playwright Lynn Nottage plays with her audience's receptive mechanisms, thus gaining the desired A-Effect her play *Ruined* (2009) aims at. Nottage's *Ruined*, devised as a revision of Bertolt Brecht's *Mother Courage* (1939), is an extraordinary illustration of the third and last category comprising feminist theatrical adaptation in our times to be analyzed in this chapter. Moved by the attempt to stimulate the audience's critical gaze, this type of theatrical adaptation counteracts the sense of displacement and disorientation brought about by our liquid times, defined

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[22] *The Mai* and *Portia Coughlan* are two of the plays by Marina Carr explored in this thesis, where musicality is at the basis of gender confrontation.

by our contemporary drive to constantly move forwards despite our uncertainty about the destination being aimed at. The precarious subject feels compelled to keep moving forwards in the direction established by our contemporary society despite our ignorance concerning the destination or the very purpose of our social dictum. Consequently, the individual's existentiality is based on this very inertia defining our ontological drive by which we join the movement initiated by contemporary social entanglements. Such social and economic 'progress', the essential cornerstone from which the discourses of today's politicians are built upon, does not correspond with the existential strives and the daily lives of the contemporary Western citizen, who has no other choice but to take our reality with uncertainty, insecurity and fear. The subject's ignorance concerning whether we are in fact 'moving forwards' and, if that were the case, where exactly we are heading to, might bring about what would be the biggest danger of all ontological dispositions: apathy and indifference. In other words, if "to be modern means to be on the move" (Bauman 1997:77), there has to be necessarily a driving force instigating such movement. Otherwise, the still uncontainable social move turns into an ungrounded and unsubstantiated aimless mass casting an aura of discouragement and lack of faith in the contemporary subject.

The third type of theatrical adaptation to be studied in this chapter aims at providing such driving force instigating our 'social move' and invigorating the daily struggles of the contemporary subject, doomed to endure the empty promises of unreliable politicians and the inescapable harsh reality of their down to earth daily lives. In this light, *Ruined* intends to activate the audience's critical gaze out of shocking performance by which their indignation be stimulated. A return to Brecht's ways seems, then, imperative. These theatrical pieces focus on realities that tend to be regarded with a blind eye and are assumed as inevitable, and they work precisely on that component of

apathy and discouragement so as to turn it into a kind of indignation that would lead to an active reaction. The so called 'African Question' becomes, thus, the center of attention for such playwrights taking the challenge to awaken their audience's conscience out of their critical drowsiness and Eurocentric perspective. Lynn Nottage's *Ruined* takes us to the Congolese Revolution, while Moria Buffini describes in *Welcome to Thebes* (2010) the transition from revolution to democracy in an imaginary African Country (which nevertheless resembles contemporary Nigeria) named 'Thebes' and governed by a woman president, Eurydice. Similarly, Martin Crimp's *Cruel and Tender* (2005), deals with the Genocides of Rwanda and Congo also from a lens borrowed from the Greeks (the action of the play takes many elements from Sophocles' *The Trachiniae,* 430 BC), thus corroborating Plate's stance that 'Liquid Adaptations' find in Ancient Greek retellings the circular-inscribed kind of aesthetics fitting the moving dynamicity of our contemporary times. With an unquestionably feminist agenda, works such as Nottage's and Buffini's appeal to our sensitivities by transporting to the stage the ruthless and brutal treatment the female body is victim of in war realities. In the case of Buffini and Crimp, their works find in Greek Tragedy a referent for the treatment of war in terms such as land penetration or the usurpation of resources, which fit their concern to denounce contemporary realities that are being ignored by the Western gaze. "Whatever is besieged, whatever is penetrated, becomes by analogy female. Defensive warfare becomes a feminine enterprise" (Lorraine Helms 1989:30). And Lynn Nottage demonstrates her determination to take advantage of such analogy so as to actively denounce an abominable reality that the resigned and helpless Western subject tends to ignore.

"You won't fight your battles on my body anymore":[23]

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[23] *R* 94.

Lynn Nottage's *Ruined* as Epic Adaptation.[24]

Lynn Nottage's Pulitzer Prize winning play *Ruined* (2008), initially devised as a re-visitation of *Mother Courage and her Children* (1941), challenges the romanticized view on women's role in war as dictated by predominant patriarchal standards, thus fitting the third type of feminist adaptation in the classification put forward in this chapter. The traditional phallogocentric approach to war has fostered a tendency to use the masculine body as the site for the articulation of war corpo-realities to the extent that the scars, the muscular, tattooed and wounded body of the male soldier prevail as the privileged space where war narratives are inscribed. This inevitably leaves the female body on a secondary position where the only role devised for femininity is that of the caring motherly figure confined to the domestic realm and to the consolation of the wounded soldier.[25] In contrast to such misogynist views on the representation of gender in a war conflict, Nottage's play explicitly alludes to the physical and most aberrant aspects of war as experienced by female victims. Why rape is repeatedly an integral part of war conflicts is one of the underlying questions aimed to be answered by Nottage's play, as acknowledged by Kate Whoriskey herself, director of the first American productions of *Ruined* at the Goodman Theater in Chicago and the Manhattan Theater Club respectively (Whoriskey 2011:ix-xiii). The physicality and accuracy in the representation of war suffering as experienced by war victims is then a focal point highlighting Nottage's work. The action of her play is set on in the Democratic Republic of Congo during the recent civil war (sometime between 2001 and 2007) and focuses on the atrocious experiences suffered by four women and their struggle to

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[24] The content of the final section in this chapter is based on and extended from my analysis of *Ruined* in "'She'd Make a Splendid Freak:' Female Bodies on the American Stage" by Carolina Sánchez-Palencia and Eva Gil Cuder (2012).

[25] Rape and sexual exploitation in war have been systematically disregarded as war crimes in a military culture that considers primarily the direct effects on combatants and less-frequently on civilians. The recent revelations of the genocidal rape of Muslim women during the Balkans' conflict and of Tutsi women in Rwanda have triggered specific gender-based analyses of war and its impact on women's lives (Hynes 2004, Ashford and Huet-Vaughn 2000).

overcome the inescapable violence they experience in their daily work at Mama Nadi's brothel. Nottage's war account addresses a particular geographical context and a specific political contingency and ultimately aims at a meticulous representation of the female body that moves away from cultural stereotypes: her female models are based on real Congolese women that resist victimization and are determined to fight patriarchal power and violence, thus challenging the audience's Eurocentric expectations and encouraging to take in a similar attitude (Sánchez-Palencia and Cuder 149). Her characters' inspiring attitude thus aims at establishing a role model that is here presented as rightful encouragement to the contemporary attempt to overcome social and political resignation. Instead of falling after the inertia initiated by the social realities where the subject's existence is grounded, each of the feminine characters in *Ruined* fights to find her own means of survival and they all rebel against the imposed system established by either the rebels or the government.

When working on the play, Nottage met and interviewed a number of Congolese women in the refugee camps of Uganda in 2004, and, while her initial idea was to undertake a rewriting of Bertolt Brecht's *Mother Courage and Her Children*, it was due to such encounters with these women and by learning about their war experiences that Nottage decided to start anew and work on an original piece about these women's strength in their determination to overcome their traumatic situation, and their refusal to resignation and victimhood. Notwithstanding, Nottage's initial drive to work on a re-inscription of Brecht's classic comes to the foreground in many of the core elements integrating the play's action. The war context is a major element in common. The fact that *Mother Courage* is set in the Thirty Years' War (1618-1648), that *Ruined* similarly evokes a war conflict, and that the voice by which both events are explored moves far away from a flat and indoctrinating kind of speech grounds my classification of

Nottage's work as a feminist rewriting. *Ruined* clearly relies on Brechtian stratagems so as to articulate the female body at a war context, as will be shown throughout my analysis of the play. Additionally, a further common ground between the two plays is that both 'Mother Courage' and 'Mama Nadi' are nicknamed in the appeal to their double moral role as victimized matriarchs who at the same time profit from the misfortunes brought about by the war. This double character-moral and the ethical call grounding both plays, far from establishing a fixed ethical voice, as mentioned above, becomes one of the aesthetic cornerstones characterizing this third type of feminist rewriting on the contemporary theatrical stage. In this vein, the ethical appeal thus characterizing contemporary drama (and in particular, contemporary war drama, as has been thoroughly explored by Julia Boll in her already mentioned work) becomes a major trait identifying this third type of feminist rewriting, shared by other emerging feminist war plays such as Buffini's aforementioned recent work, *Welcome to Thebes*.

As Ozieblo and Hernández-Real recently stated in the introduction to their collection of essays, *Performing Gender Violence. Plays by Contemporary American Women Dramatists* (2012), "overcoming this position of humiliation and willing martyrdom was not necessarily easy and required an inner strength that frequently came from bonding with other women or from overturning, deconstructing, or reversing accepted patterns of behaviour" (2). Such is the attitude that Nottage's female characters resort to in *Ruined*. The examination of how their bodies –simultaneously 'ruined' and empowered,— are brought to the stage in its stark wounded physicality as powerful inscription of traumatic war will be the central point of the final section of this third chapter. The female body as physical record of traumatic experience becomes thus one of the key performative strategies of this third type of feminist adaptation here explored. Nottage plays with a kind of aesthetics swinging from the introduction of captivating

and seducing musical scenes, where the audience (initially, the male characters for which such musical numbers are performed in the brothel, and then inevitably becoming extensive to the theatre audience) is guided to momentary relieving slumber, to the sudden and explicit physicality in the presentation of women's atrocious war experiences. Such aesthetic contrast from drowsiness to in-yer-face severe performance brings the spectator's receptive mechanism to its extremes, from evasion from the reality of war, to sudden confrontation with the abhorrent and unspeakable Real. The female body is thus deconstructed to challenge the ideals about the delicate, pristine and lovely classical feminine body so as to bring to the center of the stage the question of rape as a war weapon and the female body as a bargain chip to be used by either rebels or soldiers indistinctively. Whether or not *Ruined* repeats the objectification and merchantilization of black female bodies while vindicating their bearers' position as agents and survivors in a conflict generated by men is worth considering, and to a certain extent, we might feel disturbed by the fact that the play empowers these women and simultaneously recasts them within the realm of the abject, as prostitutes, torture and rape victims, infected, pregnant and 'ruined' (Sánchez-Palencia and Cuder 150).

Nottage tries to contest this conventional gaze by means of theatrical strategies that privilege feminine agency in times of war and coincide with Diamond's contention that "by alienating (not simply rejecting) iconicity, by foregrounding the expectation of resemblance, the ideology of gender is exposed and thrown back to the spectator" (1997:46). In this vein, Nottage works meticulously with characterization and audience expectations so as to raise their awareness concerning women's suffering in war. She experiments with women's dehumanization on the stage as a theatrical device in the attempt to denounce how women's bodies tend to be objectified (how they become a prize to be won by either the soldiers or the rebels, or how they themselves turn into

warfare to combat the enemy), a situation she learnt about from the real accounts told by the Congolese women she interviewed. Many instances taken from the play point very explicitly to this attempt at dehumanizing the female body, as in the scene where Mama Nadi, the madam and owner of the brothel, and Christian (a travelling salesman) bargain over the price of two women, Sophie and Salima. It is not until Sophie and Salima appear on the stage that we realize that Mama Nadi and Christian have been talking about two human beings:

> **Mama.** What did you bring me? Are you going to keep me guessing?
> Christian. Go on, take a peek in the truck…
> **Mama**. How many?
> **Christian**. Three.
> **Mama**. Three? But I can't use three right now. You know that.
> **Christian**. Of course you can. And I'll give you a good price if you take all of them…
> (*Mama goes to the doorway, and peers out at the offerings, unimpressed*)
> **Mama.** I don't know. They look used. Worn…
> (*Christian, defeated, exits. Mama smiles victoriously and retrieves another soda from the cooler…Christian re-enters…A moment later two women in ragged clothing step tentatively into the bar…*). (*R* 9-10)
> The fact that Mama Nadi refers to Salima and Sophie as 'offerings' or as 'worn'

goods to traffic with is one of the many layers from which Nottage denounces the dehumanization of women in a war context. Similarly, the female body is represented in Nottage's play as a specific weapon used both by the soldiers and the rebels in their attempt to undermine each other. As Patricia Hynes observes, "[w]ars of the late 20th and early 21st centuries are fought with remotely guided weapons, at distances that shield the combatant from witnessing the death and maiming of his victims...Military rape and sexual exploitation, on the other hand, are perpetrated face to face on the battlefields of women's bodies"(11). A circumstance that, in the play, is made particularly manifest in the case of Salima, who was kidnapped and repeatedly raped by the soldiers (under the cry "She is for everyone, soup to be had before dinner", *R* 69) while her husband, Fortune, was away in town. That is the reason driving Fortune's

implication in the revolution (he camps opposite Mama Nadi's brothel and promises to remain there, under the rain, until he can see Salima). And still Fortune and Simon, the men trying to save Salima from her abused condition under Mama Nadi's influence, describe her as a stolen good that they want to recover: "If you're angry, then be angry at the men who took her. Think about how they did you, they reached right into your pocket and stole from you" (*R* 74).

The idea that, regardless of their positioning in the war conflict developing in the background, all the male characters in the play equally treat women as goods to possess is reinforced by Nottage's Brechtian strategy to cast the same male actors to perform the role of both the soldiers and the rebels.[26] With this theatrical device, Nottage demystifies representation and releases the spectator from possible imaginary identifications, thus allowing for a reception of what is being represented on stage from a detached and more critical perspective. This is also the case of Mama Nadi and her ambiguous character: we first meet her bargaining about the price of two women whom she will exploit despite their physical condition (she knows that Sophie is "ruined" and also starts to suspect that Salima is pregnant), but she then reveals her true altruistic nature with her frustrated attempt to save Sophie by giving away the raw diamond she possessed so that Sophie could escape and afford an operation that would fix her 'ruined' condition:

> **Mr. Harari**. Are you sure? This diamond will fetch a fairly decent price, you can settle over the border of Uganda. Start fresh.
> **Mama**. I have ten girls here. What will I do with them? Is there enough room for all of us in the car. No. I can't go. Since I was young, people have found reasons to push me out of my home, men have laid claim to my possessions, but I am not running now. This is my place. Mama Nadi's.
> **Mr. Harari.** But I'm not-

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[26] In a similar vein, Richard Foreman's 1996 production of *Venus* (by Suzan-Lori Parks) employs a multicultural casting, thus implying that both white and black men are indistinctive exploiters of black women. The play, stages the story of Miss Sartje Baartman, an African woman brought to London in 1810 under the false promise of prosper and wealth, only to become part of a Circus' freak show.

Mama. You do this for me. I don't want the other women to know. So let's do this quickly.
Mr. Harari. And the doctor's name is on the paper. I'm to call when I get there.
Mama. Yes. And you give Sophie the money. The money for the stone. Understand. Promise me. It's important. All of it.
Mr. Harari. …Yes, Are you sure?
Mama. Yes. (*R* 91-2)

Mama Nadi's duplicity (she also offers her services both to the soldiers and the rebels indistinctively) becomes, in this light, a further strategy preventing the audience from sympathizing with her, as her moral ambiguity triggers the spectator's constant shift in their response to her, thus detaching from the action and regarding the performance from a certain (critical) distance (Sánchez-Palencia and Cuder 151). Moreover, Mama Nadi's dubious moral integrity is later on revealed to be a consequence of the reality she has forcefully encountered: "I didn't come here as Mama Nadi, I found her the same way miners find their wealth in the muck" (*R* 86).

Mama Nadi's double face misleads the audience's expectations just as the strategy by which Nottage has the audience enter the hypnotizing and seducing atmosphere of the brother during Sophie's musical performance, thus being induced to forget about their terrestrial problems, just to abruptly stir the spectator's awareness by means of the sudden interruption provoked by either the soldiers or the rebels brutality in their treatment to the women (see quotation below). Nottage thus plays with the audience's involvement, first luring them into the pleasing sound of Sophie's voice, letting them be entertained, just to tear immediately this state of suspension into pieces by suddenly turning to the most ruthless aspects of the war reality surrounding the characters. By such game to combine the spectator's allure to the action at the same time that the violent scenes represented drastically bring the audience back to reality, thus producing a distancing effect, Nottage manages to awake the audience's most critical gaze and her exposé of gender violence in a war context becomes in this way more effective. In this vein, the audience is induced not to sympathize with either Mama

Nadi, the soldiers, or the rebels, and yet, at the same time, Mama Nadi's harsh attitude is sometimes depicted as sympathetic and understandable.

In this vein, Nottage's seems to predominantly appeal for an emotional understanding of the events being represented onstage, as opposed to a more Epic (in Brechtian terms) or intellectual reading. In an interview conducted by Celia McGee in 2009 for the *New York Times*, Nottage talked about the intellectual engagement prompted by Brecht's theatrical pieces in contrast with her own theatrical goals: "I believe in engaging people emotionally, because I think they react more out of emotion…It is important that this not become a documentary, or agitprop. And that Mama Nadi is morally ambiguous, that you're constantly shifting in your response to her" (Nottage 2009). This is the perspective from which to interpret her attempts to distance the audience from the action performed onstage with the purpose to elicit a critical understanding of the events.

A good example of such particular use of Brechtian detachment is seen in the many musical scenes to be found in the play. As Jill Dolan contends, "the musical performances…let the spectators – and the character—rest from the viciousness of the action, giving us a chance to breath, to think, to contemplate how a sound so beautiful could come from a situation so untenable" (2009). Hence, Sophie's singing is appealing in a sensorial and sentimental, rather than intellectual, way and it succeeds in driving the audience's attention far away from the poisonous atmosphere infecting the stage, so that their return to the actual action on stage, once the musical performance has finished, generates a stronger receptive impact.

> *Sophie ploughs through an upbeat dance song, accompanied by a guitar and drums.*
> **Sophie** (*Sings*).
> The liquid night slowly pours in
> Languor peels away like a curtain
> Spirits rise and tongues loosen

> And the weary ask to be forgiven.
> You come here to forget,
> You say drive away all regret
> And dance like it's the ending
> The ending of the war.
> The day's heavy door closes quick
> Leaving the scold of the sun behind
> Dusk ushers in the forest's music
> And your body's free to unwind.
>
> (*Josephine dances for the men. They give her tips*.)
>
> You come here to forget,
> You say drive away all regret
> And dance like it's the ending
> The ending of the war.
> But can the music be all-forgiving
> Purge the wear and tear of the living?
> Will the sound drown out your sorrow
> So you'll remember nothing tomorrow?
> (*A drunk rebel stands, and demands attention…He clumsily slams the bottle on t
> he counter. He gestures Sophie*.)
> **Rebel Soldier**. Her! Why won't she come talk to me? (*R* 20)

Sophie's singing thus takes the soldiers (and the audience of the play equally watching her performance) away from their nightmarish traumatic realities so as to offer them a fictional world of consolation and artificial comfort.[27] Just as the soldiers, audiences go to the theater "to forget", their daily worries and momentarily evade their reality, finding solace in the action staged in front of them ("Purge the wear and tear of the living"). And yet, all of a sudden, such fallacious comfort generated by Sophie's singing is abruptly shattered by the swinish roar of one of the soldiers, who wants to take Sophie and drag her to where he is sitting. Such ontological rupture takes both the soldiers and the audience back to the crude reality where such brutes are empowered to take women by the force as if conquered land.

Scene one in Act II offers a solid example about the emotional effect of Sophie's singing and how it can also become a means to translate the pain that the four women

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[27] In a similar way to that in which Dramatic Theater (as opposed to Brecht's Epic Theater) offers its audience the possibility to escape their too familiar daily reality, as opposed to the dose of factual representation with vindicating purposes that characterizes Brecht's theater.

protagonists carry on their bodies in the form of scars (*R* 34, 60), undesired pregnancy (*R* 33, 94) and genital damage (*R* 12, 16, 37, 100). As mentioned before, and in the words of Slavoj Žižek, music fills the space left by symbolic articulacy when it comes to the re-visitation of trauma (2008:5) and, in this case, Josephine's moving performance completes this aesthetic move towards traumatic reconstruction:

(The drums beats out a furious rhythm. Josephine answers with a dance, which beings playfully, seductively, then slowly becomes increasingly frenzied. She releases her anger, her pain…everything. She desperately grabs at the air as if trying to hold on to something. She abruptly stops, overwhelmed. Sophie goes to her aid) (R 64).

Such musical stratagem can be classified along with other theatrical attempts to deconstruct the representation of gender violence on stage. Noelia Hernando-Real provides a thorough analysis of Paula Vogel's use of slow motion in *Hot'n Throbbing* (1994) as another example of a theatrical strategy aimed at deconstructing gender violence and provoking a particular reaction in the audience without the need to hurt their sensitivity unnecessarily (2012:51). Vogel's strategy may be equated with Nottage's musical device in that, by appealing to a sensorial embodiment—associated more to the semiotic than to the symbolic realm, and fairly opposed to Brecht's Epic Theater—it allows for a critically distanced contemplation of the events performed.

At the same time, the portrayal of the female body as an object or territory to be possessed ("You will not fight your battles on my body anymore", *R* 94) prompts a greater impact in terms of audience response after the effective sensibility and awareness increased by means of such shocking performative devices. The staging of the female body as a fractured or broken good culminates with Salima's desperate attempt to reach freedom (and agency) by committing suicide (*R* 94). Offering suicide as an alternative for women to escape indiscriminate violence and subjugation seems problematic from a feminist viewpoint, as the author would be offering no satisfactory solution to gender violence and it would, in a way, end up reinforcing the predominant

patriarchal ideology (Forte 1989:117). Notwithstanding, Noelia Hernando-Real argues that, as a theatrical strategy, suicide shows a female character's "determination to control her life and become an agent" (46) in a similar way to that in which masculine suicide associates the male character with the classic tragic hero, as is the case with Arthur Miller's Willy Loman. Additionally, Salima's death deliberately reminds in a Brechtian and anti-cathartic fashion of the cruel reality prevailing out of the safety of the theater venue.

Female bonding is offered in Nottage's play as yet another possible instrument to prevent the imposition of patriarchal ideals, in this case contrasting with suicide inasmuch as the "sisterly atmosphere" generated in the play derives in the optimistic belief that women can escape, or at least minimize, male oppression (Narbona-Carrión 67). Some of the plays already analyzed in this thesis illustrate the feminist attempt to employ sisterhood among women as a means to challenge normative patriarchy (*Beside Herself*, *The Love of the Nightingale* and *The Mai*). The bond established in *Ruined* between Salima and Sophie, and eventually the revelation that Mama Nadi's actual drive is that of protecting her girls (especially Sophie) produces another instance of feminist reliable sisterhood that emphasizes the relevance of other victims' support to overcome victimization and subjugation, thus offering a feasible solution to gender violence (as opposed to suicide, which appealed to female agency but offered no possible way out). In this vein, female bonding becomes a sentimentally-driven strategy leading to trauma recovery by means of the mutual care and protection offered by equally damaged characters.

But it is precisely Nottage's final emphasis on the sentimental aspect of the real experiences upon which her play is based that constitutes the major criticism to her play. The fact that at one point the play falls under the romanticized view that a

woman's wounds and bitter temper may be soothed by the love of a man (in scene seven Christian comes back so as to pursue Mama Nadi's love) has been the major focus of criticism, as it has been understood that by this shift in the course of the events, Nottage has not "maintained her singular, Brechtian vision of the consequences of war for women" (Dolan 2009). To some extent, it could be argued that, appealing to cathartic mechanisms, the play's romantic ending somewhat annuls the author's previous Brechtian intent, initially aiming at alienation and at sharpening the audience's critical acuteness. In an interview for an online publication, Nottage confesses her ambition that her work would wake her audience up out of their state of critical stupor and have them act about what they passively read on the newspapers:

> *TR*: What are you hoping audiences will take away from this production as it travels the country and the world?
> LN: Act. Put down your newspaper and actively get engaged. It's very easy for all of us to be armchair activists. And very easy for all of us to be outraged in the moment—but very difficult to choose to do something tangible to implement change. So hopefully there will be one or two people compelled to do something. (Nottage 2010)

And yet, the extremely idealized closing scene in *Ruined* provides the audience with the dose of ethical reassurance needed for them to leave the 'theater reality' relieved that, after suicide, murder, rape and misogynist torture, everything comes naturally to a fairytale kind of closure. Mama Nadi's own attitude concerning romance novels comes out as paradoxic of Nottage's own dramatic move. It seems as if the same reproach she addresses to Sophie ("**Mama.** You read too many of those romance novels where everything is forgiven with a kiss…" *R* 67) could be used to discredit Nottage's dubious and unconvincing end.

It is unquestionable that in bringing these 'ruined' female bodies to the stage, the playwright has given voice to embodied black women's experiences, often ignored by Western audiences. And yet, bodily images are too easily swollen by traditional discourse, and the harsh criticism of the gender politics in such a specific war context

that Nottage gradually builds in her play seems all of a sudden to dissipate within a conservative heteronormative closure that points to a fairy-tale kind of happy ending (Sánchez-Palencia and Cuder 153). Her critical voice resounds, though, thanks to already analyzed strategies such as the dehumanization of the female body. As Julia Boll points out, "the female body as a place of war is central to several Greek tragic texts, and it is to this aspect that many modern adaptations may find almost ready-made analogies…While the state is mostly depicted as male, the nation is represented as female, threatened by violence or foreign governance…" (134). Further represented as a mere trophy to be won or lost, women's bodies are brought to the stage in Nottage's play in all its physicality by means of scenes appealing to the brutality of war (Salima's suicide). "The female body has thus become a symbol for the body of the people" (Boll 136), and by appealing to the vulnerability of women's corporeity, Nottage denounces (and expects an active reaction from the audience) a reality that tends to be ignored by the Western gaze, increasingly accustomed to the uncertainty and consequent helplessness generated by today's liquid and precarious times.

And yet, regardless of the extent of her 'loyalty' to the original intent of Brechtian practices (to appeal to the audience's intellect above their emotional reaction), Nottage's account of the suffering of women during the Congolese struggle proves a superb and truthful testimony of such largely ignored reality. It is by means of the explicit appeal to the scars there inflicted and to the presentation of its most grotesque aspect that Nottage manages to enforce a clean lens from which to regard women's role in war, thus departing from stereotypical readings of women's fragility. In his work *Violence*, Žižek reminds us about the functioning of our contemporary society's concern about humanitarian crisis and our mediation in overall traumatic conflict:

> The cover story of *Time* magazine of 5 June 2006, for example, was "The Deadliest War in the World." This offered detailed documentation on how

around 4 million people died in the Democratic Republic of Congo as the result of political violence over the last decade. None of the usual humanitarian uproar followed, just a couple of readers' letters- as if some kind of filtering mechanism blocked this news from achieving its full impact in our symbolic space. To put it cynically, Time picked the wrong victim in the struggle for hegemony in suffering. (Žižek 2008:3)

It is especially here where Nottage's success resides and, as stated at the introduction of the published edition of her play, that was the overall intention when both Nottage and director Kate Whoriskey started to work on the idea of rewriting Brecht's well known piece. Their implication with the stories they started to hear during their stay at a refugee camp in Uganda was what moved their work and what drove them to try to produce as shocking a reaction as possible, being as realistic as possible (and thus gradually moving away from Brecht's original work). The use of the Brechtian A-Effect alongside an appeal to the grotesque becomes, in this light, the identifying stratagems distinguishing this type of feminist adaptation. Grotesque, excessive, and unruly representations of female corporealities may be subversive because they make visible what has been denigrated and suppressed, and help destabilize normative notions of feminine beauty and eroticism, but, as Wolff observes, "we must be aware of making the easy assumption that the use of the body is itself transgressive, in a culture which allows only the 'classical' body" (135). As the analysis above illustrates, the use of women's embodied experiences for feminist ends constitutes a complex and risky practice that is always haunted by the traumas and dilemmas of (mis)representation. The concern addressed by Butler in "Precarious Life" and by which the discussion carried out in this chapter began, finds testimony in the three plays here explored. How can we address the very question that occupies us here, the exploration of what makes us human in our very contemporaneity, simultaneously avoiding our own eventuality (i.e. the symbolic filter limiting our gaze)? The exploitation of the grotesque and the abject

(the brutal scenes described and performed in *Ruined*, for example) attempt to fill that

aesthetic void. As put by Kristeva,

> In a world in which the Other has collapsed, the aesthetic task- a descent into the foundations of the symbolic construct- amounts to retracing the fragile limits of the speaking being, closest to its dawn, to the bottomless 'primacy' constituted by primal repression…The abject…is the aim and motive of an existence whose meaning is lost in absolute degradation… (1982*:*18)

It is in this sense how the abject, what is esteemed as not normative or

participating of our symbolic hierarchy, becomes a rightful means to represent the

irrepresentable, what cannot be contained by the sign, i.e. our precarious existences. The

three plays analyzed in this chapter aim in that same direction at the articulation of what

escapes symbolic formulation: what makes us distinctively human and, in this case,

what distinguishes women as such at the same time that we overcome the dangers of

discriminatory practices announced by Butler ("Which version of lesbian or gay ought

to be rendered visible" (1990:19), words by which the discussion carried out in this

chapter started). Thus either by trying to rectify classical accounts corrupted by the

culturally predominant male voice, by initiating an open dialogue with such original

texts or by appealing to the most brutal images so as to uncover the suffering

characterizing women's experiencing of our contemporary Real, the three types of

feminist rewriting explored in this chapter equally aim at exposing the reality of the

female subject, now void and freed from the patriarchal lens from which it was ever

inspected, and regarded from the perspective of our present day precarious gaze.

CHAPTER 4

"Don't be frightened…I'm not a human being"[1]:

Spectrality and Ontological Deconstruction as Aesthetics of Precariousness in New War Plays.[2]

Most theatrical forms are to be considered as political to the extent that they question given normative and socially accepted deeds, in addition to the fact that they voice a reality that remained so far silenced by particular symbolic pre-conceptions. Furthermore, the playwright behind the formulation of those questions posed on stage is driven by a determination to stir the audience's conscience and critical disposition to the point of provoking a reaction that would somehow change society's stake at the particular event being appealed to. In this light, the three authors studied in the previous chapter shared their determination to call the attention on the long-dated silencing of women's voice in prominent literary works which thus contribute to a patriarchal-based construction of our symbolic and cultural gaze. Their resolution to bring to the forefront the traditionally neglected female gaze in the stories they rescue from our cultural memory succeeds in that the darkness of the theater hall does not manage to obscure their ethical compromise with the events reenacted, as they succeed in shaping the specificities of the different forms of patriarchal abuse appealed to in the plays. What distinguishes, thus, any form of theater esteemed as political in the terms just established (its questioning of a particular reality) from ethically-bound Epic theater (which will occupy the investigative focus of this chapter) is then the proximity to the limits of representation. Contemporary theatre's drive to shock and provoke a particular kind of reaction (always meant to entail a major change in the way the very reality

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[1] Caryl Churchill *MD* 87.
[2] Terminology coined by Julia Boll in her study on the representation of war in contemporary drama, *The New War Plays: From Kane to Harris* (2013).

performed is regarded), and the kind of questions it elicits appeal to existential and ontological phenomena that go beyond the pragmatic and tangible kind of denounce characterizing any other form of theater defined by its political agenda. For instance, and as has already been explored in the previous chapter of this thesis, Lynn Nottage's *Ruined* formulates a reality that would otherwise remain silenced or vaguely (and erroneously) recognized by the self-centered Eurocentric gaze. Nottage skillfully manages to shape and materialize what was initially a mere abstract and distant idea in the audience's symbolic consciousness about the Congolese revolution and its impact on our traditional notions of femininity. The play's political agenda directed at the denounce of women's reality in war and, in particular, the vicissitudes suffered by the very women upon which the characters are based, thus defines the play's censuring tone and its interventionist nature.

In her study on New War plays, Julia Boll points out how the Thirty Years' War became a paradigm for New Wars insomuch as contemporary armed conflict seems to have returned to the parameters established in medieval warfare (blurred boundaries defining war and peace, territorial yearning as agent detonating armed conflict, etc...).[3] Similarly, she argues that Bertolt Brecht's *Mother Courage*, which deals with this particular war, "might be seen as a paradigm for contemporary plays on war, just as the Thirty Years' War is a paradigm for contemporary wars" (Boll 23). As a rewriting of *Mother Courage*, Nottage's *Ruined* thus stands out as a play illustrative of the contemporary trend to translate into theatrical action a war reality with vindicating purposes. The three plays to be considered in this chapter are also defined by their highly interventionist style, to the extent that their authors are equally moved by their

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[3]The theoretical turn studying contemporary warfare on a comparative basis with medieval and modern war strategy has come to be known as the New Wars and was first coined by Henry Münkler (*The New Wars*, 2005) and Mary Kaldor (*New and Old Wars: Organized Violence in a Global Era*, 1999).

drive to shock and provoke an active reaction on their audiences; and yet, the *raison-d'être* behind each of these works clashes with Political Theater's sententious agenda. However, in their posing questions that are not to find an immediate answer, these plays interrogate any given ontological element upon which the action in the play is based, and appeal to existential issues such as the limits of humanity under extreme survival circumstances.

Thus using specific war or socially conflictive situations as a background, Caryl Churchill's *Mad Forest* (1990), Naomi Wallace's *In the Heart of America* (1994) and debbie tucker green's *Stoning Mary* (2005) address metaphysical and transcendental issues concerning the definition of the contemporary subject's ethical values and how these build up the foundations of this very subject's existential surroundings or ontological reality. All these playwrights, along with a number of authors that contribute to the development of such theatrical gaze directed at the de-construction and posterior ethical exploration of our symbolic reality, resort to experimental strategies that question taken for granted ontological elements such as time and place, and take their representability to its extremes by challenging their theatricality and exploring the countless possibilities to materialize such realities on the stage.

If drama classifications and anthologies have favored Sierz's use of the label "In-Yer-Face" to name such performative mode aiming at the irrepresentable, in her thorough study of the representation of war on the stage, *The New War Plays: From Kane to Harris* (2013), Julia Boll refers to many of the plays so far considered as illustrative of the In-Yer-Face aesthetics and now classifies them as part of a growing theatrical movement aiming at the representation of contemporary war. Similarly, earlier on, Michael Patterson's revealing analysis of British late-twentieth century interventionist political drama already envisioned British dramatists' growing drive to

stimulate their audience's critical capacity by appealing to unacceptable social realities (*Strategies of Political Theatre: Post-War British Playwrights*, 2003). Theater's immediacy (as opposed to film) and its demand of complete and continued audience attention (as opposed to television) makes of theatrical performance a highly adequate arena to appeal to contemporary issues that would concern the audience's daily lives, or to denounce a so far silenced reality, thus provoking immediate reaction (Patterson 1). In his book, Patterson provides a comprehensive theoretical introduction where he enumerates the elements distinguishing naturalist from realistic theater, or, what is to be the same, reflectionist (descriptive) from interventionist (Epic) theater. While all the works that occupy his exhaustive study are to be classified as interventionist pieces, as they go beyond superficial narration and commit to the challenging and questioning of a number of contemporary political concerns, they are still somehow distanced from the group of works with which the plays to be studied in this chapter are categorized. Patterson's twentieth century Political Plays, as already said, commit to the reality surrounding them to the extent of experimenting on stage on a line issuing from Brecht's non-Aristotelian and thus unsettling and defamiliarizing theater practices. The plays to be analyzed in this chapter, if still to a great extent relying on Brechtian aesthetics, go beyond the Political Drama recalled by Patterson in that their appeal does not meet the limits of a particular economic or political situation, but rather use such specific political or social eventuality so as to pose questions going beyond any particular context. The ways in which contemporary Anglophone drama has evolved in its ambition to intervene in the socio-political panorama and has formulated such non-conformist aspirations becomes visible when carrying out a time-scope comparison of mono-graphical studies such as Patterson's and Boll's. In this vein, while post-war British drama focused its critical target mostly on domestic and/or economic issues

rather than in universal ethical concerns (Trevor Griffiths's *Comedians*, David Hare's *Fanshen*, Edward Bond's *Lear* or Caryl Churchill's *Top Girls,* among so many others), contemporary interventionist plays have come to the foreground by their appeal to the moral capacity of human beings, and to do so, they tend to engage us in processes that have mostly been silenced by the Eurocentric symbolic procedures dominating our current systemic order.

Contemporary reactionary drama is thus erected on a quest for truth and the formulation of an "ethics of unrest" (Middeke 2014) that would help us understand the behavior and nature of the human being. Thus, providing no definite answer to the questions still posed by the ultimate instigator of such theatrical quest, the playwright, today's drama seeks to articulate the precarious nature of a traumatized society whose existence seems as uncertain and unexpected as the very means to represent it. And, as put by Butler (2004:144), it is precisely this aesthetic representative void that establishes the very foundations of contemporary ontological precariousness.

The theatrical pieces that occupy us in this chapter are situated within the contemporary urge to articulate the sense of uncertainty characterizing contemporary ontological worries, and to formulate the questions that, if still doomed to remain unanswered, will reveal new realities and will provide us with a new lens to stare at our inevitably codified (and thus already symbolically tainted) coordinates of meaning. The war plays to be analyzed in this chapter thus share an inclination to question taken for granted ontological facts such as time, place and even the ontological dimension where the events are taking place (whether tangible reality, traumatic flashback or reverie). This is a consequence of the uncertain reality outlived by the different characters of all of these plays, and their unreliable existences as remnant-subjects of a collapsing regime and as witnesses of the construction of a new symbolic reality. Caryl Churchill's

exploration of the Romanian Revolution in *Mad Forest* (1990), Naomi Wallace's deconstruction of the Gulf War in *In the Heart of America* (1994), which brings in elements from the Vietnam War in a surrealist fashion, and debbie tucker green's minimalist view of the impact of AIDS in Africa in *Stoning Mary* (2005); all those approaches to a shattered community thus question the reliability of the fantasmic coordinates of meaning upon which such symbolic orders relied. The interrogation of the reality surrounding the characters of these plays intends to translate such uncertainty to the audience by destabilizing their granted daily realities and maxims by which their lives become symbolically meaningful. Which kinds of violence are to be accepted upon which circumstances, or to what extent should we trust and welcome an Other (in the specific form of a refugee, for example, in Churchill's play) into our exclusive and protective community, are some of the questions indirectly posed by these authors.

In his book *Violence* (2008), Slavoj Žižek puts forward a classification of violence according to its 'visibility', i.e. according to the procedures by which the human subject codifies, and thus understands and tolerates violence. He distinguishes subjective violence from objective violence, and claims that the different types of objective violence (linguistic and systemic) display a kind of violence that has been filtered by our symbolic understanding of the Real. Violence constitutes here the 'non-violent zero level' upon which other forms of already interpreted violence materialize. In contrast to this, subjective violence is the kind that we most frequently witness (violence enacted by a social agent, by a particular evil individual, at a demonstration, by the police forces…). Subjective violence is the one we witness and tend to condemn or tolerate according to the symbolic background by which we read it (established precisely by the two different kinds of objective violence: our given linguistic grid and

systemic understanding of our communities, by which violence is silently, covertly and yet effectively manipulated):

> Subjective violence is experienced as such against the background of a non-violent zero level. It is seen as a perturbation of the 'normal,' peaceful state of things. However, objective violence is precisely the violence inherent to this 'normal' state of things. Objective violence is invisible since it sustains the very zero-level standard against which we perceive something as subjectively violent…Subjective violence is just the most visible of the three (Žižek 2008:2-11).

It is systemic and linguistic violence, the two types of objective violence distinguished by Žižek, that the authors of the three plays to be analyzed in this chapter try to deconstruct so as to expose our blindness to it. We are subject to the symbolic codification of the Real in general and of violence in particular, and take for granted a 'zero-level' standard, or the limits of what should be tolerated, without realizing about the indoctrinating procedures that we are subordinated to as members of a given community. It is then precisely the kind of violence that is tolerated by our society, the kind of abuse or aggression for which we do not try to find responsibility (as our social code interprets and reads it as acceptable) the one that these three authors question in their work. To achieve this purpose they appeal to specific conflict zones or war contexts where all symbolic and systemic coordinates of meaning seem to be on the verge of collapse due to war or revolution. And still, in their work, they go beyond the specificity of the given conflict upon which the very action of the play is built, so as to transcend that particular reality and formulate ethically and existentially relevant questions. Churchill, Wallace and tucker green thus partially rely on realistic strategies (the daily lives of the characters that become the focus of action, for instance) and yet manage to deviate from a naturalistic description of a recognizable world by aesthetically and transcendentally questioning the reality surrounding their characters.

As way of illustration, the action of Wallace's *In the Heart of America*, despite

initially relying on the pragmatic realities of a number of characters personally involved in the first North American intervention in Iraq (1991), turns into a surreal decomposition of each of the character's stances, their involvement in the Iraqi conflict, and their personal lives before and after the war. Wallace thus twists taken for granted ontological parameters, and she blends past with present, introducing traumatic flashback and different realms in such a fashion so as to confuse memory with tangible real, alive with dead, and even the eventuality of the actual Gulf War with reminders of the Vietnam War. The audience hence reaches a point where all taken for granted realistic facts on which the action initially relied are questioned, as they move from the original attempt to partake of the action performed, towards a total unreliability that only reflects the uncertainty and precariousness experienced by the characters, all of them in some way or another victims of war trauma.

The aesthetic equilibrium found between the realistic approximation to a character's daily struggle and the extreme alienating distancing from the performed action through such non-narrative and non-naturalistic means brings these three plays together in their attempt to interrogate our own daily experiencing of either objective violence (as put by Žižek) or our natural (symbolically biased) involvement in major socio-political events. Churchill's approach to the Romanian Revolution is mainly formulated through the gaze of two families, one of them visibly accommodated, the other one humbly struggling to maintain their social status. Additionally, in Act II Churchill explores the development of the revolution from the very first-hand accounts of random individuals who try to rigorously reconstruct in a disorderly and collage kind of fashion their experiencing of systemic uncertainty and violence during the revolt. The impact of the trauma, which comes forth only belatedly in their failed attempt to make sense of it, along with their uncertainty concerning what is left for them to hope for after

the derogation of a system that, despite being repudiated, was their only known reality; such conglomeration of human feelings finds representation in this dual aesthetic lens by which we are allowed access to the (still chaotic and precarious) testimonial formulation of the very traumatic event from the lens of the traumatized individual, just to be afterwards pushed away and distanced from it by means of a surrealist aesthetics deconstructing the whole reality upon which such individual experiences are built.

The three plays to sustain the investigative focus of this chapter align with a view of ethics that is mostly based on Alain Badiou's contention that all humanity is rooted in the identification with an Other. As a consequence of that, he argues, there is no ethics in general or abstract terms, but an ethics that draws its maxims from the specific situation of a given individual:

> All humanity has its roots in the identification in thought [*en pensée*] of singular situations. There is no ethics in general. There are only-eventually- ethics of processes by which we treat the possibilities of a situation…From the very beginning, ethics is the ethics of the other, it is the principal opening to the other, it subordinates identity to difference." (2001:16-7)

It is because of this that contemporary plays still rely on the realistic approach to the particularities of a subject's everyday life experiences, as the everyday lives of the witnesses of the Romanian revolts in 1989. And yet, as I will try to demonstrate with my analysis of the three plays above suggested, these plays set forth a transcendental and ethical agenda aiming at the deconstruction and Brechtian defamiliarization of our ontological surroundings so as to be able to re-visit them with a brand-new gaze no longer tainted by our systemic and symbolic code. This ethics of estrangement, uncertainty and representational precariousness brings these plays together and characterizes contemporary plays dealing with the individual's metaphysical struggles to make sense of our symbolic reality. Furthermore, it is this ambition, I argue, what moves contemporary aesthetics away from the foregoing interventionist political plays;

their appeal to ethical and existential questions goes beyond the realistic portrayal of a character's traumatizing experience in war or any other social or political conflict. These theatrical attempts thus try to deconstruct, make sense of and denounce a reality that seems to vanish after the collapse (through war or revolution) of a no longer valid system, and similarly scrutinize the victim's sense of unbelonging, unsteadiness and dispossession.

Julia Boll's study focuses on recent war plays and inspects different performative strategies brought about so as to materialize on stage the atrocities that would otherwise remain invisible for the Western audience. Contemporary war plays hence put the audience in the position of the victim and thus make war accessible for a kind of audience that would otherwise remain ignorant of it (Boll 24). In this chapter, I will try to demonstrate how this attempt to make war trauma extensive to the audience does not only rely on the realistic description of a number of character's involvement in the war or conflict in question, but also, and especially, on a rather contrasting strategy that distances the audience in a Brechtian fashion from the atrocities staged. This is done by means of an aesthetics of deconstruction which manages to distance the spectator from the particular stories of the characters so that they are able to regard the reality performed from a new lens, rid of symbolic and systemic restrictions. The figure of the ghost and the aesthetics of spectrality, whose function in different theatrical contexts has been explored in the previous chapters of this thesis, now become a valid theatrical mechanism to evoke the uncertainty and precariousness that defines the traumatized individual, as well as the shattered community where he/she belongs. It is through the figure of the ghost, and the elusiveness and uncertain aura that surround it, that these plays manage to appeal to both the realistic specificity of a given individual's

traumatic experiencing of a community's deconstruction by war eventualities and the Epic distancing to such collapsing reality.

By means of this theatrical strategy these three plays foreground the irrationality and surreal logic characterizing the precarious experiencing of war reality (the derogation of symbolic order and the questioning of social ontological realities that it entails). It is the ghost-figure that best captures the haunting and unsettling aura of war, as in its very undecidability, it becomes metaphorical and representative of such ontological void characterizing the liquid (in the sense established in Bauman's contributions) transformation of a nation after war or revolution. The ontological uncertainty predominant in times when all that was known and taken for granted disappears is reflected in the experimentation with time, space and existential boundaries. And it is the theatrical terrain that offers the best arena to materialize such transcendental uncertainty by means of the plasticity it offers to re-dispose of time, place and ontological structures.

Mad Forest resorts to the visitation of a character's individual trauma by means of the transgenerational phantom theory already explored in chapter one of this thesis, when discussing melancholia as participating of individual trauma and studying the different mechanisms to perform it on stage. Similarly, Churchill makes use of other spectral figures (such as a vampire) and thus starts to experiment with the potential of stagnant and spectral aesthetics so as to formulate the existential precariousness of the individual when his/her surrounding reality is thus threatened by systemic collapse.[4] *In the Heart of America* uses the figure of two ghosts (one of them described in the characters' description as "a ghost, but more solid", the other as the wandering soul of a

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[4] Churchill will further explore such spectral aesthetics based on the inertia and aimlessness of the victim of totalitarian systems in her 2003 play *Far Away*.

still alive Vietnam War veteran) as medium to shake, distort and finally deconstruct the already doubtful reality on which the realities of the two living characters rely. Similarly, the unsettling and terrifying force stirred by the speechless ghost-figure, the Child Soldier, along with an overall minimalist and laconic use of language, contribute to the fragmentation of the characters' reality and the overall interconnectedness of the thus scattered story presented to us in *Stoning Mary*.

The ontological elusiveness, the inability to make sense of one's systemic and symbolic surroundings and the consequent existential instability thereby occasioned is reflected in such fragmentary and spectral aesthetics of the elusive and yet persecutory and unavoidable trauma that the characters in the plays to be analyzed are doomed to confront. In her already mentioned and much commended study on traumatic memory, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative and History*, Caruth contends that

> Ever since its emergence at the turn of the century in the work of Freud and Pierre Janet, the notion of trauma has confronted us not only with a simple pathology but also with a fundamental enigma concerning the psyche's relation to reality. In its general definition, trauma is described as the response to an unexpected or overwhelming violent event or events that are not fully grasped as they occur, but return later in repeated flash-backs,   nightmares, and other repetitive phenomena (1996:92).

The systemic and symbolic violence, in Žižek's terms, triggering the outbreak of hostilities covered in the three plays object of study in this chapter is revealed by means of the fragmentary and deconstructive theatrical modes above mentioned with the intention to shed light on the psychic (at an individual level) and existential (in terms of the consolidation of a community's symbolic normativity) mechanisms regulating the traumatic disposition of contemporary times. The formulation of the very ethical grounds through which the human gaze reads the different systemic crisis revisited on these plays seems to fall into the ineffable due to the non-symbolic nature of traumatic experience. The codifying means hence regulating a subject's symbolic construction of

the reality surrounding him/her does suffice to read and interpret the traumatic experiencing, which remains then unidentifiable and yet insistently haunting the victim. The subject's incapacity to interpret their traumatic surroundings (the derogation of the systemic reality upon which their daily lives were constructed) by the means at their disposal (their linguistic or systemic codifying means) is explored in these plays by the ontological and linguistic deconstruction strategies to be analyzed in this chapter, of which the elusive and yet haunting spectral aesthetics becomes herald.

Churchill's *Mad Forest* thus begins by warning the reader in the production notes about the play's linguistic development, moving from silence and speechlessness towards extreme linguistic fragmentary, chaotic and non-narrative speech: "The play goes from the difficulty of saying anything to everyone talking" (*MF* 9). Tucker green's *Stoning Mary* similarly visits the ineffability validating a subject's trauma by means of a minimalistic and stinging style where the role of prolonged pauses and the silent and ghastly presence of specter-like characters builds up the breathtaking and sudden effect of traumatic re-visitation.

As put by Žižek, and echoing Badiou in his definition of contemporary ethics around the truth of transcendental events, it is a traumatic event's "very factual unreliability, its confusion, its inconsistency" (Žižek 2008:4) that constitutes its very traumatic, unreadable and uninterpretable nature. It is thus such non-symbolic, non-narrative nature defining the traumatic recollection that identifies it as a truly relevant and 'transhistorical', in LaCapra's terms (2013:148-64), traumatic event. The aesthetic turn hence attempting to grasp such precarious and elusive experience must appeal and evoke rather than aim at the accurate description of an eventuality escaping all symbolic and codifying means of articulation. "Realistic prose fails" (Žižek 2008:4) and it is at this narrative impossibility that the aesthetics of verbal collapse, ontological

precariousness and hauntology succeed in the re-visitation of the collective trauma of a systemic reality's shattering into pieces. The theatrical stage comes forth as the right arena where to attempt at a formulation of that very trauma and ineffability of a subject's stagnant precariousness as a consequence of the derogation of his systemic coordinates of meaning. Being the most malleable and fluid of all artistic expressions, as it is suited to challenge normative narrativity to extremes not viable to exploration in other mediums, performing arts come up as an inestimable mode to formulate the ineffable trauma and uncertain existences of the characters whose stories establish the basis of these plays, as well as the precarious and decomposing symbolic order on which their existences are based.

As put by Diamond, "[p]erformance…dismantles textual authority…In performance, linear fictional time gives way to spatial intensities or projections of the performer's thought, gesture, movement and voice" (1997:84). The unreliable reality surrounding the characters of the plays to be analyzed is thus formulated by such fragmentary and deconstructing theatrical modes which at the same time appeal to contemporary ethics of precariousness. A lack of certainty, security and safety define contemporary times, and the way in which we relate to our systemic and symbolic reality; a reality defined as liquid, malleable and thus unstable, and always and inevitably "on the move" (Bauman 1997:77) despite a disconcerting lack of any transcendental aim. The theatrical strategies by which the three plays mentioned visit such ethical disorientation and the paradoxical nature of a community's traumatic experience (the inability to assimilate the deconstruction of a whole system and yet the necessity to make sense of it so as to move on) will be the main investigative focus of this chapter.

"you have to keep moving faster and faster, that eases the pain, seeking":[5]

Caryl Churchill's *Mad Forest* and Spectral (dis)Identification.

Already at the beginning of her undeniably successful and worldwide meaningful career, Caryl Churchill revealed the *modus-operandi* behind her writing and which, according to her, should be the driving force for significant and transcendental dramaturgy: "Playwrights don't give answers; they ask questions".[6] Always socially and politically committed, and a self-declared socialist feminist writer (Aston 1997:18 and Churchill 1988:3-16), she began her career as a writer for radio and television and it was during the mid-seventies that she started to work with companies (the Joint Stock and Monstrous Regiment from 1976), even though her first staged play, *Owners*, had already been produced and had a warm reception in 1972 at the Royal Court Theater Upstairs. Despite her uninterrupted adherence to such compromising maxim which she identified so early in her career, her playwriting has experienced an evolution which may be identified with the aesthetic procedures already hinted at in the introduction for this chapter. From the 70s and throughout the twenty-first century contemporary Anglophone theater gradually departed from domestic and Western affairs and from the exposition of a clearly identifiable political agenda. It started then to become ethically committed and to visit 'abstract' (ignored by the average Western audience) realities, mostly foreign and also many times conflicts not to be identified with any real community,[7] and yet illustrative of the ethical concerns wanted to be explored by the writer. As Elaine Aston and Elin Diamond state in their *Cambridge Companion for Caryl Churchill* (2009), for this dramatist, "an urgent political theatre question has

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[5] *MD* 46.
[6] Churchill 1960:446.
[7] Moira Buffini's *Welcome to Thebes* (2010) creates a whole non-existent scenario based in Ancient Greece and yet bringing about a reality more likely to be identified with contemporary Africa.

become how to further our 'selves' democratically in the absence of any ideological base from which to challenge the status quo" (2009:6).

In this chapter, I consider Churchill's *Mad Forest* as a turning point in her career, pertaining to her growing commitment to formulate contemporary ethics parting from a foreign, and thus diffuse, systemic reality, and yet, at the same time, her capacity as a writer to formulate an ethics that transcends the momentous reality of the particular community being described (Romania during the 1989 revolution). Relying on a classification of Churchill's work in the light of its relations with Bertolt Brecht's theatrical experimentation,[8] in this chapter I will explore Churchill's resort to Brechtian aesthetics and the A-effect (in this particular case, achieved by the aesthetic component appealing to the spectral, surreal and fragmented) in her theatrical attempt to investigate the precariousness of the individual's existence in a community threatened by ontological disintegration and posterior reconstruction. As already formulated by Enric Montforte in his study of Churchill's play, *Blue Heart* (1997), Churchill's most recent face as a playwright denotes a recognizable move to linguistic deconstruction (which finds its most explicit illustration in her 1994 play, *The Skriker*) and which has been associated with the rise of radical capitalism and conservative governments in the UK towards the end of the twentieth century (Montforte xi). The consequent aesthetic move evolves so as to cultivate an atmosphere of distrust, also towards language, now approached as useless in its symbolic task to reflect a world that is now regarded with suspicion. To the aesthetics of linguistic deconstruction that I hereby approach as metaphoric for the representation of a community's systemic disintegration and later reconstruction, my analysis of Churchill's play similarly considers the spectral component, integrated by the uncanny and surreal presence of non-human characters

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[8] For a comprehensive study of the relationship that can be established between Caryl Churchill's work, late twentieth century feminism and Bertolt Brecht's work, see Enric Montforte's *Gender, Politics, Subjectivity: Reading Caryl Churchill* (2002).

(from a talking dog, to a vampire or several ghostly appearances) as a fundamental component for the construction of such non-naturalistic Brechtian space. Moreover, from the point of view of audience response, and as I intend to show with my analysis of the play, such alienating deconstruction of the action performed integrates the second step in the audience's receptive mechanisms: As already hinted at the introduction of this chapter, contemporary drama appealing to ethical issues plays with the audience's empathy and capacity for identification with an Other by taking their willing disposition as members of an audience to two opposite extremes, by first having them empathize with the experiencing of the traumatic event from the point of view of the individual, just to unexpectedly (and radically) move to uttermost surrealist deconstruction and symbolic estrangement.

In his works *Being and Event* (1988) and *Ethics* (1993), Alain Badiou criticizes and dismantles intellectual tendencies of our time by which ethical ideology is built, and attempts at a reconstruction of an acceptable concept of ethics. His view on contemporary ethics relies on the definition of 'being' as contingent to fidelity to an evental occurrence that appears as an errant remainder which does not necessarily follow from anything, but takes place rather spontaneously and does not belong to or fit into the process either preceding or following it. By way of explanation, he defines the event as an adventurous or fortuitous remnant or supplement occurrence that is left out of the ordering of situations which surround it. An event may occur in a wide and varied range of dimensions, such as the aesthetic one (in which case events are sublime), religious (events then emerge as something either apocalyptical or miraculous) and so on. But in all cases an event entails an absolute change in the way things are understood and truthfully experienced by the individual. The event, Badiou accordingly maintains, shapes, identifies and thus creates, so to say, the subject. It is the event "which compels

us to decide a *new* way of being…The subject, therefore, in no way pre-exists the process. He is absolutely nonexistent in the situation 'before' the event. We might say that the process of truth *induces* a subject" (2001:41, 43, emphasis in original). In the dimension of politics, an event would be identified as a revolution, a putsch, or a war. And the extent to which such political eventuality deconstructs and reconfigures the existence of any being minimally involved appears as something indisputable.

In Churchill's *Mad Forest* the action centers on two different families, the Antonescu Family, upper-middle class, and the Vladu family, noticeably humble and struggling against scarcity (the first scene of the play shows Florina, one of the two daughters in the family, scrapping up a broken egg from the floor so as to still use it for dinner). The lives of these characters, along with that of the other supporting roles that appear throughout the play, is inevitably framed by the systemic reality surrounding it and thus reconfigured, as put by Badiou, after the occurrence of the major political event defining the course of the play's development: the execution of dictator Nicolae Ceauşescu and his wife Elena Ceauşescu on Christmas day, 1989. The action of the play is thus organized into a seemingly conventional three act structure, and yet, as the action progresses, the audience is gradually 'invited' to participate of the nonsensical, surrealist aesthetics which puts forward the transition from subjective nonexistence before the event, towards the gradual acquisition of a post-traumatic, fractured and disoriented subjectivity, having no systemic coordinates of reference to rely on. The introduction of characters such as talking dogs, a vampire, ghosts, and an angel, contributes to the surrealist aesthetics of the non-symbolizable and fragmentary existence that defines an individual's post-traumatic experiencing after the loss of all systemic and symbolic coordinates of meaning, so far establishing the foundations of his/her reality.

In this fashion, and as mentioned above, "the play goes from the difficulty of saying anything to everyone talking" (Production Note) or, in other words, from their 'not-being there' or their 'non-existenciality' moved by the inertia of systemic monotonous occurrence (as Badiou contends, the subject is "absolutely nonexistent in the situation before the event"),[9] to the post-traumatic urge to formulate and work through the very traumatic event, which unsuccessfully derives in nonsensical blather as a consequence of trauma's ineffability (Badiou 2001:43). The characters' disidentification, their sense of disorientation and the precariousness of ignoring the direction towards which their realities are moving finds aesthetic formulation in the play in the devices to be analyzed in this chapter (spectrality and aesthetic deconstruction being significantly illustrative thereupon). Repetition and compulsive talk appear in Act III as heralds for such post-traumatic need to rationally articulate the meaning of the event now shaping their existences, which however only meets frustration at the impossibility to reproduce with exactitude and certainty what the event consisted on (*MF* 50, 77, 81-87). Similarly, the repeated recognition of a post-eventual and post-traumatic lack of symbolic and systemic referent frames the development of Act III, where the characters remain clueless about what is expected of them as individuals taking part of a community:

> **Irina.** Yes, a little present for the doctor so he's gentle with you.
>
> **Gabriel.** That was before. Not now.
>
> …
>
> **Irina.** They can't change things so quickly, Gaby.
>
> …
>
> **Gabriel.** Different now. (*MF* 49)

---

[9] Badiou 2001:43.

Gabriel. The poor Hungarians have a bad time because they're not treated better than everyone else. How did they treat us when they had the chance? They go abroad and insult Romania to make people despise us.

Lucia. This is what we used to say before. Don't we say something different? (*MF* 53)

Mihai. Nimic nu e pe baze realistice. (Nothing is on a realistic basis.)

…

Gabriel. Diferit acum. (Different now.) (*MF* 85, 87).

Mary Luckhurst's analysis of the play (which she herself directed and brought to the York Theatre Royal stage in 2007) centers on the idea that Churchill's major concern was to reflect the events of 1989 from a foreigner's point of view, hence the consequent experimentation with "clashing performance styles, her juxtaposition of the surreal with the real, of the imaginary with eyewitness accounts, of the dead with the living, and her subtle use of the micro-political to illuminate the macro-political…" (2009:63). The idea that the play accentuates an outsider's view of the event, and focuses on the barriers of understanding which blur a foreigner's transcendental stance concerning the systemic order of an alien community is explicitly formulated in the title, which announces that we are about to witness a play "from" (and not 'about') Romania (M. Luckhurst 2009:64). Similarly, Churchill clarifies the title at an introductory note to the published edition of the play, where she refers to the forest upon which Bucharest was erected, as "impenetrable for the foreigner who did not know the paths" (*MF* 7). The titles for each of the scenes are to be announced in Romanian, then translated into English and read "from a phrasebook as if an English tourist" (*MF* 14), and then repeated once more in Romanian. The image of the tourist is thus explicitly evoked so as to indicate, as M. Luckhurst argues, the blurred, confusing and fragmentary optics, as if from the perspective of an outsider, that the play puts forward.

And yet, still keeping in mind such certain stance that the play by all means reminds of an outsider's partial and symbolically blurred and biased view, I would like to suggest a further lens from which to analyze the introduction of the tourist-figure (or the tourist-lens), following from Zygmunt Bauman's understanding of modern life. In contrast to the previous conception of life in former times, by which our existence could be measured by the steps we take, the paths we choose and the self-reality we gradually and episodically construct, the contemporary subject has no certain soil where to rely and no chance of constructing a cohesive and consistent life strategy. Modern lives resemble more a collection of ponds than a river (Bauman 1996:10). We do not stand anymore in secure soil but on moving sands where our steps do not leave a track, and so it is impossible to build a safe and purposeful path. According to Bauman, the figure of the pilgrim arduously and diligently completing a lifelong and meaningful pilgrimage does not apply anymore to the modern subject, who is rather identified with the tourist, aimlessly wandering around an unfixed world where he does not belong; the tourist just keeps moving without actual certainty or strategy. *Mad Forest* is a superb materialization of Bauman's theory about the tourist and the vagabond as modern paradigms for the contemporary precarious subject. As Churchill herself formulates through one of her characters in her later play, *Far Away*, "everyone's moving and no one knows why" (2000:43); and as the vampire in *Mad Forest* states and then repeats in the line by which the play finishes: "you have to keep moving faster and faster, that eases the pain, seeking" (*MF* 46). The uncertainty of such aimless and yet non-stoppable existential move thus exposes the lack of solidity characterizing the contemporary being that Bauman no longer identifies with the figure of the foresighted, constant and steady pilgrim able to acknowledge the path already walked and to plan his upcoming route, but with the figure of the unfixed tourist. Furthermore, in "Tourist and

Vagabonds: Heroes and Victims of Postmodernity" (1996), he further distinguishes the figure of the vagabond as opposed to that of the tourist relying on a trait which opposes one to the other: free will. In *Mad Forest*, the curious tourist peeping at the events taking place in Romania in December of 1989 from a completely detached and uninvolved perspective (thus our free choice to either watch or ignore the event) clashes with the individuals whose traumatic involvement in the event occupies the central action of the play (thus dog-like 'vagabonds' having no choice but to struggle to construct a new whole existence from the remnants of the traumatic occurrence).[10] In this sense, the formulation of the play through a tourist's lens, so to say, also points to a superb aesthetic formulation anticipating the fluid dynamics of modernity that Bauman would later on capture and define in his theory of the tourist and the vagabond: "tourists and vagabonds are the metaphors of contemporary life…Having this in mind, I suggest that in our postmodern society, we are all- to one extent or another, in body or thought, here and now or in the anticipated future, willingly or unwillingly- on the move" (Bauman 1996:14).

The naïve and shallow description of each scene as announced by the scene titles (read as if from a tourist's phrasebook, as mentioned above) thus not only underlines a foreigner's ignorant gaze, as already pointed out by M. Luckhurst (63), but it also formulates a criticism of today's world order as articulated by Bauman's theories of the individual and his constantly 'on the move' existence in modern liquid times. The vampire in Act II thus encourages the homeless dog to constantly stay on the move so as to avoid unnecessary pain.[11] And the abandoned dog finds no other way but to follow the vampire to an eternity of uncertain and unreliable existence. The lack of free will

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[10] See below for an analysis of Act II in *Mad Forest*, where an abandoned and beaten dog embraces the only chance for survival presented to him in the shape of a vampire.
[11] "The shorter the trip, the better the chance of completing it." (Bauman 1996:10)

characterizing the vagabond (just as the dog in Act II) thus contrasts with the tourist's privileged uninvolved lens. Such shallow voice is hence formulated at scene headings such as "6. Doi oameni stau la soare. Two men are sitting in the sun" (*MF* 17), for a scene actually showing how Bodgan is being coerced by a Securitate, "4. Elevii ascultă lecţia. The pupils listen to the lesson" (*MF* 16), for a scene where Flavia, a school teacher, convincingly indoctrinates her students into Ceauşescu's ideas, presenting him as a hero and liberator, or "2. Toată lumea speră ca Gabriel să se însănătosească repede. Everyone hopes Gabriel will feel better soon" (*MF* 47), scene which actually presents the two families' growing disquietude and post-traumatic anxieties, and their initial struggle to start formulating and belatedly making sense of the event changing their lives.

Reminiscent of a child's perspective, the titles summarize from a completely simplistic perspective the content of each of the scenes. They thus formulate in an alienating fashion the superficial and sometimes careless Western voice in our detached, superior and tourist-like approach to the appalling reality affecting an Other which appears to our eyes as a far and abstract reality (a reality that we, as allowed by the free will granting our privileged status as existential 'tourists', might just as well ignore).

The three acts-structure of the play, far from falling into traditional dramatic arrangement, formulates the stages gone through by a community exposed to collective trauma. Act I is thus an articulation of Romania's stagnant fantasmic state defined by the inertia of a system which is in vain dragged to aimless (and this useless) movement. Silences and the appearance of ghostly and non-human characters support the aesthetics of dormancy and stagnancy which formulate the Romanian community's reality before the revolution. The turning up of the radio's volume so as to cover the silence (most notably in scene one, Act I) and prolonged inarticulacy (for instance, Bodgan, father to

the Vladu family, only gets to articulate four words throughout Act I) are already met from the very beginning at the opening scene where nonsensical conversation blurred by the loud music on the radio guide the audience to rather concentrate on the interaction between the characters, by which the sense of insecurity and precariousness is transmitted:

> LUCIA *and* FLORINA *laugh.*
>
> BODGAN *picks up an egg and breaks it on the floor.*
>
> IRINA *gathers the other eggs to safety.*
>
> LUCIA *and* FLORINA *keep still.*
>
> IRINA *turns the radio up loud and is about to say something.*
>
> BODGAN *turns the radio completely off.* IRINA *ignores him and smokes*
>
> FLORINA *gets a cup and spoon and scrapes up what she can of the egg off the floor.*
>
> LUCIA *keeps still.* (*MF* 14)

Disturbing silences thus repeatedly transmit a sense of disconcert and fear (scene five, Act I) characterizing the resignation to the inertia of concatenated occurrences under a vicious system that is taken for granted and accepted with resignation. Scenes throughout Act I that do show regular daily conversation only reflect the falsity and corruption of a systemic reality about to meet its collapse. That is the case of scene six, where "[t]wo men sitting in the sun" (*MF* 17) happen to reflect governmental distortion, or scene nineteen, where words clash and contradict the fraudulent practices allowed by the corrupt systemic coordinates under Ceauşescu's regime:

> LUCIA *and a* DOCTOR.
>
> *While they talk the* DOCTOR *writes on a piece of paper, pushes it over to* LUCIA, *who writes a reply, and he writes again.*
>
> **Doctor.** You're a slut. You've brought this on yourself. The only thing to be said in its favour is that one more child is one more worker.
>
> **Lucia**. Yes, I realize that.

Doctor. There is no abortion in Romania. I am shocked that you even think of it. I am appalled that you dare suggest I might commit this crime.

Lucia. Yes, I' m sorry.

LUCIA *gives the doctor an envelope thick with money and some more money.*

Doctor. Can you get married?

Lucia. Yes.

Doctor. Good. Get married.

The DOCTOR *writes again,* LUCIA *nods.*

Doctor. I can do nothing for you. Goodbye

LUCIA *smiles. She makes her face serious again.*

Lucia. Goodbye. (*MF* 19)

In this fashion, when words are uttered, they do not seem to meet the reality about the functioning of these characters' world, but rather contribute to the falsity and symbolic pretense protecting the very system condemning them to their fantasmic existences. It is precisely in the spectral realm, where they are allowed to talk to non-human entities, that the characters find protection and the freedom to meaningfully utter their real inside feelings: Scene nine, where a priest reveals his distress to an angel, or scene twelve where, against her husband's seemingly inexorable silence, Flavia reveals her fears to the ghostly figure of her dead grandmother. Both characters are shown as terrified not only about the regime strangling their existences, but also about the inevitable passing of time with a sense of not having made use of it, and under the uncertainty concerning the direction where they are headed.

Hence, both the priest and Flavia resort to such non-realistic fantasies so as to liberate their fears and uncertainties, otherwise suppressed by the restrictions of the systemic order governing their existences:

Priest. I don't trust you any more.

Angel. That's a pity. Who else can you trust?

Pause.

Would you rather feel ashamed?

Pause.

Or are you going to take some kind of action, surely not?

Silence.

Priest. Comfort me. (*MF* 22)

and

Grandmother …Who do you talk to? Your closest friend is your grandmother and I'm dead, Flavia, don't forget that or you will be mad.

…

Flavia. Yes, my life is over.

Grandmother. I didn't say that.

Flavia. I don't envy the young, there's nothing ahead for them either. I'm nearer dying and that's fine.

…

But nobody's living. You can't blame me.

Grandmother. You'd better start.

Flavia. No, Granny, it would hurt.

Grandmother. Well.

Silence.

Flavia. Mihai.

MIHAI *goes on working.*

Mihai.

He looks up.

Silence. (*MF* 27)

In this way, Churchill blends real with imagined and human with non-human, so as to create a dismal atmosphere of ghostliness, hybridity and stagnancy which defines these characters' resigned and subdued commitment to their empty and false symbolic reality. Consequently, the blurring of ontological foundations thus contributes to the creation of

an alienating aesthetics which will gain more prominence as the play develops. The first scene of Act III, "1. Cîinelui îi foame. The dog is hungry" (*MF* 44) becomes in this sense a defining moment in the play, as it announces the development of such surrealist aesthetics of ghostliness. The conversation there held between an abandoned dog and a vampire becomes metaphorical for the situation of the individual under a state of complete precariousness after the dissolution of the systemic and symbolic reality sustaining his existence. Just as Bauman's vagabond, the subject whose systemic real has been shattered into pieces wanders in a state of disorientation and vulnerability (having no reality where to ground his own social persona, and so no other choice but to keep moving with no ontological certainty), like an abandoned dog, desperately looking for an owner who would protect him and give him shelter. The dog's ambivalent feelings towards his last owner, who kicked him and mistreated him, are thus also met by the individual facing the construction of a new whole systemic real, who condemns but at the same time misses the former dictatorial system causing his existential asphyxia:

> **Vampire**. Do you belong to anyone?
>
> **Dog.** I used to but he threw me out. I miss him. I hate him. (*MF* 45)

and

> *Silence.*
>
> **Radu**. What? Why?
>
> **Florina**. I miss him.
>
> **Radu**. You miss hating him.
>
> **Florina.** Maybe it's that.
>
> **Radu.** I hate Iliescu… (*MF* 61)[12]

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[12] Ion Iliescu, to be elected for presidency as leader of the National Salvation Front at the legislative elections held in 20 May 1990.

Luckhurst's reading of the opening scene to Act III understands it as "a reminder that material deprivation and poverty provide a dangerous engine to the political machinery of state" (M. Luckhurst 68), as she identifies the figure of the vampire as "a manifest allusion to Ceauçescu himself" (67), and the dog, disoriented and desperately looking for an authoritative figure to subjugate him, with the Romanian community after the deposition and execution of Ceauşescu. Along these lines, the abandoned dog, "undecided between eagerness and fear" (*MF* 44), represents in a Brechtian defamiliarizing fashion the precarious subject's excitement after the triumph of a community over his vampiric instigator ("**Doctor**. For the first time in my life I felt free to laugh" *MF* 38) and yet, at the same time, the simultaneous sense of panic at the ignorance about what is coming next on the one hand, and at the sense of emptiness at not having any tangible reality on which to rely, on the other ("**Mihai**…Nothing is on a realistic basis" *MF* 66). Flavia's words at her son's wedding, represented at the last scene of the play, summarize such ambivalent post-evental feeling of speechless euphoria and yet inner fear: "What's so wonderful about a wedding is everyone laughs and cries and it's like the revolution again." (*MF* 74)

Act III becomes in this way the aesthetic articulation of the individual's post-traumatic uncertainty about the event, and his relentless determination to grasp the eventual occurrence in its exact entirety, which time and again proves to be impossible. The characters thus constantly search for sources confirming what they esteem to be the truth of the event, even though such sources might be defined by their very fictional basis, as is the case of dreams, nightmares, or television:

Patient. Did we have a revolution? Or what did we have?

…

Radu. The only real night was the 21ˢᵗ. After that, what was going on? It was all a show.

Lucia. No, it was real, Radu,/ I saw it on television. (*MF* 53)

In such a context of distrust in which the boundaries separating real from fiction/dream and dead and alive are thus blurred, the traumatized and disoriented community keeps desperately searching for means to grasp the truth of the event. Badiou defines the subject as incomplete and inexistent before the very occurrence of the event. And it is precisely in their attempt to grasp and make complete and rational sense of the traumatic event (which proves to be impossible due to its ghostly and elusive nature) that the characters of the play look for self-existential confirmation.

As already discussed throughout this thesis, due to the ineffability characterizing the very traumatic event, belated performance appears as the most effective strategy in the attempt to formulate the veracity of the event, due to the void characterizing the symbolic order on those grounds. Under a state of complete disorientation, with no symbolic or systemic reality on which to rely any longer, the Romanian community found in Churchill's (despite it being from a 'tourist's' perspective) performative attempt a relieving working-through experience by which their inarticulate precariousness found momentous aesthetic pair.[13] Identically so, the meta-representation of the very moment of the execution of the Ceauşescus, performed by the characters of the play in scene six, appears as a traumatic acting-out mechanism to confirm the truth and veracity of the event (*MF* 68-71).

According to Badiou, it is the very fidelity to the event that defines the human nature: "It is our capacity for truth- our capacity to be *that 'same' that a truth convokes*

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[13] Despite the play's "unfinished feel" (Nightingale 15) and its pretension for an alienating and distancing effect to awaken the audience's critical eye, during its performance in Romania, the audience responded with cheer and applause to many of the scenes staged, at the post-traumatic relieve to approach a re-formulation of the original event (Aston 1997:47).

to its own 'sameness'. Or in other words, depending on the circumstances, our capacity for science, love, politics or art, since all truths, in my view, fall under one or another of these universal names" (2001:27). The subject is faithful to an event to the extent that he/she moves within the situation that this event has supplemented (i.e. when his/her behavior needs to change so as to assimilate it). "[B]y *thinking*…the situation 'according to' the event" (Badiou 2001:41), the subject's existentiality acquires full meaning; the novelty carried out by the event "compels the subject to invent a new way of being and acting in the situation."(Badiou 2001:42). The characters in the play thus try to act faithfully and according to the new order of things following from the event in their attempt to find the new meaning their lives have acquired after its occurrence.

However, still at a loss and belatedly recovering from its impact, they are unable to recognize the systemic Real regulating their new reality, and find difficulties when addressing the actual referent that their symbolic order codifies. Thus, just as they are unsure whether to decode what happened as either a putsch or a revolution (*MF* 50, 77), they seem unable to recognize substantial and serious talk, from a pun or a joke, where language does not allude to any real entity or fact. In this way, in the middle of their performance of the night when the Ceauşescus were executed, Gabriel's verbal aggression against Ianos, Hungarian and engaged to his sister, is hidden in the language of pretence and fiction, as part of the performance, and the true content of his statement is thus disguised:

> **Radu**. [Playing the role of Ceausescu at his execution] I'll give you the people's Palace-
>
> **Ianos**. In the head.
>
> *They shoot again. He lies still.*
>
> *They all sheer and jeer.*
>
> **Ceaşescu (Radu).** *sits up.*

Radu. But am I dead?

All. Yes.

He falls dead again.

More cheering, ole ole ole etc.

RADU *and* FLORINA *get up, everybody laughing.*

IANOS *hugs* LUCIA *lightly.*

GABRIEL *suddenly hits out at IANOS with his crutch.*

Gabriel. Get your filthy Hungarian hands off her.

Ianos. What?

Gabriel. Just joking (*MF* 71).

In this fashion, as inaugurated by the fragmented and collage-like mode characterizing Act II, Act III gradually moves towards extreme linguistic and also ontological deconstruction (as, for example, non-human characters mixing with real life characters at the celebration of Florina's wedding). Act II gathers a collection of independent testimonial speeches overlapping one another in a compulsive post-traumatic mode. In Act II, each of the characters (different from the ones leading the action throughout the rest of the play) "behaves as if the others are not there and each is the only one telling what happened" (*MF* 29), thus alluding to the isolation characterizing traumatic re-experiencing also in the case of collective trauma. In her study on contemporary Trauma Culture, E. Ann Kaplan puts forward the impact that trauma brings about both at an individual and at a collective level, and how difficult it is to distinguish collective from individual trauma, as major collective traumatic events (she begins her book by discussing the 9/11 attacks) have an impact at an individual psychic level on each of the victims, either directly or indirectly (but always differently) involved (1). As she acknowledges, trauma produces new subjects, and one of the major challenges of contemporary literature has been to capture the constellation of personal and individual struggles and psychic stances after the traumatic occurrence. Churchill's

Mad Forest moves from the representation of a community's stagnant and dead-like state as a consequence of a repressive system, to the initial euphoria and then utter fear that gradually and belatedly invades each of the victims involved. Act II is illustrative of how the individuality of each testimonial attempt builds up in a fragmented fashion a collective (anti)narrative of disorientation, inarticulacy and persistence in the attempt to formulate the authenticity of the event, how it is the small and fragmentary details remembered by each of the victims that participate in the construction of a collective and unsystematic mosaic reflecting the event's totality:

> **Girl Student**. On my way to the People's Palace I saw people queueing for a new thriller that had just been published, so as I feeling guilty about my mother I decided to try and buy one, thrillers are her favourite books. So I queued to get the book, and at about one o'clock went home.
>
> **Bulldozer Driver**. I leave work to get my son from school and I don't go back to work, I go to the Palace Square.
>
> **Student 1**. There were two camps, army and people, but nobody shooting. Some workers from the People's Palace come with construction material to make barricades. More and more people come, we are pushed together.
>
> **Doctor**. On my way home in the afternoon there was a woman crying because she lost her handbag, the other women comfort her saying, 'it could be worse, people were crushed and lost their shoes, don't cry for such a small thing.' (*MF* 31)

Despite the testimonial style and the individual attempts at a specific and ordered description of the collective traumatic event, the result is a fragmented and precarious attempt at narrative assimilation. It is precisely the fragmentariness and the impossibility to address the occurrence directly (the impossibility to embrace and then formulate it in its totality) that renders the traumatic event to be truthful (Žižek 2008:5). Testimonial accounts and realistic prose come up as deficient and defective and only bring about the frustration at the impossibility to take hold of the event in its totality. Sensorial evocation, allusion and non-narrative means materialize as more suitable instruments in the exploration of the fragments making up traumatic memory. Aesthetic

modes more in contact with sensorial evocation render a more faithful approach or reformulation of the traumatic event. While Žižek advocates that poetry and music emerge as successful mechanisms to address the narrative impossibility to grasp the truthfulness of a traumatic occurrence, one major investigative goal throughout this thesis has been to demonstrate that theatrical performance surpasses other aesthetic forms at the accomplishment of this very task. Poetic evocation and music's emotional and sensorial nature meet in performing arts, which furthermore offer the plasticity to dispose of temporal, ontological and further (anti)narrative devices in such a way that the very fragmentary and chaotic nature of evental occurrence is thus successfully and authentically revisited.

The transition from individual assimilation to collective attempts at a reconstruction of the event, which Kaplan rightly deemed as difficult to tell apart (Kaplan 1), is successfully revisited by Churchill's aesthetic turn in Act II. Here, single testimonial statements build up an overall testimonial collage carefully reconstructing the unstable, elusive and fragile Real upon which a community's new systemic reality is about to emerge. Starting from the disconnected accounts of voices coming from different sources which sometimes confront each other (as we hear the vigorous accounts of students who demonstrated at the People's Palace, just as the proud and non-repentant voice of Securitate guards), Act II moves to explore the collective stance by which the Romanian community will codify the event and move on to construct a new normative reality.

The recognition of the Other in a Levinasian fashion constitutes one of the cornerstones upon which such collective gaze towards the traumatic event is constructed. The initial disorientation and uncertainty that invades the subject's stance thus moves to collective assimilation and symbolic codification by means of the

recognition of the existence of an Other who is likewise involved, as Churchill ingeniously articulates through the voice of two of the victim-witnesses:

> **Student 1**. I got to the square and people are shouting against Ceausescu, shouting 'Today in Timisoara, tomorrow in all the country'. I look at their lips to believe they say it. I see a friend and at first I don't know him, his face has changed, and when he looks at me I know my face is changed also. (*MF* 31)
>
> …
>
> **Painter**. I was empty of soul. I didn't know who I was.
>
> …
>
> I was with my girlfriend so felt I should act as a man and be confident. I was curious to know what I could feel in difficult moments. (*MF* 34, 41).

Act II turns into a successful approach to evental inexorability and the need for an Other's recognition of our own existentiality at the very moment of the event's occurrence. The presence of the Other thus validates our assimilation and acceptance of the event. This is the very step, as Churchill successfully exposes, that allows for a transition from the individual and isolated experience of the trauma's eventuality, to a collective assimilation, which grants the symbolic and systemic validation of its very occurrence. After the collective recognition of the event's transcendental nature, there follows the search for the appropriate means to codify it or for a context from which to read the already validated (by means of the other) and yet ineffable occurrence:

> **Translator:** We heard shots so we went out. I've noticed in films people scatter away from gunfire but here people came out saying, What's that?...
>
> I heard people shouting, 'Down with Ceauşescu', for the first time. It was wonderful feeling to say those words, Jos Ceauşescu…
>
> There were no words in Romanian or English for how happy I was.
>
> …
>
> **Painter**. Painting doesn't mean just describing, it's a state of spirit. I didn't want to paint for a long time. (*MF* 36-43)

The translator, whose occupation enables him to codify reality by means of symbolic tools, runs thus short of instruments to rationally capture the very eventuality and how it was individually and collectively experienced. The painter, who, contrastingly, does not look for rational and symbolic description but rather sensorial and emotional evocation, is similarly unable to translate into pictorial sensations what he outlived as a witness. Such belated post-evental ineffability is thus revisited and successfully reconstructed by Churchill's brilliant use of a fragmentary and deconstructing aesthetic mode which is prolonged and developed to extremes in Act III.

Echoing the vampire's claim at the first scene in Act III,[14] the last act in *Mad Forest* evolves into a frantic existential race with no set destination or aim in which each character hectically moves forward trying to make sense of their reality. The final act formulates the anticipation of an inevitably uncertain future (which they regard with fear) and the inability to run away from the belated impact of the event which completely changed both their reality as a community and their identity as subjects with no valid system to rely on. The aesthetics there evoked to explore such malleable, unpredictable and liquid existence relies on spectral means formulating a haunting and by no means certain past, and on fragmentary speech signaling the characters' inability to make sense of their past or ascertaining the direction in which their lives are heading. In this light, ghosts (*MF* 73), nightmares (*MF* 55), compulsive, nonsensical, areferential and overlapping speech (*MF* 50, 54, 69, 85-87) and the cultivation of an unfounded hatred towards the unknown (formulated in the shape of a fantasmic Other- a Hungarian 'invading' their community, a refugee child, the communists…) (*MF* 62, 71, 79) are some of the mechanisms by which such aesthetics of undecidability is formulated.

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[14] "you have to keep moving faster and faster, that eases the pain, seeking." (*MF* 46)

Back to the daily reality of the characters met in Act I after the fragmentary testimonial approach of Act II, the silent and stagnant atmosphere dominating their reality as presented in the first act finds now a substitute in incontrollable and overlapping post-traumatic speech which is in all cases less meaningful and revealing than their previous ghostly silences. In this line, in scene 3.iv Irina confesses "I used to say more with the radio on" (*MF* 55), when actually the volume of the radio was the device they used before (Act I) so as to conceal their speechlessness. Linguistic uproar and chaos, expressed in the form of simultaneous talk or overlapping speech becomes one of the most notable strategies pointing to the existential confusion belatedly invading the characters in the play after the destruction of their symbolic coordinates of reference. Such need to formulate and make sense of the revolution also finds expression in the characters' attempt to perform it theatrically in its exactitude, as already mentioned above, and in the strategy to contrast different speaking paces so as to foreground the restlessness of a generation concerned about their whereabouts after the revolution and the uncertainty and eagerness invading them concerning the direction their lives are moving towards ("*The* GRANDPARENTS *are sitting side by side on the bench, the others around them. The* GRANDPARENTS *speak slowly, the others fast*" *MF* 61).

The last scene of the play matches the mosaic-like reconstruction of the event already exploited in Act II with the individual testimonial performances which moved towards a diffuse and chaotic traumatic collage. The fragmentary style is now taken to extremes by means of the formal and symbolic deconstruction of the collective image or picture unsystematically and disconnectedly built up out of such individual traumatic experiences. The painstaking attempt to codify and assimilate the occurrences changing their systemic Real is now deconstructed and shattered into pieces in a surrealist and

non-narrative move at the end of the play. As put by Philip Roberts "[the play] in fact ends abruptly, for there can be no ending to a fluid and ongoing situation" (121). Churchill brings about each characters' most significant line, and creates a momentous frame in which the existential frustration, anger, disorientation and panic of each of the characters is thus captured at their uncontrolled and most extreme expression. The stage directions before the last lines of the play (to be spoken in Romanian) put forward the surreal confusion aimed at to close the action of the play:

> [After a scene where they have been fighting each other in a nonsensical way]
>
> *They pick themselves up, see if they are all right.*
>
> *Music- the lambada. Gradually couples for and begin to dance.* BODGAN and IRINA, MIHAI and FLAVIA, FLORINA and RADU, LUCIA and IANOS, GABRIEL tries to dance on his crutch. For some time they dance in silence. The ANGEL and VAMPIRE are *there, dancing together. They begin to enjoy themselves.*
>
> *Then they start to talk while they dance, sometimes to their partner and sometimes to one of the others, at first a sentence or two and finally all talking at once. The sentences are numbered in a suggested order. At 14, every couple talks at once, with each person alternating lines with their partner and overlapping with their partner at the end. So that by the end everyone is talking at once but leaving the vampire's last four or five words to be heard alone. At first they talk quietly then more freely, some angry, some exuberant. They speak Romanian.*
>
> **Vampire.** Incepi a vrei sînge. Membrele te dor, capul îţi arde. Trebuie să te mişti din ce în ce mai repede. (You begin to want blood. Your limbs ache, your head burns, you have to keep moving faster and faster.) [End of play] (*MF* 85, 87)

Churchill thus finishes the action of the play relying on a sheer Brechtian sense of unfinished agitation, disorientation and frustration at finding no answer solving these characters' existential quest and, extensively, leaving open the transcendental ethical issues addressed on the play: how does the individual meet a new subjectivity in a context of systemic dissolution, what is the direction to which the new systemic Real should aim, or how is such ineffable sense of post-evental precariousness assimilated and codified by a community?

Moreover, in the post-dictatorial context of the play, any sense of an ordered closure might suggest a return to the old forms of tyranny and discipline. Churchill's drive is thus to force the audience's departure from their accommodated position as uninvolved tourists, in Bauman's terms, so that they make use of their free will (defining them as such) and get critically and emotionally engaged to a vagabond's precarious perspective of life as condemned to aimless liquid mobility. The discussion of how to combine Brechtian estrangement procedures with emotional empathy and identification will be one of the main focuses of attention addressed in my analysis of Naomi Wallace's *In the Heart of America* (1994), following this. Essentially contradicting Brechtian precepts about audience alienation and dis-identification as a means to effectively activate critical receptivity, empathy and emotional identification emerge as valid strategies that the authors addressed in this chapter adopt so as to create an effect of agitation and ethical concern. Thus moving from empathic individual exposition and the visitation of particular characters' traumatic nightmare,[15] the plays here analyzed unfold into surrealist and deconstructing aesthetics, employed so as to provoke the desired alienating effect. It is initially by empathy with the Other and emotional identification, and then by extreme symbolic deconstruction, that the spectator's understanding is broadened so as to assimilate foreign traumatic eventuality. In my analysis of Wallace's *In the Heart of America*, I explore the balance between such affective turn and the aesthetics of fragmentation, on the one hand, and Brechtian defamiliarization, by which effective ethical concern is raised, on the other.

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[15] As contended by Badiou, there is no 'ethics in general' or 'universal ethical norms' to be applied systematically, as our ethical concern is always born out of our natural capacity of identification in thought with the other (Badiou 2001). The playwrights whose work is approached in this chapter hence take a given character's specific existential quandary as point of departure so as to aesthetically evolve from there towards a formulation of a number of transcendental ethical concerns.

"The army will give you a quite sense of pride":[16]

Ghostly Wandering and the Search for Symbolic Self-confirmation in Naomi Wallace's *In the Heart of America.*

In 1967, Jacques Derrida published three influential books setting the grounds for his theory on linguistic deconstruction, phonocentrism and logocentrism: *Of Grammatology*, *Speech and Phenomena* and *Writing and Difference*. There, Derrida puts forward his ideas counteracting Saussurean thought, which had previously sustained the identifying unit constituted by thought and sign. The cornerstone for Derrida's linguistic theory sets forth the view that signifier and signified are in constant movement, breaking apart and coming together in new and endless combinations which thus render meaning-signifier identity impossible. Language appears, therefore, from Derrida's views, as a completely unstable phenomenon, and in constant movement and renovation. It is thus made up of endless traces left by elder combinations, and of resonances and connotations acquired in a constant basis by its incessant introduction into new symbolic contexts; signifying bits whose connotations (signification) come to the surface on a greater or smaller basis depending on the context in which such linguistic occurrences are evoked. As put by Terry Eagleton,

> It is an illusion for me to believe that I can ever be fully present to you in what I say or write, because to use signs at all entails my meaning being always somehow dispersed, divided and never quite at one with itself. Not only my meaning, indeed, but I myself: since language is something I am made out of, rather than a convenient tool I use, the whole idea that I am a stable, unified entity must also be a fiction. (130)

In her acclaimed 1994 play, *In the Heart of America*, Naomi Wallace explores linguistic instability, symbolic identity and the extent to which language distorts and corrupts our reality from a Derridean point of view. In a fashion similar to Churchill's

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[16] *HA* 90.

linguistic collage at the very end of *Mad Forest*, where the most significant lines spoken by each of the characters are brought to mention again in a disorderly fragmentary fashion, Wallace's play uses linguistic construction as a means to appeal to ontological and existential instability: symbolic and linguistic areferentiality, the manipulative use of euphemisms, social labeling so as to symbolically validate a piece of reality, and misleading and ambiguous punctuation and pausing are some of the strategies by which language, and so the reality it names, is deconstructed and questioned throughout the play.

Additionally, Wallace resorts to alienating performing strategies reminiscent of actors' rehearsal in the very preparation to perform a given theatrical role by directly appealing to the very fictionality and functioning mechanisms behind dramatic fabrication (thus enhancing the desired estrangement effect). The actual physical rehearsal of daily performative acts such as walking, and then ethically bound acts such as violence in war is introduced by Wallace as an aesthetic device which goes beyond the meta-theatrical strategies and the play-within-a-play device previously explored in this thesis (in particular, in my analysis of *The Love of the Nightlingale* and *Mad Forest*) in that rehearsal does not aim at the belated formulation of an event as a consequence of the failure of symbolic means to represent it, but rather appears as an extreme defamiliarizing mechanism allowing us to step by step and scrupulously scrutinize the performance of normative and taken for granted social practices such as the way we walk, the way in which torture of war prisoners proceeds, or our human reaction to death. Rehearsal is therefore not a belated and retrospective mechanism, but a deconstructing device aiming to change our future understanding of symbolic and systemic realities.

Finally, the third destabilizing and deconstructing mechanism functioning in the play so as to question symbolic normativity in a war context focuses on the dismantling and interrogation of accepted ontological establishments grounding our understanding of reality. Time, space and dimensional boundaries are thus deconstructed to the extent that a character may simultaneously have a conversation with a ghost and a human being (*HA* 138-9), concurrently partake of two different realities at two different realms (memory and present reality), freely and tourist-like travel throughout time and space (Lue Ming), or be bound and tided in a vagabond-like manner to ghostly wandering around the world in the shape of a body-less soul (Boxler, soul of lieutenant Calley).

All three Brechtian mechanisms contributing to the audience's estrangement and subsequent questioning of the (sur)real evoked on stage are called forth after the previously mentioned procedures working towards emotional identification by which the spectator's empathy is activated. Such back and forth movement deriving in extreme deconstruction by the means already mentioned gives way to the interrogation of a Real with which the audience is thus made to partake. As already set forth at the introduction of this chapter, contemporary ethics is not limited to the denounce of issues bound to the familiar surroundings of Western communities, but is rather inclusive of symbolically obscured foreign realities; and the theatrical conventions that are met to reach such vindicating purposes are aesthetically formulated in Wallace's successful 1994 play in the mechanisms above mentioned, to be now in depth explored.

While Saussurean theory formulates the illusion (as put above by Eagleton) that code and meaning are implicated in a relation of identity, Derrida's later contributions were directed at the derogation of the idea that there is such a thing as symbolic (signifier) and ontological (signified) unity allowing the subject to evoke the full reality of a thing or being by naming it or symbolically codifying it. A subject or thing is never

caused to be fully present by symbolic and codifying formulation. Signs can only partially evoke fragments of the reality named in an incomplete way, as language is build out of the semantic traces or remains left by previous use which is still contained by a particular sign, and is subject to constant symbolic renovation.

The dislocation of evental occurrence and the deconstruction of human existence by linguistic, performative and ontological means in *In the Heart of America* formulate reality in a way which verifies Derridean thought, radically opposing Saussure's views on the sign and its functioning. There is no form of pure expression for the reality evoked in *In the Heart of America* (the first Gulf War and its impact in the lives of several subjects there involved), just as there is no valid codifying means to truthfully recover the very eventuality there re-visited in its entirety, or how it changed the existences of the subjects involved. The means of articulation by which Wallace touches the individual traumatic experiences of each of the participants rather puts the pieces together in a disorderly and unsettling fashion thus making up a surrealist collective picture about the first Gulf war and its evental impact in several individuals.

It is therefore not only language that is "dispersed and divided", but the reality it names, as it inevitably relies on such symbolic and codifying grounds only able to construct such unreliable order of things. As Eagleton ingeniously points out, it is thus not only meaning that we try to formulate by symbolic means, but also our own persona, inherently defined and made out of the very language by which we inspect the Real, that is thus shattered and unstable. The subject appears, from a deconstructive point of view, not as a unified and stable entity, but as the disorderly constellation of dispersed and fragmentary pieces that can be named and filtered by codifying means (the daily and normative tools by which we are compelled to inspect the human subject).

The understanding of human existentiality is thus approached in Wallace's play, where the past of the characters is revisited in such fragmentary and precarious fashion. The childhood of the two main characters, Fairouz and Remzi, brother and sister, is thus stated never to have existed in its entirety, but rather as a collection of pieces now put back together in a retrospective fashion as if in a puzzle: "**Fairouz:** He and I. We were never children. We were pieces of children. After that. But what is a piece of a child?" (*HA* 136).

Throughout the play, Wallace directly refers to the symbolic procedures by which we codify our reality, appealing to the mechanisms we unconsciously apply to interpret our surroundings and so as to expose its very artificiality. The action in the play centers on five characters: two of them alive and three of them either dead or somehow immaterial (the latter being the case of the wandering soul of Lieutenant Calley, who separated from its still alive body). Craver and Fairouz, the two characters that are alive, are connected by means of a third character, Remzi, brother to Fairouz and Craver's lover (although we are not provided with that piece of information until the very end of the play). Fairouz visits Craver looking for answers concerning her brother Remzi, an American-Palestinian soldier sent to Iraq during the first Gulf War and who never came back. Craver, Remzi's comrade sent back home in Kentucky, is initially reluctant to deliver any information, but finally, in a belated attempt to work through the trauma, reveals that he and her brother were actually in love ("**Craver**. It might keep me alive. Talking about it might keep me alive" *HA* 138). The other two characters, initially not involved in the event connecting the other three characters together, appear in a surrealist spatio-temporal intrusion as apparent remnants of long lasting traumatic evental occurrence taking place much earlier than the (both personal and war, global-wide) experiences recalled by Craver and Fairouz. Lue Ming is the

ghost of a Vietnamese woman whose baby was killed by Boxler, whom she desperately searches throughout time and space realms, ignoring all ontological thresholds, just to be able to identify and interrogate the perpetrator of her life[and death]trauma.

The action of the play thus gradually and deconstructively evolves to an extreme where the world of each of the characters blends in a fragmentary way shattered by personal and collective (war) trauma. Fairouz's childhood memories about her brother taking care of her damaged foot blend in a disorderly fashion with her present-day conversations with Craver, just as Craver's pieces of memories about his races with Remzi appear in a flashback mode at the same time that he talks to Fairouz. Boxler becomes the lieutenant teaching Craver and Remzi how to torture prisoners, thus confusing existential grounds (he still believes to be in Vietnam). The play is therefore made out of remnants or traces of traumatic experiences that keep haunting each of the characters in a ghost-like fashion, who become thus involved in evental conflicts not pertaining to their own experiences in such a fragmentary, uncertain and precarious deconstruction of their realities.

As argued above, language itself is made out of traces of previous pieces of meaning and significations (*HA* 92). This Derridean approach to the codification of reality becomes one of the main strategies building up such a shattered and unreliable Real throughout the play. Wallace exposes the falsifying meanings by which we filter our reality and appeals to issues such as biased labeling and how it corrupts our reading of the reality surrounding us. Remzi and Fairouz repeatedly appeal to their harsh experiences during childhood as a consequence of social intolerance, just as Craver is continually called "white trash" (*HA* 99, 112, 114, 134, 136) and Lue Ming submissively accepts the role of "gook" by which she is identified and regularly uses it as a means helping her identify other people's identity:

Lue Ming. Arab! Slope! Dink!

Fairouz. No, they didn't call me that: slope.

Lue Ming. Thought I'd through it in. Slope. Dink. Gook.

Fairouz. Gook I've heard of.

Lue Ming. The Phillipines war. It was used again for Korea, and then recycled f or Vietnam (*HA* 92).

Lue Ming. …How many gooks have you killed?

Craver. I don't kill gooks. I kill Arabs. Iraqi Arabs, Saddam Arabs. But that war is over now too. (*HA* 86)

Lue Ming's retrospective and etymological approach to the label by which she herself is obnoxiously identified echoes Derrida's views on language as an unstable system subject to temporality and signifying restructuration. Similarly, it critically recalls the fantasmic nature of the other, whose actual reality and circumstances are not available for symbolic interpretation and is so understood as a threat to our community. It is our ignorance about the other what drives us to phantomize and terribilize their existences by means of symbolic codification. As put literally by Craver when describing what his and Remzi's mission in Iraq was:

> **Craver.** It's nothing personal: we're not just here to get them out of Kuwait, but to protect a way of life.
>
> **Remzi and Craver.** Flawed it may be, but damned well worth protecting!
>
> **Craver.** Those poor bastards are so brainwashed by Saddam, they need to kill like we need oxygen… (*HA* 87)
>
> **Remzi.** Why are we here (*Beat*) killing Arabs?
>
> **Craver.** For love? Say it's for love. Don't say for oil. Don't say for freedom. Don't say for world power. I'm sick of that. I'm so fucking sick of that. It's true, isn't it? We're here for love. Say it just once. For me.
>
> **Remzi.** We're here for love.
>
> (*They kiss*). (*HA* 126)

Remzi's and Craver's proud alignment on the US military sprouts from their lack of reliance of a symbolic reality safeguarding and preserving their subjectivity and

their right to exist as part of a community. In other words, Craver, a piece of "white trash", and Remzi, taken as not completely Arab and not completely American,[17] merely lacked a community to feel part of as valid subjects whose belonging was accepted and never questioned. Instead, they are symbolically identified as perpetual hostages (in Derrida's terms), paralyzed and unable to cross the threshold by which they would be accepted (symbolically assimilated) with hospitality in their own homeland.[18] Their sense of shame about their irrevocable identity status (*HA* 97) is made explicit throughout the play, just as the sense of lack of belonging which has persecuted them since childhood:

> **Remzi and Craver.** (Sing): "…chicken pox! Love hot dogs. Armour hot dogs. The dogs kids love to bite".
>
> **Craver.** I always loved that song when I was a kid.
>
> **Remzi.** It made me feel included.
>
> **Craver.** Yeah (*HA* 122).

The US Army thus emerged as the institution providing them with "a quite sense of pride" (*HA* 88); pride to belong somewhere, and so to be classifiable and symbolized as a valid subject whose existence thus gains intentionality and purpose. A lack of direction and an insubstantial, phantasmal existence characterizes all of the characters in *In the Heart of America*, as they keep wandering aimlessly and always revolving around the very ineffable eventuality changing their unreliable existences. Their precarious existences keep thus being beaten by the remnants of the event making such impact in their realities, and they are thus condemned to keep moving forwards in their unstable

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[17] "**Remzi**. I'm sick of being a hyphen: the Palestinian, the gap between Arab-American…" (*HA* 95)

[18] In "Hostipitality" (2000), Derrida ethimologically and epistemologically deconstructs the experience of hospitality in the attempt to reach an accurate definition. One of the conclusions there reached is the very aporic nature of hospitality. It is thus regarded as self-contradictory because its very functioning implies the strengthening of the host's authoritative role and consequently the confirmation of the other's status as hostage at the very act of crossing the liminal threshold identifying him as such. In *In the Heart of America*, the hostage-status of many of the characters defines their vulnerable and precarious existences.

realities where real and fiction (either dream, or corrupted memory, or belonging to the ghostly realm) is confused in a surrealist fashion. Fairouz and Craver's existences are thus just as unreliable and illusory as that of the actual ghosts in the play (Lue Ming, Boxler, and Remzi, who does not appear as a ghost, but is already part of the realm of dreams and memory as his death is gradually confirmed as the action progresses). The play ends up by focusing the action on the aimless and uncertain future opening before them once the certainty of Remzi's death, and the acceptance that his body will never be recovered, is confirmed. Thus, as if sand escaping through her fingers, Fairouz's future materializes as less tangible:

> **Fairouz.** And the sand. I can't sleep because of it. Everywhere. Inside my pillow. Inside my sleep. I'm walking. Walking and calling for you. But the sand slides below my feet, stopping me, keeping me in place. And the wind throwing handfuls. But then in the distance. I see. Something. Dark. Moving. Moving towards me.
>
> …
>
> And it seems hours, years, until I can see. What. Yes. That it's a child. Five or six. A boy. The wind has torn small pieces from your body. With each step you take towards me you are less whole. When we reach each other, you are almost transparent. (*HA* 137)

Incorporeal, atemporal and non-spatial post-traumatic reality is thus formulated by Fairouz, once she has the certainty of her brother's death. Thus shattering all of her coordinates of meaning, the eventuality of her brother's death rids Fairouz of all symbolic coordinates sustaining her reality. Her confusion and disorientation concerning her future prospects, or how she will be able to formulate a life without her brother, is thus metaphorically formulated. The post-traumatic urge to search what made her subjectivity meaningful thus only meets non-stable and uncertain existence. None of the characters in the play are able to meet a symbolic identification of their very existentiality which would provide them with the desired sense of belonging and direction. Lue Ming's and Boxler's uncertainty about ontological status or the reason

why they have been aimlessly wandering throughout time and space for such a long time, meets Fairouz's, Remzi's and Craver's existential quest for "a quite sense of pride" or a label to identify their own realities as legitimately belonging to a given symbolic order.

The a-teleological and disoriented existences of Fairouz, Remzi and Craver, who wander aimlessly towards an uncertain future and with an unfixed destination ("**Fairouz.** I'll go wherever I need to go. I won't leave them in peace." *HA* 138), is provoked by the hostility with which they have been received (symbolically interpreted) in their own communities.[19] Being rejected by the very community that he considers to be his home (The United States), Remzi himself, however, simultaneously acts as inflexible and reproachfully authoritarian colonizer towards his mother, who has not been able to integrate in the host community (*HA* 94).[20] And yet, it is his mother's keeping in the compliant role of hostage and the symbolic distance that such refusal to completely cross the threshold grants her which allows her to prematurely foresee her son's fatal end at the hands, not of the Iraqis, but of the very Americans he considered to be his family ("**Boxler** No "sirs" and "thank yous". We're equal when I say "at ease"…We're all family here. Aren't we?" *HA* 96-97). Remzi thus rejects his own family roots (*HA* 97), which he considered where preventing him from being allowed to cross the threshold to the new community he was trying to be a member of, and so became a stranger for his own family community ("**Fairouz.** You're becoming a stranger. **Remzi.** Look, I'm sorry about the occupation and that you don't feel you have

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[19] The hostility shown towards the figures of Remzi and Craver, hostages in their own homeland, is further explored throughout the play and reaches its extremes when the specificities of Remzi's death 'in the war' are revealed: he was not killed by Iraqi soldiers, but by his own American 'comrades' after they found him having sex with Craver, whom they also ruthlessly torture.

[20] Remzi's and Fairouz's mother refuses to speak the language of the host (even though she has learnt it) and similarly refuses to completely adapt to the rules imposed for the consecution of a hospitable integration in the territory which is perceived as alien for her (The United States). Just as well as Fairouz, Remzi's mother remains a stranger in a land which neither of them comply to consider their own.

a homeland. But I do, and it's here. Not over there in some never-never land" *HA* 93):

"**Fairouz.** I've told mother that, Remzi. Over and over I've told her that it's the Iraqis you're going off to fight, but she keeps saying (*Speaks in Arabic and then translates*) "They'll kill him. The Yankees will kill him." Silly old woman. She's all mixed up." (*HA* 106)

Despite his will to comply to, so to say, the rules of 'the host', Remzi is thus never welcomed in the land which he considers his own, and thus remains a stranger, symbolically unclassifiable and, drawing from Butler, representationally precarious. Consequently, he is treated with incommensurable hostility, which occasions his violent death at the hands of his own 'family'. In this fashion, the spectral apparitions in the play (Lue Ming and Boxler) and their eternal wandering around time and space metaphorically represent Remzi, Fairouz and also Craver's precarious existences as perpetual strangers who have not won the right for a dignified label (or sign of symbolic identity) at a community which never offered them the hospitality they were looking for. Consequently, outcasts and dispossessed spirits, they are condemned to precarious wandering around, directionless, yearning for a community willing to provide them with a symbolic 'I', a systemic 'family' and a hospitable home where to find existential rest, or the so longed "quite sense of pride" (*HA* 88).

They aimlessly run away from strangeness so as to meet the sense of inclusion and belonging that Remzi and Craver thought to have found in the US Army. White-trash, brown-trash, half-nigger, jew-bastard, terrorist, sandnigger, slope, dink, gook…; all of those signs codify the different characters of the play as fantasmic beings excluded from the prevalent Western order. By oxymoronic constructions such as "friendly war" (*HA* 103), whose self-contradictory nature does not but emphasize the reality behind it (war, by definition, can never be friendly), and similarly, by other

linguistic mechanisms such as euphemisms, Wallace deconstructs our unquestioningly accepted Western gaze with the ambition to rid our thus tainted ontological lens from corrupting symbolic inscription. The use of euphemisms and their translation into signs likely to approach their semantic totality in a more precise way (which, as argued above, is deemed as impossible from a Derridean perspective) is another of the linguistic devices by which Wallace deconstructs the unconsciously taken for granted symbolic and systemic normativity determining our subjectivity as members of a community. Žižek's classification of violence and his definition of objective violence (which is further sub-classified into systemic and linguistic) appeals to the same ontological blindness to which the human being is subject as part of a given social order:

> (*Lue Ming steps forward.*)
>
> **Lue Ming.** March 16, 1968. Charlie Company…
>
> **Boxler.** A Unit of the American Division's 11th Light Infantry Brigade entered-
>
> **Lue Ming.** Attacked.
>
> **Boxler.** Attacked an undefended village on the coast of Central Vietnam and took the lives-
>
> **Lue Ming.** Murdered.
>
> **Boxler.** And murdered approximately five hundred old men, women and children. The killing took place over four hours. Sexual violations…
>
> **Lue Ming.** Rape, sodomy.
>
> **Boxler.** Anatomical infractions.
>
> **Lue Ming.** Unimaginable mutilations.
>
> **Boxler.** Unimaginable. Yes…(*HA* 125)

The fact that a unit of the Infantry Brigade is described as "entering", and not "attacking" a territory is part of the corrupting procedures by which a community's view of the real (of war violence, in this case) is thus tainted. Such linguistic procedures, passing by unnoticed and easily assimilated by the individual without critical resistance, become in this way the 'zero level' ground from which any other

'properly violent' action is symbolically classified. In other words, Boxler's symbolic coordinates of meaning lead him to esteem the act of taking the lives of a number of Vietnamese civilians as closer to the ground-zero level of violence established by his community than it would be the case for Lue Ming, who, in an upstanding attempt, appeals to those acts of aggression as proper "murder". The linguistic procedures by which, to some or other extent, the real is codified and contaminated is thus deconstructed thanks to the contrasting linguistic approach to the reality of (in this case) the Vietnam War.

Linguistic codification is thus object to such stylistic retrospective glance in *In the Heart of America*, exposing the artificial procedures by which our symbolic mechanisms taint our scope of reality. Such deconstructing mode inevitably derives in linguistic surrealism and conversational nonsense where referent and reference do not seem to coincide anymore. In many ways reminiscent to the closing scene in Churchill's *Mad Forest*, the final dialogue between Fairouz and Craver (which ends up including a third participant when Craver's dream or memory evocation of Remzi is fused with his simultaneous conversation with Fairouz) exposes an impossibility to match signs with reference/meaning as a consequence of the unbalanced, unreliable and incoherent existences led by the characters, where there is no longer existential certainty about one's own reality and where real, memory, dead and alive coexist in chaotic post-traumatic fashion:

> **Fairouz.** He said balance could be a bad thing, a trick to keep you in the middle, where things add up, where you can do no harm.
>
> **Craver.** Remzi said that?
>
> **Fairouz.** No. But he might have…
>
> …
>
> …It's terrible…isn't it? To be freed like this. Are you going to talk?

Craver. I'm going to try

Fairouz. But what is it for?

Craver. It might keep me alive. Talking about it might keep me alive.

Fairouz. I mean the ram's horn. What is it for? (*HA* 138)

Such drastic referential movement granted by a semantic non-correspondence (Fairouz was talking about what to do with the ram's horn her brother sent her from Iraq, while Craver thought she was bringing forth a more transcendental question about the meaning of their lives after the war and Remzi's death) illustrates the contradictory audience response elicited by Wallace's theatrical deconstructing technique, by which the audience's stance unexpectedly moves from emotional understanding to alienating Brechtian critical reading.

As argued above at the introduction, the three plays analyzed in this chapter align with a view of ethics based on Badiou's ethics of the individual which draws its maxims from the particular case of a given individual with whom we empathize. It is only from that individual identification that broader and transcendental questions may be formulated. Wallace's work thus presents the action in such a way that the audience is made to feel some kind of identification with the character in question, thus relating to the event performed and partaking of a given character's traumatic experiencing; and yet, at the same time, by means of a deconstructing and fragmentary aesthetics of hauntological/ontological scrutiny, she manages to alienate the audience from the action staged by exposing the contaminating symbolic procedures to which our human understanding is tied. Therefore, and as has already been explored in Churchill's *Mad Forest*, these playwrights resort to mechanisms such as ineffective and fractured conversation, a demolished systemic Real leaving the characters disoriented and unable to distinguish anymore between real and corrupted traumatic memory, dream/nightmare, or ghostly surrealist dimensions blending with real life. The stylistic

choice they rely on thus presents the audience with individual experiences of traumatic events which activate their empathic understanding of a given occurrence (the Romanian Revolution or the Gulf War), just to progressively move towards Brechtian distancing and alienation so as to question and dismantle a taken for granted symbolic order.

Rehearsal emerges as another mechanism contributing to such aesthetics of estrangement deconstructing the real and interrogating what is taken as normative. Rehearsals analyze the step by step behavior of a character, thus bringing us closer to an understanding of his motives. Additionally, it simultaneously deconstructs (and thus estranges and interrogates) an action that would otherwise be assimilated as normative and would pass unnoticed (from the daily and customary act of walking, to the silently accepted acts of torture of war prisoners). The fact that the stage is described as minimalist (*HA* 80) contributes to both the close analysis of a character's individuality, aimed at an empathic understanding of the characters' situation, and the stark Brechtian deconstruction of non-questioned symbolic acts. Thus rid of the symbolic filter by which they are interpreted, daily acts as natural as the act of walking or eating are deconstructed and approached again from a critical distance. It is in this fashion that the play reveals how a customary act is subjected to the eventualities shaping a given community's ontological order that are symbolically codified, accepted, and assimilated without further questioning:

> *Fairouz is practicing a walk, in a similar, but different motel room.*
>
> …
>
> **Fairouz.** How do women walk in your country?
>
> **Lue Ming.** Not as upright as we'd like. Hunched over a bit most of the time.
>
> **Fairouz.** Show me.

> **Lue Ming.** (*Shows her*): The lower a body is to the ground, the less of a target. (*HA* 91)

As put by Lindsay B. Cummings, "rehearsals are liminal processes, often requiring us to question that which seems 'normal' or 'natural' in life. In rehearsal, 'strips of behavior' are broken down and reassembled in new ways" (72). The scrutinizing lens provided on stage by rehearsal thus deconstructs our symbolic view on acts that would otherwise be taken for granted and would therefore remain unquestioned. It furthermore allows us access to a given individual's motivation (such as the reason why Lue Ming performs the act of walking the way she does) as, through rehearsal, an individual's motives and positioning is explored to the detail through step by step decomposition of the very act in question. Remzi's death (Act I, scene three) is in such a way pre-visualized and pre-enacted in a move which requires, not only Craver (the very person rehearsing his reaction to Remzi's hypothetical death and thus prematurely exploring what his feelings would be), but also the audience, to place themselves in a given character's positioning, thus inevitably getting also personally and emotionally involved:

> **Remzi.** Craver. This is something important I am talking about. Let's say I'm you and I see my lying up ahead, dead. I stop in my tracks. I'm upset. We were friends, and I've got to cross the thirty or so feet between us (Does a "walk" over to the imaginary body). No. That feels too confident.
>
> **Craver.** And you wouldn't feel confident because…
>
> **Remzi.** Because I'd be thinking: that could just as easily be me lying there as him.
>
> **Craver.** Right. So maybe you'd like to do it like this. Kind of… (*Does his "walk" up to the imaginary body*)
>
> **Remzi.** That's too careful.
>
> **Craver.** Yeah, and too scared. I mean. I might be feeling in a pretty nice way, thinking about being alive and not quite as dead as you.
>
> **Remzi.** You've got a point there. You might be feeling pretty OK.

Craver. And fucking lucky too, 'cause the blood's still rolling through my veins.

Remzi. Something like this maybe. (*Does another "walk," a sort of combination of the others*)

Craver. Yes! That's it! That's it! Let me try. OK. I see you up ahead of me, twenty feet, maybe thirty, and I want to get closer to you…Why do I want to get closer if you're dead and I know it's you? I mean, there's nothing else to figure out then, is there?

Remzi. Because…I'm your friend, and you'd rather be the one to report my death than some jerk who doesn't know I exist.

Craver. Right. So here I go.

Remzi. Get on your mark.

Craver. Get set.

Remzi. Go! (*HA* 88-89)

In her essay "Naomi Wallace and the Dramaturgy of Rehearsal", Lindsay B. Cummings discusses the emotional procedures the audience goes through, being subject to such sentimental reading, granted by deconstruction through rehearsal. She addresses the intrinsic paradox to treat Brechtian defamiliarization along with empathy procedures by which the audience is thus (in this case through deconstructing rehearsal) invited to understand a given character's position. She reminds that Brecht's goal was precisely to distance the audience from the fictionality staged so as to awake their critical gaze, thus rejecting all kinds of emotional content associated to Dramatic theater and which attempted at an affective identification and unquestioning acceptance of a character's stance and ideas. Cummings' consequent move so as to account for the aesthetic balance between Brechtian distancing and emotional empathy however falls in a philosophical quandary which is difficult, if not impossible, to resolve. She argues that the empathic procedures appealed by Wallace's theatrical rehearsal do not fall on emotional understanding, but remain at the level of "using all that you understand about the other to imagine her feelings and reactions in that particular situation" and how

"[t]his process may not lead to a shared affective experience" (75). She carries out a study of the meaning and implications of empathic processes and argues that empathy is in fact not an emotional procedure. The very moment in which we start to develop an affective response, we move away from empathy and start developing, according to Cummings, an affective experience of our own (76).

Again relying on Badiou's ethics of the individual, according to which our ethical principles act moved by our capability to relate to an Other, I consider Cummings' philosophical move to be misleading and inexact, as it asks us to measure the extent to which the audience develops an emotional response so as to esteem whether such response would coincide with "critical empathy" (L. Cummings 76) or with the development of their own affective experience. As put by Wallace through the words of her characters, our affective appeal cannot be measured to the exact detail. Just as Fairouz's and Craver's anguish to re-visit Remzi's death in a post-traumatic fragmented way cannot be grasped by symbolic means, or their memories of Remzi's physicality (her body is never to be recovered) cannot be successfully measured by mathematical procedures, our own emotional response as members of an audience cannot be mathematically calculated with the exactitude required by Cumming's definition of empathy:

> **Fairouz.** If you could give his flesh a velocity?...or a number, what would it be?...If you could give his flesh a number?...A number that's short of infinity? Was that your desire for him? (*HA* 111),
>
> and
>
> **Craver.** I took him in my arms. The blood had stopped coming out. (*Beat*) Five foot…eleven inches. That's how tall you were" (*HA* 136),

or the appeal to similar exacting means to measure abstract phenomena, like the attempt to measure the weight of death:

> **Lue Ming.** I woke up after you and your troops were gone. I woke up with a child in my arms. A dead child weighs so much more than a live one…What sounds it like to go on living and the child in your arms is so heavy and she is dead an you are dead and I am dead but-
>
> …
>
> It sounded like this:
>
> (*Lue Ming, Fairouz and Boxler all scream: "No." Their screams are deafening and mixed with the sound of thundering jets. Remzi and Craver look up at the awe-inspiring jets above them.*) (*HA* 131,134)

The memory of Remzi's existence and the traumatic loss and the affective impact thereupon evoked cannot be measured by exacting means but rather slips through the fingers of such rational scrutiny, as evoked by the scene quoted above (*HA* 137). Similarly, the extent to which the audience undergoes either a more or less emotional (and thus self-focused) experiencing, or a more detached empathic procedure cannot be measured by tangible means. Cummings suggests that a combination of Stanislavskian empathy with Brechtian estrangement can work on the grounds that such empathy remains at a critical level, due to the Brechtian annulment of feelings in exploring a given character's positioning by means of the aesthetics of rehearsal advanced by Wallace. Nevertheless, it is actually not the cancelation of an emotive reading what makes Wallace's rehearsal mode effective, but rather the achievement of a perfect equilibrium between empathic affective understanding and the posterior drastic distancing by which the whole performative act is deconstructed, and so its real basis interrogated. As put by Badiou, "the singularity of situations as such… is the obligatory starting point of all properly human action" (Badiou 2001:14); and contemporary drama appeals to such understanding of the particularities of the other's existence by questioning broader and transcendental symbolic and systemic establishment. In other words, contemporary ethics demands our truthful involvement in the singularities of an Other so as to shatter the silently imposed normativity of our given symbolic and

systemic structures. Empathy, affectivity and emotional response or understanding cannot be measured, and in all cases should not be annulled so as to grant a distanced (and thus critical) reading of a given eventuality. Contrarily, and as suggested by the three contemporary playwrights whose work is revisited in this chapter, it is from such singularities explored through empathizing procedures that our broader understanding of an ethical program should sprout. Wallace's criticism of war therefore emerges from the specificities of a number of characters thereby affected; and it is by our understanding, partaking of, and relating to their circumstances, that a broader stark criticism can be generated (and eventually achieved by means of the deconstructing Brechtian devices here analyzed).

From the particular experiencing of war trauma, explored by the initial glance to the specific situation of each of the characters, the action of the play thus moves to interpret not just the Gulf War, but all wars ("**Lue Ming.** The past is never over. **Boxler.** The war is over. **Lue Ming.** Which one?" *HA* 125). Wallace thus ingeniously moves from the individual belated experiencing of trauma, to the painstaking formulation of a transhistorical (in LaCapra's terms) outlook which aims to interrogate and shake our ethical forethought. The rehearsal mode explored on stage meets both readings, as it allows the audience to step by step partake of particular performative acts to which the characters are tied, at the same time that the dismembering of a given act's symbolic meaning inevitably questions its nature. The interrogation of given ontological establishments is thus accomplished by such deconstructing strategies literarily distorting and dismembering acts and bits of reality that would otherwise be naturally assimilated. Wallace further explores ontological interrogation and fragmentation by metaphorical images appealing to physical rupture and dismemberment, thus

additionally appealing to the scatological reality and the very materiality of war experience from a critical prism:

> **Remzi.** What was it like, you son of a bitch? To carry a man's leg?
>
> **Craver.** We were ordered to pick up-
>
> **Remzi.** (*Interrupts*): To carry a man's leg when the man is no longer attached?
>
> **Craver.** To pick up the pieces and put them in holes… (*HA* 123)
>
> And
>
> **Boxler.** I pulled his rib cage wide open…and stood inside his body. I said: …Hey, boys, now I'm really standing in Iraq. (*HA* 129)

Wallace's strategy to jump from emotional empathy to Brechtian alienation thus guides the audience in a journey starting from individualized traumatic struggle to a fragmentary, and thus critically distanced, exploration of the ethical grounds on which our contemporary Western community allows for such atrocities to be held. By means of an aesthetics of ontological dismembering and deconstruction, Wallace moves from the close analysis of a subject's precarious and unreliable (as memory fuses with real) post-war reality, to the abstract and transcendental questioning of contemporary ethical and existential issues:

> **Craver.** When I woke up, I took him in my arms. The blood had stopped coming out. (*Beat*) Five foot…eleven inches. That's how tall you were. I used to run my hand up and   down your spine like I was reading the bones.
>
> **Remzi.** I wanted to travel everyplace on your body. Even the places you'd never been. Love can make you feel so changed you think the world is changed. Up till then, we'd survived the war. (*To Craver*) What are you?
>
> **Fairouz.** (*To Craver*): What are you?
>
> **Remzi.** (*Louder*): What are you, Craver?
>
> **Craver.** (*Whispers*): What are you? What are you? (Shouts) What are you, Craver?
>
> (*Remzi says the following words with Craver, beginning with "Indian." Remzi's words are spoken just a fraction sooner than Craver's.*)
>
> I am White Trash,

> **Craver and Remzi.** Indian, Sandnigger, Brown Trash, Arab, Gook Boy, Faggot- (*HA* 136).

Giorgio Agamben's theory of the *homo sacer* departs from his classification of the human being according to his social role. He takes two Greek terms from Aristotle and his contributions on the state of being. Thereupon, according to Agamben, *zoe* denominates the mere and biological fact of living that we humans share with animals, while *bios* refers to our taking part in a social distribution and our participation in a community which determines the way in which our lives befall and progressively unfold, thus engendering what is esteemed by the aforesaid community as 'the good life' (Agamben 1998:1). On further exploration of the functioning of such social groups and the way the social being (*bios*) is upon it defined by the social dispositions grounding such communities, Agamben builds up the figure of the *homo sacer* as the person who is cast out (not legally recognized) by its community, being left bare of any social or communal recognition, and thus in a precarious state of non-existence when it comes to juridical and systemic interpretation, as he is regarded as some sort of 'bare life' who cannot be read or symbolically identified by its own community: "in the case of the *homo sacer* a person is simply set outside human jurisdiction without being brought into the realm of divine law" (Agamben 1998: 82). In *In the Heart of America*, 'white trash-Craver' and 'sandnigger-Remzi' articulate Agamben's notion of the *homo sacer* as a social being who has been expelled from the community where it should belong, thus irremediably condemned to unstable and uncertain bare existence. The *homo sacer* needs to have committed a crime (or what according to the given community's divine law is esteemed as crime) so as to be casted away from social and systemic recognition, which in this case is identified with the actual realization of what is thereupon interpreted as abject (following Kristeva) and taboo.[21] The commitment of

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[21] i.e., Remzi and Craver's love relationship.

such ruthless murder, the assassination of Remzi at the hands of his own fellows explicitly revisited in Act II scene nine, is therefore legitimized by divine law, as it is formulated as the corresponding punishment for committing a 'crime' against the 'good life' aimed by the society they were trying to be part of. Furthermore, and in accordance to Agamben's stance, Remzi's and Craver's status as *homo sacer* made of them vulnerable to aggression by an Other, by a righteous member of the social circle they have been expelled from, due to their bare nature, or bare lives, which deprives them of any kind of civil or human rights and thus makes of them the tentative target of legal aggression. According to Agamben, the *homo sacer* is an empty life, a residue of humanity that is no longer read or interpreted as such and who can be accordingly killed without civil or legal punishment. And yet, the *homo sacer* is precisely defined and given an identity by this self-destructive identification in relation to the community that is at once expelling it and yet giving it a name as an outcast. Contemporary war plays appeal to that ontological inconsistency by which precarious figures such as refugees (the child refugee in Churchill's *Mad Forest*), war veterans (such as Boxler in Wallace's play) or child soldiers (the ghostly figure in *Stoning Mary,* to be object of analysis in the next few pages of this chapter) are formulated in all their self-contradictory existencial nature. The main argument grounding the present chapter, and which will be further reinforced with my analysis of tucker green's work, addresses the simultaneous identification and distancing from the atrocious war eventualities staged; a double reception move by which the audience is made to empathically explore these given subjects' reality at the same time that these subjects' very status as 'bare lives' takes them to a state of extreme animalization by torture and/or punishment which cannot provoke any other reaction but Brechtian alienation, in this case moved by moral appall

and disgust.[22] The contradictory empathic-distancing effect therefore achieved gives way to long-lasting audience consternation. The aesthetics of spectrality and ghostliness by which the *homo sacer* figure is formulated in these plays thus explores contemporary sociological and ethical issues, which interprets the contemporary subject just in such an elusive, fantasmic and precarious way. Tucker green's *Stoning Mary* is situated here as a further realization of Agamben's *homo sacer* theory, as it appeals to the self-contradictory nature of the ethical grounds on which contemporary communities rely: they allow for and rely on violence so as to punish violence.

<div align="center">

"said that…I said- you said that/ already":[23]

Language as Post-Traumatic Core of Nothingness in debbie tucker green's *Stoning Mary*.

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The *homo sacer* is the person that has been removed from a community on accounts of having committed a crime (or what the civil rights on which the community is erected decrees as crime). Thus, the Roman *homo sacer* is interpreted by such community as the person that may be killed but not sacrificed (Agamben 2005:8), as he has been stripped of all humanity by the very act of being repelled. Such bare being, thus deprived of all human traces by civil law, becomes one of the major focuses of contemporary war plays (Boll 41). And yet, New War Plays do not tend to revisit specific crimes rendering a specific subject's dehumanization by the aforesaid civil processes for the sake of a particular political moralizing reading. Instead, and as has been contended throughout this chapter, contemporary plays exploring ethical concerns

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[22] The undeniably ghostly hats-parade by which Churchill's *Far Away* appeals to such dehumanizing processes formulated by Agamben in his *homo sacer* theory provides a vivid and intense visual image that recalls the same theatrical effect here explored: ghostliness and spectrality. Such aesthetic move thus provokes a self-contradictory sense of identification (empathic approach, or, to some extent, a taking part of the subject's anguish) with the victim, and Brechtian alienating distancing, in this particular case moved by disgust and disbelief of war-torture aberration.
[23] *SM* 19.

depart from the moral perspective of the individual in a move relying on Badiou's ethics of difference, so as to then broaden their scope and appeal to transcendental events of sociological relevance. And this is exactly tucker green's aesthetic move in her 2005 play, *Stoning Mary*. Relying on a number of characters' personal struggles, and after the fragmentary introduction of certain personal quandaries, the audience is allured throughout the course of the events to put those pieces of 'real' together so as to be able to make whole sense of the complete action on stage. And that complete puzzle, once all of the pieces have been cunningly build up together, opens a door to questioning a number of transcendental concerns at the basis of any contemporary project on social and ethical fabrication.

In *Stoning Mary*, Mary is condemned to be stoned to death on accounts of her having murdered a child soldier, who is at the same time guilty of the murder of Mary's own parents. Thus grounded on a cyclic and never-ending infrastructure of killing and extermination, the community not only allowing for, but igniting such destructive existential move, is aesthetically constructed in a way that appeals to our own social and systemic reality; a reality relying on "the hypocrisy of those who, while combating subjective violence, commit systemic violence that generates the very phenomena they abhor" (Žižek 2008:206).[24]

The action in *Stoning Mary* is divided into three different performative focuses, all of them articulating a dialectic duel between two confronted characters: Husband and Wife (and, consequently, Husband Ego and Wife Ego), Mum and Dad, Older Sister and Younger Sister, and then, towards the end of the play, Older Sister and Boyfriend. As

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[24] The stage directions explicitly require the actors playing each of the roles to be white (despite the clear reference to African issues such as the AIDS epidemic and the lack of means to contain it) and the setting of the play to remind of "the country it is performed in" (*SM* 2). The play thus brings the action closer to our own civil surroundings in a Brechtian alienating fashion that estranges the events performed, hence instigating a critical reception.

the action of the play moves in a disorderly fashion from one focus to another one, the overall sense is that of disconnection, fragmentariness, and achronological time, which gradually develops in the direction of constructing an unreliable and fragile (given the multiplicity of contradicting voices) common (anti)narrative. Such overall mosaic picture that the audience gets in the end consists of a triple murder involving a child soldier (who now returns in the disturbing shape of a silent ghost to haunt his own parents), his two victims (Husband and Wife) and the younger daughter of the two victims (Mary, or Younger Sister). Mary relied on her own moral code when avenging her parents, thus ignoring the civil one by which her community is regulated. The play hence wittingly criticizes the self-contradictory ethical grounds of any community that, as put by Žižek on the quotation provided above, punishes and condemns violence at the same time that it is constructed on the grounds of a particular kind of (objective, again relying on Žižekian terminology) violence, hence casting aside any 'criminal' (or any subject who is thus deprived of any recognition of humanity, and is thus animalized) who does not commit to the particular kinds of violence allowed for and who, like Mary, prioritizes moral imperative to the detriment of civil ethical values.

In his book *Violence*, Žižek provides an insightful approach to the Benjaminian classification of violence as mythic or divine, and brings it to Agamben's ground combining it with his definition of the *homo sacer*: "in both cases, killing is neither a crime nor a sacrifice" (2008:198). In other words, just as a 'bare life' (and Žižek uses the example of the Nazi killing of the Jews) can be spared of by an act of killing that remains unpunished and that would by no means be given the category of divine sacrifice (if taking the discourse to the Aristotelian grounds wherefrom it comes), divine violence materializes in violent sprouts whose origins and function remain unclear. They materialize as irrational violent acts that do not intend to re-establish the

equilibrium of justice or avenge a particular act. Divine violence (and by extension, divine justice) "is a sign without meaning" (Žižek 2008:200) that necessarily brings about a series of transcendental changes; it is the exception to the 'rule' (the judicial, systemic rule, self-imposed by contemporary societies). In a brilliant move bringing us back to Badiou's theoretical contributions, Žižek evokes Badiou's definition of contemporary ethics as relying on an interplay between 'being' and 'event', and compares such existential take with Walter Benjamin's understanding of violence and justice as mythic or divine:

> …the opposition of mythic and divine violence is that between the means and the sign, that is, mythic violence is a means to establish the rule of Law (the legal social order), while divine violence serves no means…It is just the sign of the injustice of the world, of the world being ethically "out of joint."…To put it in Badiou's terms, mythic violence belongs to the order of Being, while divine violence belongs to the order of Event: there are no "objective" criteria enabling us to identify an act of violence as divine; the same act that, to an external observer, is merely an outburst of violence can be divine for those engaged in it… (Žižek 2008:199)

Keeping such considerations in mind, the confrontation with violence as addressed in *Stoning Mary* is made from a much more illuminating lens helping us understand how similar acts of violence (the killing of a couple, Husband and Wife, and the killing of a child soldier) are differently filtered by the symbolic and systemic scope of the community that we, as spectators/readers, are visiting (which is, as a matter of fact, purposefully made to assimilate our own as much as possible). While the child soldier's violent behavior is ethically sustained and validated by his community (which not only protects him in the carrying out of such act, but has shaped him to do so), Mary's spontaneous and evental (in Badiou's terms) act of moral justice brings about a complete life-scope reversal for her, as she is condemned by civil law to death penalty. The code punishing Mary's moral and personal stance hence coincides with Benjaminian mythic law (thus articulating mythic violence), which, according to Žižek,

belongs to the "order of Being" (2008:200), as it is written and effected by the hands of the social being (*bios*).

On the contrary, Mary's evental and spontaneous violent drive, to personally punish the child soldier who killed her parents by taking his life is identified with Benjamin's and Agamben's definition of divine law/violence, as its eventuality is "to be distinguished from state sovereignty as the exception which founds the law…The divine violence strikes out of nowhere, a means without end" (Žižek 2008:201). As such, Mary's moral drive is to be ignored and silenced by the superior mythic code (systemic impositions), which is at the same time relegating Mary to a *homo sacer* position. Her crime has caused her expulsion from the mythic order and the community she was part of, a situation which allows for her righteous, ethical execution:

> YOUNGER SISTER 12?
>
> OLDER SISTER 12 people signed.
>
> YOUNGER SISTER
>
> OLDER SISTER Put their pen to your petition. 12.
>
> YOUNGER SISTER 12's after 10, right?
>
> OLDER SISTER After 11
>
> YOUNGER SISTER Which is after 10, right?
>
> OLDER SISTER
>
> YOUNGER SISTER How many did I need?
>
> OLDER SISTER 6,000.
>
> …
>
> YOUNGER SISTER How many marched for me?
>
> OLDER SISTER
>
> YOUNGER SISTER …Anybody march for me? How many did that? Less than ten?...Not even the women. Not even the women?
>
> OLDER SISTER …No.

YOUNGER SISTER So what happened to the womanist bitches?

…the feminist bitches?

…the professional bitches?

What happened to them?

What happened to the burn their bra bitches?

The black bitches

the rootsical bitches

the white the brown bitches

the righ-on bitches

what about *them*?

What happened to the mainstream bitches?

The rebel bitches

the underground bitches

what about-how bout-

the bitches that support other bitches?... (*SM* 56, 61-62)

Mary's bare-life or *homo sacer* status becomes thus effective to the point that her situation is ignored by those she expected to save her from the atrocities of a jurisdiction that she herself participated of until her exclusion. Such frustrating silence and the lack of response generated by Mary's punishment intend to effect, nevertheless, a completely opposite reaction in the audience.

Just as put by Žižek in the quotation above, divine law and acts of divine violence are distinguished from systemic regulations in that they precisely constitute the exception which founds that very mythic law. The frustrating silences characterizing tucker green's (anti)narrative are thus transformed into silent frustration in the audience hall, which is intended to become active and loud reaction outside the theater venue, thus articulating the subsequent post-evental change. Silences become an essential part of tucker green's dramatic voice and one of the major focal points in the play addressing

existential precariousness, in this particular case caused by subjective self-awareness about an upcoming death. Both Mary and her parents, Husband and Wife, are formulated as vulnerable beings whose existential integrity their communities can no longer protect.[25]

As hinted by Heidegger in his work *Being and Time* (1927), and as put by Paul Hegarty in his analysis of Agamben's and Heidegger's contributions, according to both philosophers "authentic existence occurs only in awareness of death, of death as something that will come, and yet, 'I' will not be there when it happens to me. So the most authentic human experience possible is one of absence" (Hegarty 16). Theatrical experience materializes as a most fitting medium to articulate such existential self-denial by which the human nature is defined, due to its aesthetic malleability, which allows for an open examination of ontological boundaries such as time, place or the liminal threshold defining the human self, as is being explored in this chapter. By way of example, Hippolytus's very last lines in Sarah Kane's *Phaedra's Love* (1996) thus appeal to such extreme experiencing of one's significance as a human self, which comes simultaneous to one's own absence and face to face recognition of imminent death: "if there could have been more moments like this" (Kane 2001:103).

Tucker green similarly appeals now to this very liminality of the human nature which, again according to Agamben, is thus defined by negativity, as opposed to animal life, for example, or as in being alive opposes being dead. In this line, one's own existence as being alive becomes more pronounced (more intense or extremely experienced, as it were, as put by Kane's Hippolytus), when in complete awareness of

---

[25] Husband and wife were also threatened by tentative death even before the appearance of the child soldier due to the fact that they only had one medical prescription to protect just one of them from the implacable raid of AIDS menacing their community.

one's own upcoming disintegration. And such ontological disintegration is sharply articulated by tucker green's style, described as "sparse, stylized" and with a "minimalist, condensed simplicity and accumulation" (Middeke 2014:107) which very much suits the formulation of the human voice. In *Stoning Mary* it is thus by means of tense silences relying on such minimalist atmosphere and moving towards such aesthetic sense of accumulation (mostly achieved by repetitions) that the exploration of "human authentic experiencing" (Hegarty 16) as recalled by Heidegger in *Being and Time* takes place. Such conception of human reality as defined by its opposite is at its best reflected in human language, in its very failure to contain it, according to Agamben. For Agamben, language works covering true meaning (as it tries to name a meaning that it cannot contain), and that is precisely the actual meaning of the human nature, which is the reason why he esteems language to be "the opening of the ontological dimension" (Hegarty 17). In other words, reinforcing Agamben's stance to define reality through the scope of negativity, language cannot convey the meaning of human existence, as it is doomed to always contain a meaning that it cannot completely convey. But it is precisely this incommensurability that simultaneously defines the precariousness (in Butler's sense) characterizing the human being. This is the point in *Language and Death* (1991) in which Agamben turns to define what he calls 'Voice'. The voice is the phenomenon by which human existence is distanced from animal sounds, and yet it does not seem to reach the experiencing of meaning. The voice is defined as some intermediary point in between animal voice and human rational discourse, as if in the attempt to run away from the one so as to reach the other (Agamben 1991:35).

Agamben's voice and his definition of language as the upmost form of expression of human incommensurability are formulated in tucker green's *Stoning Mary*

by the aesthetic interplay between silences and verbal accumulation. As if tiptoeing around the true meaning wanting to be formulated, which never quite manages to be fully expressed and which is always, in some way or another, relating to death, the characters in *Stoning Mary* move from silences and a kind of discourse that seems to be afraid to formulate the reality wanting to be named, to an accumulation of sometimes already formulated half-sentences, thus gradually constructed in what finally culminates in a disorderly, deconstructed and fragmentary kind of speech:

> **FOUR**
>
> 'The Child Soldier'
>
> MUM and DAD are trying to think.
>
> MUM Umm.
>
>> Umm…
>
> DAD Er.
>
> MUM Umm…
>
>> DAD coughs
>
>> Yes?
>
> DAD Er…
>
> MUM Yes?
>
> DAD Um.
>
> MUM…To watch…to watch him.
>
>> Lovin that. Lovin doin that.
>
>> Doing that.
>
>> Er.
>
>> Hold.
>
>> To hold him- his hands his fingers- fingertips, onto him, onto his gaze-into his gaze his any-little-bit-a-him, to hold that- onto that- to have that, into that, to have and to hold that. To have that to hold…
>
>> Having that to hold on to.
>
>> Having that.

Doing that.

Miss that.

…To smell. Have his smell. Smell his smell, smell his smell on him-smell his smell on me. The never-get-used-to-that, the never-get-enough-of-that. The after-bath-aroma, the first thing of a morning- the just-come-in-from-out wanting more of that smell. The smell- lovin that the smell of lovin that- lovin smellin that.

Me doin that.

Waiting for that.

That smell.

That.

His. Him.

Doin that.

Me.

Miss it.

Umm..

Touch.

Touch him. Doin that-

DAD said that.

MUM I said-

DAD you said that/ already. (*SM* 18-19)

The inarticulacy of post-traumatic speech (Mum and Dad are the parents of the child soldier killed by Mary) is in this way formulated in stuck speechlessness that simultaneously coincides with Agamben's notion of the voice and the idea that language contains a meaning that it cannot really say. Human awareness of death (in this case in the form of post-traumatic working through) is always lost, and never to be fully grasped, as it is "always deposited in the voice without meaning, and in turn, this voice without meaning is the indicator that Being is bordered and defined by death" (Hegarty 16).

The staccato-style characterizing the dialectic confrontations in the play thus evoke Agamben's voice and his view of language as a core of nothingness, as it fails in the formulation of a reality defined in terms of negativity (what is not), which at the same time succeeds in the appeal to the ineffability of the human nature. Additionally, the negativity upon which our reality is defined entails, as mentioned before, a definition of life in terms of negativity, as opposed to death, which is precisely heightened, and yet still not bound to be linguistically contained, by the materialization of death itself. Consequently, the incommensurability of life as heightened by death (in a fashion reminiscent of Hippolytus's last claim in Kane's *Phaedra's Love*) is here appealed to by means of tucker green's fragmentary, sharp and minimalistic style, drastically moving from stark and tense silence, to concatenated speech.

The approach to language from a deconstructive perspective so as to explore the very moment of a subject's confrontation with death has already been investigated in previous chapters, in particular for the analysis of Carr's *Woman and Scarecrow* and *The Cordelia Dream*, and Kreitzer's *Self Defense or Death of Some Salesmen*. Similarly evoking an aesthetics of linguistic and ontological deconstruction, these plays appeal to the very process by which a subject's reality is shattered down to pieces as death comes closer. And also in an analogous way, that approximation to the end of all that is known is likewise signaled on aesthetic terms by the blurring of existential boundaries by the introduction of characters coming from a spectral dimension, such as Scarecrow and ghostly Cordelia in Carr's plays, or the angelic choir in Kreitzer's *Self Defense*. On a similar move, tucker green explores now the figure of the ghost so as to appeal to the realm between the human and the non-human. It is thus by means of the ghost's silences that tucker green appeals to a performative tension that revolves around this interplay between verbal minimalism and concatenated, accumulating speech:

WIFE We don't

HUSBAND we don't

WIFE we don't-

HUSBAND have anything-

WIFE we/don't-

HUSBAND for yer. Something aint here, nuthin aint here- if something was here we'd say, if anything was here we'd tell yer-

WIFE honest.

HUSBAND Honest- there's-

WIFE there is/nuthin

HUSBAND there is nothing-

WIFE we don't/have

HUSBAND nuthin here-

WIFE no. No.

HUSBAND Anything here.

WIFE No. No.

HUSBAND Something here for yer. Honest…

Honest

HUSBAND

CHILD

WIFE

CHILD

HUSBAND

WIFE

WIFE Except- if it's food-

HUSBAND do you want food?

WIFE Does he want/food?

HUSBAND This isn't-

WIFE is it/food?

HUSBAND about that.

WIFE We have that we have that we have that if that's what you want- if that's
the something you want we have that but apart from/that.

HUSBAND apart/from-

WIFE apart from that.

HUSBAND we don't have nuthin.

WIFE There is-

HUSBAND nuthin-

WIFE there/is

HUSBAND there is nothin- there is nothing here for you- that we have…

WIFE No.

Except food…

…

No. No. Tell him…

HUSBAND And he's not here for /the-

WIFE it's not much.

HUSBAND And he's not come for/the-

WIFE I know it's not/ much-

HUSBAND He's not here for that

WIFE but this will be everything.

HUSBAND There's nothing.

WIFE there is/nothing

HUSBAND yes there's nothing-

WIFE no. No.

HUSBAND There is nothing else we can do…

Is there. Is there? Is there.

CHILD

HUSBAND

CHILD

HUSBAND

> WIFE *offers up the prescription to the* CHILD SOLDIER. *Beat. The* CHILD SOLDIER *destroys it.*
>
> CHILD Beg. (*SM* 36-41)

In *Stoning Mary*, war is not present on stage by traditional narrative means. Instead, it is the very elusive figure of the ghost-child soldier, bringing about such tense and restive atmosphere that addresses the implicit war being held at a background. And yet, even if at a background level, the war atmosphere is present on stage through the child soldier figure. Playing around the threshold separating the human from the animal, the child soldier appears as the metonymical means by which war becomes a character itself in tucker green's play. Despite constructing abstract war scenarios whose exact location or actual reality tend to remain thus obscured (hence formulating the implicit menace for the western audience that a similar war conflict might occur in their immediate surroundings thus involving their very communities), contemporary New War Plays have found new means to articulate war on stage, such as the strategy by which war itself becomes one more (though unlisted) character (Boll 38).

In this vein, tucker green appeals to the "ethics of unrest" (Middeke 2014) on which the continuous re-construction or reformulation of a community shattered by war relies. In this chapter I have tried to demonstrate how the attempt to make war trauma extensive to the audience becomes successful by means of an ontological jump from the specificities of a subject's existential quandary, to the broader and transcendental interrogation of contemporary ethics. In aesthetic terms, this move is translated in an initial step focusing on the realistic description of a number of character's involvement in the war or conflict in question, which radically meets the alienating strategy that distances the audience in a Brechtian fashion from the atrocities staged. This is particularly done by means of an aesthetics of deconstruction which manages to distance the spectator from the events performed on stage concerning the different

characters so that the audience becomes able to regard the reality performed from a new lens, rid of symbolic and systemic regulations. The figure of the ghost and the aesthetics of spectrality, whose function in different theatrical contexts has been thoroughly explored in the previous chapters of this thesis, contribute to evoke the uncertain and obscure destiny that defines the traumatized individual, as well as the precarious shattered community where he/she belongs. It is the ethereal and undecidable figure of the specter that best captures the haunting and unsettling spirit of war and revolution, as it is, furthermore, metaphorical and representative of such existential nothingness and the sense of aimlessness characterizing the liquid transformation of a contemporary community victim of such processes of ontological deconstruction as the ones revisited through this chapter.

Conclusions.

Appealing to the symbolic disidentification and the verbal ineffability that has been time and again revisited throughout this thesis as a theoretical cornerstone of Trauma Studies and contemporary critical theory (and I rely here again on Butler's famous claim about the precarious representability of the postmodern subject in 2004:147), the title of this doctoral project similarly seems to fall in the troublesome task to name, and thus limit, the investigative ambitions instigating this doctoral thesis from the very beginning. Under the title *Haunting the Stage: The Performance of Trauma by Contemporary Women Playwrights* I have thus tried to explore what I argue seems to have emerged as a prominent theatrical strategy for the articulation of the contemporary subject: spectrality and the haunting and alienating procedures provoked by the A-effect evoked in the plays here analyzed. As announced by the words I borrowed from Zygmunt Bauman so as to open the critical discussion that has occupied this doctoral thesis, the contemporary subject has grown to be identified by the inability to preserve one's identity in a context of undecidability[1] in which there is no longer a teleological existence, but rather a circular movement, or an uncertain wandering ending in eternal return (Bauman 1996:8-9). The post-traumatic deconstruction of a subject's intra-psychic persona and the existential quandary to define one's own identity in a context of shattered coordinates of meaning have come to be aesthetically signified by the figure of the specter or ethereal non-human being, such as Churchill's wandering vampires (chapter four), Carr's haunting specters (chapter one), Kreitzer's angelic visitations (chapter two), or Nottage's defamiliarizing musical numbers, hauntingly evoking the abominations of war (chapter three).

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[1] As already noted by Middeke in his analysis of Crimp's and tucker green's formulation of contemporary subjectivity in two of their most outstanding works (Middeke 2014:98).

At the introduction of this thesis I stated some of the theoretical approaches that would ground the research project further developed throughout the subsequent pages, and the cultural and social events motivating the aesthetic turn that occupies my study. The revelation of a high number of cases of sexual abuse, along with the publication of the first autobiographical incest narrative in 1978, prompted the already active and diverse feminist movements into the formulation of a feminine subjectivity distant from previous prevailing patriarchal formulations. Such invigorated feminist voice is clearly distinguishable in *Beside Herself* and *The Love of the Nightingale* (the earliest plays, from the ones explored in this thesis), where the absolute denial of so far prevailing patriarchal readings becomes predominant. And yet, throughout my thesis I have tried to demonstrate how such iron-strengthened feminist will to construct a new and irrefutable feminine gaze overriding previous patriarchal readings gradually lost certainty and conviction as a consequence of the rise of the existential preoccupation with the preservation of one's integrity as member of a given community, and a growing sense of ontological vulnerability. Unanimously defined by contemporary critics as a time of existential uncertainty, precariousness and undecidability, our liquid times, as put by Bauman, have made an impact in the world of the arts that has materialized in an interrogative mode which leaves empty signifying gaps, only acknowledging the certainty that truthful evental representability remains a fallacy. Echoing Badiou's contentions, much cited throughout this thesis, it is a being's capacity to live faithfully and in truth to a given event that allows him/her to remain open to further eventuality. The subject's fidelity to the event, an unprecedented occurrence that falls out of the regular historicized order, guarantees a true understanding of our existence in a broader community and our capability to discern between good and evil (Robinson 36-7). It is thus our "post-evental fidelity" (Badiou 2001:46) that integrates

the process by which subjectivity is articulated. That very eventuality to which the subject owes truthfulness and loyalty so as to fulfill symbolic subjectivity emerges as a void or as an exception to regular and historicized occurrence, and as such, it is not liable of representation or to be contained by any means trying to formulate (and thus limit) its force and impact. Such is the representational quandary at the core of contemporary humanism and such is the aesthetic task occupying the authors that I have brought together in my thesis.

Through my analysis of the texts chosen to integrate the corpus explored in this thesis, I have thus tried to illustrate such existential move, the contemporary concern to symbolize irrepresentable traumatic eventuality, and to classify the different artistic turns struggling to do so, all of them to some extent, I argue, relying on hauntology and spectrality as ethereal means symbolizing such aesthetic incommensurability. This evental ineffability and the formulation of subjecthood is addressed differently in the plays I have hereby tried to classify. As way of illustration, Wertenbaker's Philomele in *The Love of the Nightingale* managed to formulate her own version of a story lapidating her (and, by extension, female identity) for centuries, and to condemn Tereus as the male perpetrator and instigator of such life-long silencing in the story thus articulated. And yet, contrastingly, Carr's Woman (who could be read as a contemporary Cordelia if Shakespeare's classic were to take place in contemporary times) does not repudiate her male perpetrator, but rather comes back from the world of spectral everlasting wandering so as to open a mythic dialogue with him that reaches no satisfactory end and offers no answers to their existential quandary. Thus moving away from the certain and solid attempt to condemn the silencing and misrepresentation exerted by the patriarchal order, in its appeal to contemporary liquid times, contemporary drama builds a kind of dialogue which questions, instead of asserting, and which unsettles, instead of

formulating stable and certain subjectivity. Therefore, from the solid attempt to formulate a certain feminine voice, contemporary feminist re-inscription has moved to contemplate the precariousness and uncertainty characterizing postmodern subjectivity in its articulation of a more flexible, open-ended and liquid kind of feminist discourse.

In the attempt to wittingly demonstrate this point, I have appealed to a wide range of contemporary critics and considered sometimes divergent voices so as to explore the gaps formulated in each of the works here suggested for analysis. The plays integrating the corpus of my thesis thus point to that very irrepresentability of traumatic occurrence and eventuality, and they do so by similarly appealing to the aesthetics of the specter. And yet they do so differently, in ways that I have tried to illustrate by means of the classification here suggested.

Relying on contemporary Psychoanalytical Theory (from Lacan, Foucault and Torok and Abraham, on the one hand, to the more recent contributions of Klein, Kristeva and Žižek, on the other), Trauma Studies (R. Luckhurst, Kaplan, LaCapra, Felman and Caruth), Deconstructionist Theory (Derrida), Post-structuralist Theory and ethical considerations (Lévinas, Bauman, Badiou, Agamben and Butler), I have carried out an exhaustive analysis of key works generating a high impact in audience and critics and thus generating a certain effect in the world of culture and the arts. Furthermore, I also regarded contemporary contributions on Brechtian theory (Diamond), feminist drama (Aston) and theater semiotics (Carlson and Blau) in my analysis of the reception in the performance of trauma relying on a balance between empathy and Brechtian alienation, bringing about the audience's disconcert and so effecting an active reaction to the events performed on stage. As also consistently demonstrated from the beginning of this thesis, theatrical representation proves to be an apt arena for the representation of trauma and to appeal to such questions of irrepresentability as the ones here evoked, due

to the anti-narrative and anti-logocentric possibilities the genre offers. This thesis has thus tried to articulate a reading of contemporary drama as contingent to recent ontological entanglements determining the direction towards which the Western gaze evolves.

Furthermore, the immediacy and compromising nature (in terms of the audience's ineludible involvement from beginning to end) characterizing the theatrical message, which is not to be met by any other art form, has also been considered and accordingly explored in this thesis as a fundamental component integrating drama's capability in the task to delineate and evoke evental irrepresentability. In particular, semiotic phenomena such as iconicity (Diamond 1997:45), psychic polyphony (Carlson 1990:107) and empathy as a mechanism opposed to (or combined with) Brechtian alienation, have been considered in my study of the representability of traumatic occurrence and how it shapes contemporary subjectivity.

In chapter one my analysis of three plays by Marina Carr and of Sarah Kane's *Cleansed* focused on the study of intra-psychic maladies hindering the natural process of what Torok and Abraham defined as introjection (a subject's natural psychic growth; a definition that contrasts with others given by Freud or Pierre Janet, as I also explain in this chapter). The fragmentation of the subject explored by both authors, I argue, comes to be formulated by means of the aesthetics of the specter, which signals the main character's undecidability and her precarious existential positioning in the ethereal and fragile threshold separating the symbolic from the traumatic.

In contrast to the repressive psychic position explored in chapter one, chapter two dwelt into Kleinian theory so as to bring light to a different psychic process similarly formulated by means of anti-naturalistic and spectral means appealing to

fragmentary subjectivity. The splitting of a subject's psychic-self becomes thus the center of the investigative task in chapter two, which delves into the particular theatrical means by which the three authors here chosen for analysis articulate the ineffable nature of such traumatic splitting procedures. While Sarah Daniels's *Beside Herself* formulates a subject's post-traumatic psychic fragmentariness by means which potentiate the ghostly effect, such as broken mirrors, Marina Carr and Carlson Kreizer appeal to a subject's gradual fragmentation and deconstruction, as she progressively approaches her own death. Such gradual existential fragmentation is similarly articulated by the introduction of spectral and non-human characters and, in this case, additionally, by a notable linguistic deconstruction where signifier and signified gradually grow apart, as the subject approaches a complete symbolic disintegration.

In chapter three I explored the trend that emerged in the late twentieth century to re-inscribe female subjectivity in contemporary cultural memory as a consequence of the growingly influential feminist wave. As I try to demonstrate throughout this chapter, the initially solid and decided feminist voice determined to refute previously predominant patriarchal accounts so as to re-inscribe feminine subjectivity gradually becomes less certain and more open to mythic dialogue (and I appeal here to Liedeke Plate's claim that 'Liquid Mythology' has emerged as a powerful instrument in the field of feminist rewriting). The emergence of precarious and vulnerable subjectivity under the threat of an unstable systemic real thus deprives feminist supremacy from the solidly indoctrinating voice erected throughout the second half of the twentieth century. Žižek's and Bauman's contributions about the fears of the contemporary subject concerning the instability of the coordinates of meaning articulating our existence as social beings become the theoretical cornerstone informing my analysis of the works by the

aforementioned authors and my classification of contemporary feminist rewritings according to such cultural contingencies.

In chapter four I take up from my approach to Bauman's and Žižek's contentions in the analysis of contemporary metaphysical and ethical presumptions so as to now focus on the exploration of shattered subjectivity as a consequence of the deconstruction of the systemic real in a war context and its impact in the world of theatrical representation. In my analysis of Churchill's *Mad Forest*, Wallace's *In the Heart of America* and tucker green's *Stoning Mary*, I therefore develop a textual analysis that relies on recent philosophical contributions alluding to the ethical cornerstones shaping contemporary Western communities and our Eurocentric gaze. From there, I explore the deconstruction of subjectivity in the aforementioned circumstances and the resort to the aesthetics of the specter (in this case appealing to a surrealist construction of the theatrical real) as a relevant theatrical means for the evocation of post-eventual irrepresentability. As already advanced in chapter three, the voice here thus formulated lacks the certainty and indoctrinating will that characterized both the feminist wave appealed to in chapter three and the previously predominant post-war political drama (Patterson's exhaustive study on British Post-War Drama, *Strategies of Political Theatre: Post-War British Playwrights* (2003), is brought to the foreground as an illustration of this) so as to give way to a theatrical voice preoccupied for ethical concerns beyond the particular denounce of subjective traumatic eventuality. In this last chapter, I therefore explore a kind of theatrical aesthetics recalling Badiou's ethics of difference (Badiou 2001) at the same time that Brechtian alienation is kept at the foreground of the theatrical mechanisms here appealed to. Hence, a sophisticated balance between emotional empathy (or the identification with the Other and his/her experiencing of traumatic eventuality) and drastic Brechtian distancing (to a great extent

achieved by the introduction of spectral figures in a surrealist context), I argue, becomes the predominant aesthetic effect by which audience reaction is stimulated.

The ethical move in the arts in general, and in performing arts in particular, seems thus to have directed its audience and readers to an aesthetic experience that increasingly tends to offer more interrogation and less narrative certainty; more gaps to be filled up and gradually less sentencious political readings. And the figure of the wandering specter, be it in the shape of a ghost, a vampire or a scarecrow, as I have intended to prove throughout this work, has emerged as a principal and key element conducting the ontological deconstruction the subject of such existential quandary is object to. If maybe relying on many (and many times dissenting) critical voices, from Agamben to Žižek, and from Carlson to Diamond, the work accomplished throughout these pages, the exploration and critical scrutiny of the wide range of texts hereby presented, has inevitably asked for theoretical support in the search for research and investigative rigor. The different textual analysis have thus been fully informed by a wide variety of respected critical voices and, at the same time, I have struggled to keep raising my own, by trying to prove throughout these pages that the precarious and uncertain times faced in contemporary cultural eventuality have come to be symbolized (in this human/artistic inexhaustible attempt to symbolically contain what is intrinsically ineffable) by the ethereal and elusive specter in the manifold ways shown in this extensive study, product of a large expanse of conscientious investigative work. In order to support my argument, and throughout the analysis of the texts here suggested, I have thus relied on a wide range of authors whose contributions on the analysis of the subject, both from an introspective and psychoanalytic perspective, and from a sociological an ethical point of view, has been indispensable to find my own critical voice throughout this academic process that along these lines comes to an end. Though

departing from the primal concern about the controversial theatrical representation of trauma (one existential experience which makes the subject's meaning and identity coordinates collapse and thus demands alternative strategies for its testimonial formulation) this work has hence grown tree-like as the different plays of the corpus demanded specific critical approaches to the distinct aspects and responses to traumatic reality.

As way of recapitulation, and thus as a kind of mythical reopening of Bauman's discourse about the malleability of contemporary liquid times that I appealed to at the introduction of this thesis, I must state that along the pages of this doctoral project I have consistently attempted to delineate the aesthetic turn that, on account of its elusiveness and uncontainability, I have hereby formulated (and also incorporated in the very title of this work) as theatrical 'hauntology'. The various ways in which evental trauma, its unrestrained specters, uncontrollable remnants and vanishing traces force us to re-think and re-formulate our very subjectivity place us at an ambivalent ground of undecidability; at an undefined ontological locus between the present and the absent, the material and the ethereal, which inevitably matches such existential move that I have thus referred to as 'hauntology'. As conveniently put by Fredric Jameson,

> Spectrality does not involve the conviction that ghosts exist or that the past (and maybe even the future they offer to prophesy) is still very much alive and work, within the living present: all it says, if it can be said to speak, is that the living present is scarcely as self-sufficient as it claims to be; that we would do well not to count on its density and solidity, which might under exceptional circumstances betray us. (1999:39)

Hauntology, and in particular, its theatrical formulation, thus becomes a powerful instrument so as to formulate transcendental considerations on contemporary subjectivity. My investigative intention with this work has been to demonstrate how the contemporary ontological move towards the precarious asks for aesthetic mechanisms

remarkably met by the contemporary theatrical panorama and its aesthetics of 'hauntological' deconstruction to extents that are not reached by any other artistic means. Traditional representational mechanisms appealing to a realistic narrative discourse fall short of instruments to evoke such discursive struggle to contain the unrestrained or to represent the irrepresentable implied in traumatic experiences, and it is through the figure of the specter, the ethereal and non-human, and its emergence in a context of aesthetic deconstruction, that such existential quandary is thus effectively represented in the terms throughout this thesis illustrated. The theatrical stage thus emerges as an apt arena for the development of a Brechtian alienating mode capable of constructing a defamiliarized lens from which to scrutinize the otherwise blurred and incomprehensible spectral figure of the precarious contemporary subject. As thoroughly proved throughout these pages and in the various ways hereby appealed to, the contemporary theatrical stage and its spectral call for liquid and fragmentary subjectivity emerges as an arena integrating a critical paradigm from which to inspect contemporary ethics from a thus sharpened and broadened analytical gaze.

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